

Rimrock Church



ALL SCRIPTURE REFERENCES ARE NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION (NIV)

"A community being transformed by Jesus Christ."

Experience God - Embrace Grace - Engage Others

Key ideas that help us interpret the 10 Commandments

- Jesus is the final and perfect Word of the covenant. We interpret the 10 Commandments in light of who Jesus is and what He has said and done. (Matthew 5-7; John 1; Hebrews 8-10).
- The 10 commandments are **in the context of a story** of relationship and covenant with God. (Deuteronomy 5:6; Ephesians 2:1-10)
- The commandments reveal God's goodness and love towards His people. They show the way that we were created to live in a relationship with God, which will always be the best. (Psalm 119:41-48; Romans 7:12).
- The commandments reveal human sinfulness and the need for God's grace. They show us our need to fully depend on God and not ourselves in order to be able to live the way we were designed to with His Spirit in us. (Romans 3:9-20; 7:7-12; 8; Ephesians 2:1-10; Matthew 5-7).
- The commandments lead us to love God and love our neighbor, which we were designed and created for. (Matthew 22:34-40).

Introduction

Jesus began His ministry with a simple message, "Repent, for the Kingdom of God is near". To us, this message may seem too short and irrelevant. For the First Century Jew, they understood the Kingdom of God as the ultimate fulfillment of the story of God with His people. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was a covenant making God who delivered His people from the land of Egypt through his servant Moses and gave them a promised land, and promised to establish His forever rule and reign through the offspring of King David. This seed, or child, would rule as the Messiah with justice and righteousness bringing the glory and blessing of Eden with a forever promised land.

The story of Israel was one in which the desire for this Kingdom had many misadventures with the surrounding nations. Even on the cusp of receiving the Promised Land the people's fear and lack of trust in the goodness of God caused them to wander for 40 years. Once the Promised Land was delivered to them, the people put their trust in other things besides God. This brought only sorrow and disappointment into their story. Israel had been unfaithful, but God kept His covenant of grace and love with the people. When Jesus announced the coming of the Kingdom of God, people knew that it was a significant declaration. Jesus' message was simple and straight forward: you must repent to receive God's Kingdom.

Repentance means a change of thinking, a change of mind. Instead of going the same way as everyone else, it is turning to a new way of living. It is an invitation to a new way of being. This invitation is not for our harm or disappointment. The motivation behind the invitation is to bring blessing.

Jesus makes this motivation very clear. His incarnation and presence is a sign and a fulfillment that God intended to bless. The apostle John says it this way, "For God so loved the world He gave his one and only begotten son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16) God reveals himself as the fulfillment of the human longing for love and justice. In His love and justice, He chooses to bring blessing to humanity instead of a curse. This is the story of Israel fulfilled in Jesus Christ. This story culminates in the revelation of Jesus on the cross as God's atoning sacrifice for our sins. Jesus demonstrates God's love and justice in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us

to pay for sin and wrongdoing. His Resurrection power reveals God's victory over sin and darkness and all the wayward ways of man. The tree of knowledge of good and evil was turned into a cross, forever banishing its shame and guilt from the human heart. Jesus creates a new way for all human beings to be transformed and made new in the likeness of God's goodness and glory. All this is possible because God became man in the person of Jesus Christ.

What is Blessing?

One thing every person has in common is that they want to be happy and successful. I have never met a person who does not want to be fulfilled and to have blessing in their lives. As human beings, we are hardwired to desire and chase after blessing. Just think about your life and everything you desire and want for your life.

The dilemma for us as human beings is that we don't always see or understand what will truly bring us fulfillment and blessing. Some things we desire and achieve end up not being blessings at all but instead end up causing us and others harm and stealing our joy. Other things we had no desire for and did not look for end up being our greatest gifts and blessings. This confusion about what is ultimately good for us and others is the Biblical definition of sin. It is missing the mark of what is ultimately good.

If you follow the storyline in the Old Testament Scriptures there is a key theme, "the blessing". Abraham received it from God (Gen.12) and every generation knew that the most valuable thing they could ever receive was God's blessing. Jacob and Esau were the grandchildren of Abraham. From their birth, there was a competitive drive to dominate over each other with both wanting the blessing. Each one had success in their business and exploits through their human ingenuity although the ultimate showdown was receiving the blessing of God through their father Isaac.

This becomes a key moment in the story of the God of the Bible. Esau goes hunting and returns back famished. Jacob has a delicious bowl of soup that he has made and Esau is hungry. Isaac won't give the bowl of soup to Esau unless he is willing to give up his birthright to the blessing from Isaac. Esau considers the trade and decides the bowl of soup is worth more to him than God's blessing.

This decision by Esau is the human dilemma found in every one of our hearts and is the most basic human tragedy. Adam and Eve were free to eat from the tree of life and everything God had made for them. Yet the desire for the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was stronger than their desire for God. They chose the forbidden fruit over the blessing of God just as Esau did many generations later for a bowl of soup.

People today still make questionable choices. I have met many men who have chosen a career over their families and important relationships. People choose alcohol over family or career. I have met people who choose sex over every other relationship. I have seen students choose cheating over studying and learning. I have watched people choose political allegiance and power over trust in God and relationships with others. I have even known a successful businessman who chose not to pay taxes and lost his personal freedom. Each of these choices has to do with a desire for blessing.

So what is blessing?

“Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man who trusts in Him.” (Psalm 34:8)

The Bible’s answer to that question is simple and clear. God is blessing. There is no blessing outside of Him and He is the source of all goodness. Every encounter with God reveals, “The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth” (Exodus 34:6).

Jesus is the ultimate revelation of God’s blessing and goodness. John says of Jesus, “Through him, all things were made; without him, nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind” (John 13:4). In other words, everything we desire for fulfillment, goodness, and happiness is found in Jesus Christ. Jesus is Blessing!

Because of Jesus, that blessing is now available to people who otherwise thought they would never have had access to God’s blessing. The Sermon on the Mount begins with blessing from God but not in the way we tend to think (remember repentance). A new way of thinking has to take over how we understand blessing. These are not ideals to achieve or strive for, rather this is the way Jesus is bringing blessing to all people who place their faith and trust in Him as eternal life (eating from the tree of life). It is not a prescription rather a description. We don’t need the secret knowledge of the tree of good and evil to achieve success or happiness. We have Jesus - God with us!

The tree of knowledge of good and evil says the strong will... but Jesus says the one who sees their need **has the power of the Kingdom**

The tree of knowledge of good and evil says the ones at the party will... but Jesus says those who mourn and lament **find comfort**

The tree of knowledge of good and evil says the influential and the freedom fighter will...but Jesus says the meek will **inherit the land**

The tree of knowledge of good and evil says the rich will... but Jesus says the hungry and thirsty for right relationships will **be fulfilled**

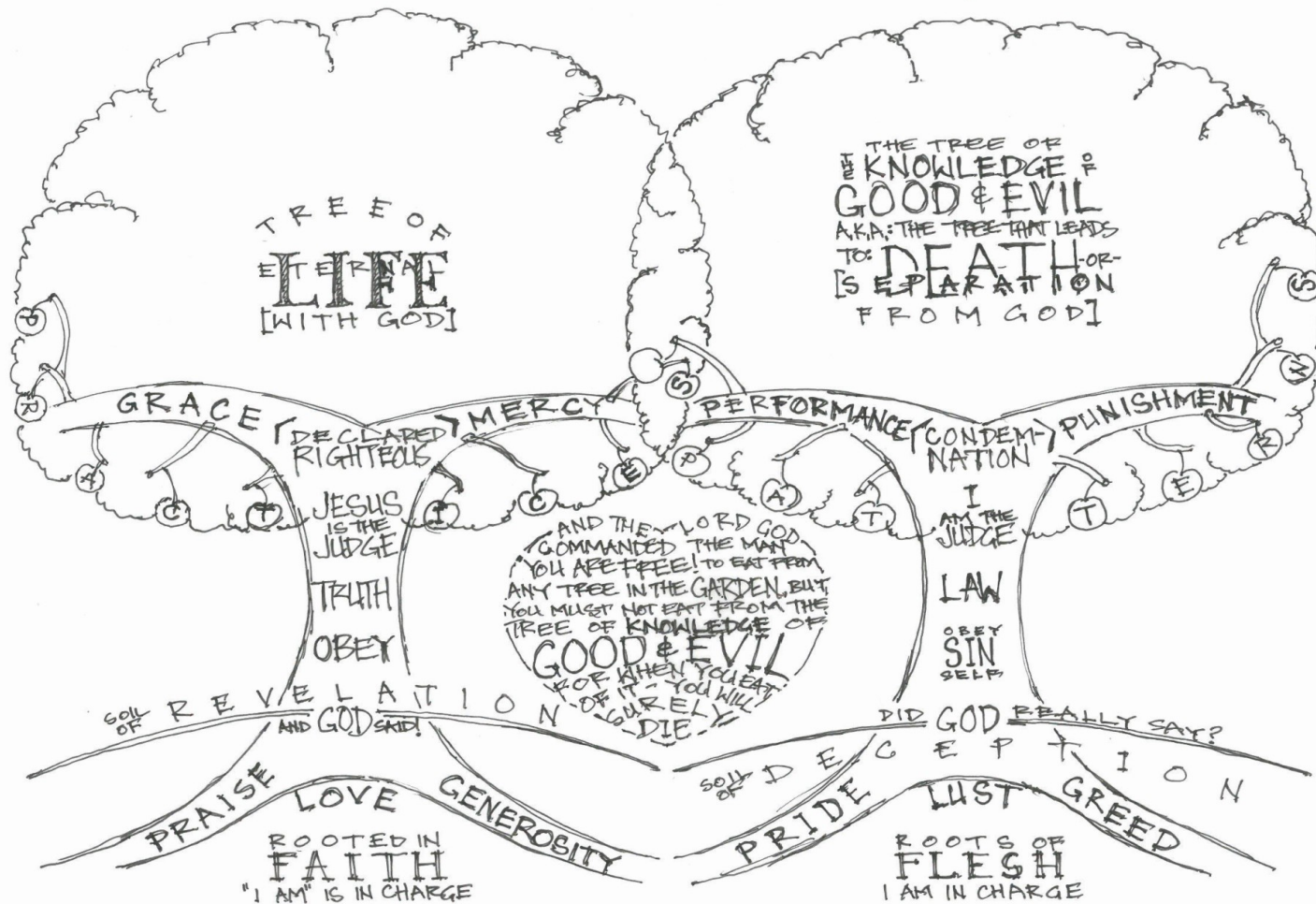
The tree of knowledge of good and evil says the ones who stand up for their rights will...but Jesus says those who give up their rights to be merciful to others will **be taken care of**

The tree of knowledge of good and evil says the ones who enjoy pleasure will... but Jesus says the pure in heart will **see and experience God’s glory**

The tree of knowledge of good and evil says the warrior and fighter will... but Jesus says the peacemaker will **inherit the wealth of God**

The tree of knowledge of good and evil says the powerful and dominant will...but Jesus says the overlooked and persecuted will **receive the power of the kingdom**

Blessed are you...**because of ME**. Rejoice and be glad because great is your reward in heaven (with me).



TWO TREES GROW IN A GARDEN... FOR AGES, THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE HAS ENTRENCHED HUMANITY IN PATTERNS OF JUDGEMENT AND CONDEMNATION, BUT THE TREE OF LIFE BECKONS THE BELIEVER TO THE SPIRIT'S GRACE & MERCY. JOIN US AS GOD UNVEILS THIS PICTURE OF THESE CONTRASTING TREES AND EXTENDS AN INVITATION TO A LIFE OF FREEDOM!

The Two Trees

Thee of knowledge of good and evil is the pattern of thinking and behaving that is in direct opposition to the goodness of God. It is the spirit of the anti-Christ that says, “I decide” and “no” to God! It also denies the Lordship of Jesus. Its fruit is recognized as pride, idolatry, judgment, condemnation, self-sufficiency, selfish-ambition, discord, hatred, violence, sexual immorality, envy and jealousy, love of pleasure, drunkenness, orgies, and disorder (Galatians 5:19).

The tree of life is relationship with Jesus Christ. It is the transformation of our thinking and behaving that is empowered by the Holy Spirit. It submits to the goodwill of the Father. It is the filling of the Holy Spirit that says, “Yes God!” It receives and rejoices in the Lordship of Jesus. Its fruit is recognized as humility, worship, generosity, love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, and self-discipline (Galatians 5:22-25).

What is Eternal Life?

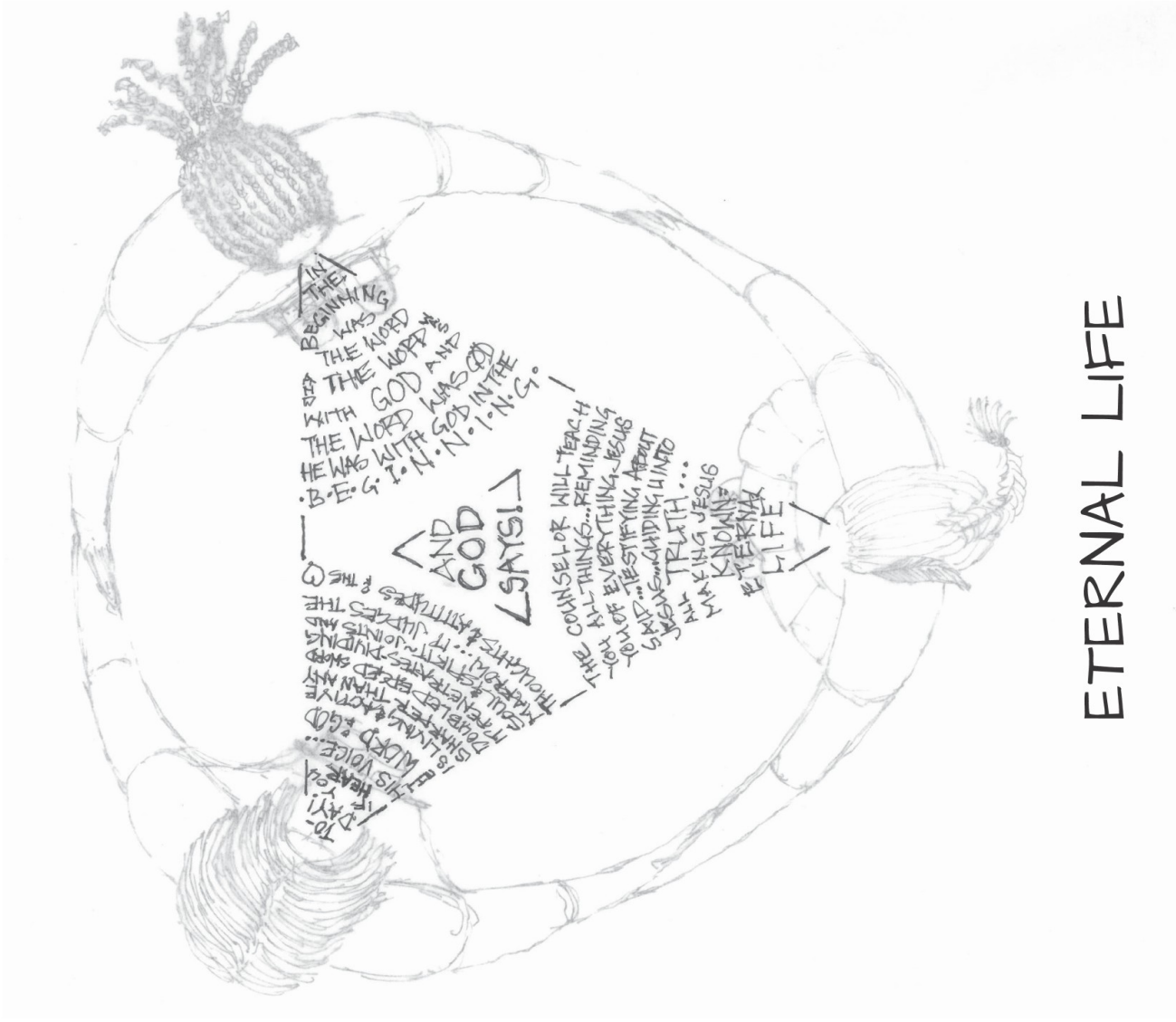
As human beings, we are preoccupied with death and the question of the afterlife. Modern-day Christians are particularly preoccupied with the afterlife. The Bible says very little about the afterlife. The story of God revealed in the Bible is much more focused on the present life we live now. This does not mean the afterlife is not important and is not real. God’s revelation and story gives us much hope and certainty concerning the reality of life after physical death (1 Corinthians 15: Resurrection and New Creation).

We must be careful not to bring a presumption of the afterlife focus onto the words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount or the definition of blessing. Some Bible scholars have attempted to place the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount into the afterlife. I believe this is an errant view of the text in context of the teaching of Jesus on the blessing of His Kingdom. A careful reading of Jesus' words leaves no doubt that his words are meant for this present life right now!

So how should we understand Jesus' words about the Kingdom of heaven in the present tense?

Jesus declared, “Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven has come near” (Matthew 4:17). Jesus is saying the Kingdom of heaven is at hand, breaking into this present time. Jesus preached a message that heaven (God’s presence, action, will) is now. The following verses describe Jesus' ministry of teaching, healing, and delivering (Matthew 4:23-25; Luke 4). The message is clear. Heaven is not only afterlife. God is here now, He is doing something new, and His will is good! No more waiting. We can change our thinking because eternal life and God’s blessing is available now.

This changes how we think about this present life with God and His commands. This present life is full of purpose and hope and blessing in Jesus Christ! Just as our resurrected life (afterlife) will also be filled with these things with God forever as well.



ETERNAL LIFE

Who Are We? What Does it Mean to Be Human?

If eternal life is available now and blessing is available to everyone in Jesus Christ, what is our purpose now?

Genesis tells us we were made in God's image, male and female made in God's image. Not only did God create Adam and Eve in His likeness, but He also gave them a creative purpose of caring and ruling over His creation. This truth has incredible implications for how we understand ourselves and others. We believe every human life is of infinite worth.

Jesus speaks to the human purpose when he says, "you are the salt of the earth", or when he says, "You are the light of the world". Jesus explains these analogies when he says, "let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:13-16). This reveals two aspects of who we are and what it means to be human.

1. **We exist as beloved children of God to glorify and worship Him.** We are made to glorify and worship our Father in everything we do as beloved sons and daughters. This is our blessing!
2. **We exist to be a blessing to others.** We are made to be like Jesus and bring goodness and blessing for others. "I did not come to be served but to serve." (Matthew 20:28; Mark 10:45; John 13:1-17)

Understanding the Ten Commandments as the way of a transformed life in relationship with God as we practice worship and love for God and others.

"Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commands that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the door-frames of your houses and on your gates" Deuteronomy 6:4-9.

"Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord." Leviticus 19:10

²⁸ "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." Matthew 11:28-30

"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, ² because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. ³ For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit." Romans 8:1-4

"If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit." Galatians 5:25

God's covenant and commands are part of a story

We should never read or try to obey the 10 commandments without understanding that they are part of God's story in Jesus Christ. If we don't understand the context behind the commandments, they will become lifeless duties that are impossible to follow. These words of the covenant come out of an epic love story of God for his people. In fact, the word covenant should alert us that God is concerned about a relationship more than he is looking for an obligation. It is wrong to post the commandments without sharing who God is and the story behind them. They are lifeless without the life-giving God who reveals them in His heart for relationship and desire for- covenant love with His people. He alone makes these commandments alive in our hearts and lives. It is about the Person of God!

The first words that the finger of God carved into the stone had to do with a story. He says, "I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery" (Deuteronomy 5:6). We can only understand these commandments in light of the sovereign action and will of God in the life of God's people.

At the burning bush, terrified fugitive Moses learned that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was concerned about the people suffering in slavery in Egypt. He tells Moses that He has, "heard their cries". He tells Moses that He is going to do something about their condition and asks Moses to be His chosen person to bring about this deliverance. Moses asks what name he should give to this God that is concerned about the condition of the people. God says, "I am who I am". He is the Lord! Moses, a reluctant recruit, agrees to go back to Egypt. There God moves in a powerful way with signs and plagues to bring about Israel's freedom. The greatest sign is the blood on the doorpost of every Israelite's home as the angel of death strikes down the firstborn of Egypt. This Passover event becomes the defining act of God for the deliverance of the people. The symbolism of the blood of the spotless lamb atones for the people's lives. God reveals His purpose of salvation and redemption in love and justice through the shedding of blood.

Egypt is a sign of all that is anti-God in the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. The worship of false gods, the cruelty and pride of Pharaoh, and the refusal to allow God's people to worship all point to the rebellion against God as the great "I am". The defeat of Pharaoh at the Red Sea again reveals God's victorious purpose to destroy the sinful rebellion against Him and bring about deliverance and blessing to His people. The greater challenge was getting Egypt out of Israel's heart! Much of the book of Deuteronomy is addressing the issue of what will they choose? It is this story that helps us to understand the words of the covenant and God's purpose to save and transform His people into people made in His image.

Jesus teaches us that The Sermon on the Mount is a recreation of the Moses event with God on Mount Sinai that God's purpose for creating us is twofold. First, it is to create goodness and bless others. Second, we were designed to worship and glorify our Father. Jesus says this is the intention and heart of the commandments. They have to do with our relationship with God and each other. They point the way to blessing in God. Jesus says, "Do not think I have come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly I tell you until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of the pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished".

Matthew 5:17-18

God's desire was always to write the words of the covenant in the hearts of his people. In Jeremiah 31 it says,

"The days are coming," declares the LORD,

"when I will make a new covenant

with the people of Israel

and with the people of Judah. "This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel

after that time," declares the LORD.

"I will put my law in their minds

and write it on their hearts.

I will be their God,

and they will be my people.

Jesus reveals to us that God's grace of "the blessing" is now available to anyone who trusts in Him as the way to right living. He makes it possible for us to change our thinking and patterns of behavior and enter the Kingdom of heaven through his atoning death and resurrection.

"Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God- this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is- His good, pleasing and perfect will" (Romans 12:1-2). The commandments reveal the will and goodness of God. Because of the transforming work of Jesus, we can now live out the blessing of God's favor and His will by His Holy Spirit in us!

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus flips the commandments and begins with the commandments on our relationships towards others. He also does another surprising thing. He makes the relational commandments inseparable from the worship commandments. This is why the Apostle John says, "And this is his command; to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us. The one who keeps God's command lives in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us" (1 John 3:24). The worship and faith relationship with God is inseparable from evident love for others. This becomes the evidence of heaven and eternal life now (God's presence, action, and will) in us through His Holy Spirit.

Receive the Blessing of God in His Word

"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 6:23)

"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." (Galatians 2:20)

"Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law....therefore, love is the fulfillment of the law." (Romans 13:8-10)

1. Rescued from slavery and given new life as children

“You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exodus 19:4-6).

“For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love, he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will” (Ephesians 1:4-5).

Slavery is something that has existed for a long time in human history. As Americans, our own history with slavery is painful. To go back and see some of the images and read the horrors that slaves faced in transport from Africa and being sold in markets in America is sobering. Every American has been touched in some way by the history of slavery. It still reverberates in the fabric of our nation as we see current events unfold. The Bible story helps us see that it is not just physical slavery that is part of the human dilemma, rather it is the slavery of our souls, spirits, and hearts that is the true tragedy “As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins. In which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient” (Ephesians 2:1-2). Every human being has been enslaved in the sins of their hearts, thoughts, and action and the rule of Satan over them in this world apart from God. The Bible does not shy away from the reality of slavery. In fact, God chose to reveal himself through a story with special people. These were the descendants of Abraham, the Israelites who became enslaved in Egypt.

The Exodus story is the revelation of who God is and His purpose and plan in the human story. Exodus 2:24 tells us that God was concerned about the Israelites enslaved, “God heard their groaning and he remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and Jacob. So God looked on the Israelites and was concerned about them”. God’s loving-kindness is on full display throughout the story of the Bible. 1 John tells us that God first loved us. Romans says He demonstrated his love for us while we were still sinners. He sees our struggle and slavery to sin and death and He is compassionate and concerned for our well-being.

The story of rescue starts with God and is accomplished by God. The good news is that God’s compassion is not just a feeling but a genuine movement of love that results in action. In the Exodus story, God raises up a special servant, Moses, to lead his people out of slavery in Egypt. God intervenes with powerful plagues that overthrow the Egyptian gods and the hardness of Pharaoh's heart. God acts at the Red Sea to demonstrate his rescue and power over the military might of Egypt with wind and water. God makes a safe way on dry ground for His beloved people. Moses and the people are freed from Egypt in order to go worship God and live out the purpose He has for them of blessing in a promised land.

This story of Israel is meant to help us understand what God is doing through Jesus Christ in us. “Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.” We were under the heavy yoke of slavery to sin and death, “But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgression-it is by grace you have been saved” (Ephesians 2:3-4). Just like in the ancient story of Israel God moves in action to deliver and set us free. He sent His son Jesus, a better Moses, to stand and act against the power of sin and the Devil. Jesus’ victory and deliverance came through the cross and His resurrection. Forever His blood covers and pays the redemption price for

His people as the atoning Passover Lamb. The judgment and condemnation for sin are paid for in full and the captives are set free to worship and live in the Promised Land as sons and daughters of God! This is our justification or adoption. "For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. The Spirit you received does not make you slaves so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship" (Romans 8:14-15).

Questions to discuss and ponder

1. Share an experience of a happy memory of being a child? What made that time special?
2. Read Exodus 1 and Ephesians 2:1-3. What are the parallels between Israel's physical slavery experience and spiritual slavery to sin and the devil that we have all experienced?
3. What are the characteristics of slavery? What are the characteristics of being a son/daughter? What is the difference? And how does this help us understand what kind of relationship God wants with us?
4. Read Exodus 2:23-25; 12:13 Ephesians 2:4-10. How are people rescued from spiritual slavery?
5. How does the reality of God's rescue story in Jesus change the way we understand His covenantal relationship with His people? How does it change the way we interpret and obey the 10 Commandments?

2. Rescued to live in the presence of God

“Because he loved your ancestors and chose their descendants after them, he brought you out of Egypt by His Presence and great strength... Acknowledge and take to heart this day that the Lord is God in heaven above and on earth below. There is no other.” Deuteronomy 4:37-39

“Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.” Psalm 23:6

Why does God save? What is God’s purpose in rescuing His people from slavery and death? In Israel’s story, they are promised a new land, a new place to dwell, a place of blessing and fulfillment. But I don’t think these are the primary reasons for God’s rescue.

Many people are misguided in answering the above question. Like Israel, our hearts are prone to wander towards idolatry. Not long after being set free from Egypt, the people of Israel made a golden calf out of the gold they had plundered from their masters. They, like us, tend to think salvation and freedom are about our own personal fulfillment. This idolatry leads us to worship false gods like comfort, wealth, possessions, self-fulfillment, what we have achieved, and other persons or objects that are not God. These golden calves keep us from the real purpose of why God saves and rescues us.

The 40 years of wandering the wilderness was an intentional time for Israel to learn the answer to this question. It was never fully about the land or place in and of itself; it was about who they were with!

God was with His people in a cloud and fire. His presence was provision and power for the people. Moses discovered this on Mount Sinai as he spent time in God’s presence. Moses would wear a veil so that people could not see the fading glory in his face when he was away from God’s presence.

The gold, the land, and the temple were nothing without God’s presence. God, Himself is the ultimate glory that we all seek.

The Word of the covenant God made with the people of Israel was all about His presence and His blessing in their lives. The covenant God makes through Jesus Christ is about His presence and His blessing in our lives. Why does God save? God wants a relationship with you. Because He wants to dwell with His people made in His image. Because He is good. Because what is best for us is to dwell with our Father in Heaven.

Jesus’ life and ministry were lived with one goal: to manifest and reveal the presence of God with mankind so that we could have a relationship with God. He lived, died, and rose again to reveal this reality. When He ascended, He told them to wait in Jerusalem for the gift of the Holy Spirit. Again, the presence of God with His people was the treasure, power, and provision that was most needed. Pentecost becomes the fulfillment of the story of God’s salvation purpose of Him dwelling with His people. God’s Spirit was poured out on all people, available to anyone who would believe and receive. The triune God saved and rescued in order to dwell with mankind that we might glory in Him and be fully satisfied in His presence. Knowing Him and being known by Him is the greatest treasure.

The book of Revelation gives us a clear picture of this purpose of God. “And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away” (Revelation 21:3-4).

Study questions to discuss and ponder

1. Read Exodus 6:1-8; Deuteronomy 8; 2 Corinthians 6:14-7. According to these passages, why did God save His people?
2. Read Exodus 7:16; 8:1, 20; 9:1, 13; 10:3. What message was Moses giving to Pharaoh in the 10 plagues? Why is this significant in helping us understand God’s purpose and goal in rescuing the people of Israel?
3. Read John 6:35. In this gospel story of Jesus, we are told he turned a few loaves of bread and fish into enough food for thousands. Why did the crowds keep following Jesus? Why did many of them eventually leave (John 6:53-68)? What does this encounter with Jesus tell us about why God saves and rescues us?
4. What do the 7 “I am” statements of Jesus (John 6:35, 41, 48, 51; 8:12; 10:7,9; 11:25; 10:11, 14; 14:6; 15:1, 5) reveal to us about God’s purpose of wanting a relationship? How is this different than what you have thought about why God saved you in the past, and why?
5. How does knowing God’s goal and purpose of rescue and salvation for relationship change the way we understand the 10 Commandments? How should we read and live out the 10 Commandments with this understanding?

3. Honor and worship God above all

“You shall have no other gods before me. 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. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and fourth generation of those who reject me, but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.” Deuteronomy 5:7-8

“For where your treasure is, there your heart is also.” Matthew 6:21

Jesus reveals that just because you don't have idols of gold or silver that you bow down does not mean that you are not idolatrous. Idolatry is the first sin because it reveals the heart condition of a person towards their Creator. Outward appearance means very little to God. He is much more interested in the heart condition of the person. He is most interested in what you treasure and love.

The invitation in this command is to love God first. The apostle John says, “because God loved us first we can love others first”. The command itself is not life-giving. It only reveals the priority of our purpose as created in God's image. It is the action and love of God that brings the command to life. The response we have is an internal response of faith to who God is and what He has done for us in Jesus Christ. Our being is transformed into the kind of person that is rooted in the identity of the blessing of Jesus. God revealed this to us at the Jordan river, “This is my son whom I love, with him I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:17). It is an inside out response to the reality of our created identity in our Father in heaven. This is why Jesus says our worship can happen in secret. We don't need our validation or identity from others or from ourselves. Our worship comes from a heart that is transformed by Jesus love resulting in practices and habits that reveal the love of God that is inside of us.

This is why Jesus begins with statements of blessing in the Sermon on the Mount. The true worshiper is blessed by God. Because we have the blessing of God, we don't need anything else for our identity or our well-being. We can be truly satisfied and happy in Him. God himself and all that He has is our great reward! He is the Promised Land flowing with milk and honey, He is the blessing, and the one our hearts long for!

The 3 marks of worshiping in Spirit and truth from the Sermon on the Mount

1. Give as unto God as an act of secret sacrifice. The first evidence of Spirit and truth Worship is giving. Not the kind of giving that gets noticed by others. But the giving that comes from a heart of love towards God. A true worshipper gives their first and best because they know God is worthy. This kind of generosity is just like Able who brought his best in Genesis and Mary in the gospels who poured out her expensive perfume on the feet of Jesus. They both chose the better sacrifice of giving their hearts without holding back to receive God's reward.
2. Pray as unto God as an act of secret devotion. Jesus characterized a person who worships in Spirit and in truth as a person who prays. Not public prayer to be noticed by others but a life of prayer in communion with the Father. Prayer marks a life of dependence on God. Jesus said, “my sheep know my voice”. Jesus teaches us to pray with a certain pattern. To pray, understanding our identity in God as Father, with praise and thanksgiving, submission and alignment with His Kingdom and will, petition, confession, and forgiveness, and victory over sin. When we live a life of prayer, we can experience God's rewards of His presence and blessing.
3. Fast as unto God as an act of secret character formation. Fasting is the final mark of the worshipper in Spirit and truth. Fasting is saying no to something so we can say yes to what is better. Practicing fasting shapes our hearts and desires. It is a habit or discipline that prepares us for God's reward. This practice is what God uses in our lives to make and transform us into a new kind of person who can receive God's blessing and reward.

Study questions to discuss and ponder

1. Read Deuteronomy 5:7-8. What is the significance of this being the first command?
2. Read Romans 5:8 and 1 John 4:10. How does Jesus fulfill this command by revealing God's love to us first before we loved him? How does this make this command possible for us to live out? How does this reveal who God is and who we are?
3. How would you define idolatry? What are the signs that we are worshiping anything besides God?
4. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus outlined 3 practical ways to show our love towards God in Spirit and in Truth. How can these be done poorly? How can they be done well? What makes the difference?
5. What is the significance of the blessing of obedience and the consequence of disobedience of worshiping God above all else? How can we practice this command in our lives as beloved children of God?

4. Honor God's name

"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."

Deuteronomy 5:11

"Acknowledge and take to heart this day that the Lord is God in heaven above and on earth below. There is no other." Deuteronomy 4:39

"I tell you do not swear an oath at all...all you need to say is simply yes or no; anything beyond this comes from the evil one" Matthew 5:33-37

Jesus points out that what we say with our words reveals what we honor and love in our hearts. Misusing the name of God is evidence of how we think about God and others. Our words reveal what is in us. I believe this is the connection between divorce and misusing the name of God in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. When we vow to something but don't follow through, we misuse God's name in our hearts. Jesus again ties together the 2nd commandment with the 6th commandment. Committing adultery is a betrayal of trust and is the ultimate dishonor of the name of those involved in the marriage. The result is broken relationships and broken vows (yes or no) which is a broken name. The very integrity of the person involved is marred. Again, the image of God is shattered just like in murder.

Unlike us, God is good and faithful to His Word. If he makes a promise or covenant, He keeps His promise. His name represents faithfulness and holiness. God's holiness is defined by His Word and His faithfulness to keeping His Word. God's name reveals who He is as the definition of existence, life, and goodness. The revelation of His name (identity) is the essence of who He is. God told Moses, "I am, who I am". In Exodus 33:19 God says to Moses, "I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the Lord, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion". The incarnation of God as Jesus Christ is the complete or full revelation of who God is. In Philippians 2:9 it says of Jesus, "Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee would bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of the God the Father". Notice the connection between God's goodness, character, and glory and that His name is to be confessed with our words and actions. The good news God is faithful even when we are not. Jesus is bringing about transformation to our hearts so that our words can reflect hearts of integrity that honor Jesus as Lord above all else. This is the transforming work God wants to do in our hearts that is evidenced by our speech. So that our yes or no can simply be that.

Story of William Tyndale

If you are blessed by being able to read your Bible in English you need to thank God for a man named William Tyndale. He honored God's name by making sure people had access to God's Word in their own language even at great personal cost. William Tyndale was born in 1494 in England. Tyndale developed some extraordinary intellectual and linguistic abilities. He could fluently speak 7 languages and he learned Biblical Hebrew and Greek. During this time the church only allowed the Bible to be read and shared in Latin by the clergy. Because of this, most people did not have access to or knowledge of the good news of Jesus. Tyndale's life was forever changed when he read the Greek New Testament and discovered he could have a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ and he had direct access to God through faith by grace alone. Tyndale's life passion became to make the good news of Jesus' name known to everyone.

Erasmus, Tyndale's mentor said, "Christ desires his mysteries to be published abroad as widely as possible. I would that (the Gospels and the epistles of Paul) were translated into all languages, of all Christian people, and that they might be read and known." Tyndale asked for permission from the state church to translate the Bible into English so people could have access to this good news. He was denied this request and threatened by the state church if he should ever attempt to do this.

Tyndale left England so he could be free to translate the Bible into English. His Bibles were banned and burned by the English government. He was constantly moving and running from the English government was looking for him to arrest him and make him stop translating the Bible.

Like Wycliff who came before him, Tyndale was convinced the state church had corrupted the good news of Jesus and profaned God's name. These religious leaders were only looking to protect their own political power and control over people. Eventually, Tyndale was betrayed and caught by the authorities. They put him in prison and had a trial to condemn him to death. During this time, he wrote:

"Let it not make thee despair, neither yet discourage thee, O reader, that it is forbidden thee in pain of life and goods, or that it is made breaking of the king's peace, or treason unto his highness, to read the Word of thy soul's health—for if God be on our side, what matter maketh it who be against us, be they bishops, cardinals, popes."

Finally, in early August 1536, Tyndale was condemned as a heretic, degraded from the priesthood, and delivered to the secular authorities for punishment.

On Friday, October 6, after local officials took their seats, Tyndale was brought to the cross in the middle of the town square and given a chance to recant. That refused, he was given a moment to pray. English historian John Foxe said he cried out, "Lord, open the King of England's eyes!"

Then he was bound to the beam, and both an iron chain and a rope were put around his neck. Gunpowder was added to the brush and logs. At the signal of a local official, the executioner, standing behind Tyndale, quickly tightened the noose, strangling him. Then an official took up a lighted torch and handed it to the executioner, who set the wood ablaze.

One other brief report of that distant scene has come down to us. It is found in a letter from an English agent to Lord Cromwell two months later.

"They speak much," he wrote, "of the patient sufferance of Master Tyndale at the time of his execution."

Source: <https://www.christianitytoday.com/history/people/scholarsandscholars/william-tyndale.html>

Study questions to ponder and discuss

1. Read Deuteronomy 5:1. Why do you think God commands us to see the importance of His name? What is the connection between a name, identity, character, and what we do?
2. How would you describe the power of speech and words in relation to our actions? What are some ways we misuse The name of God?
3. Read James 1:19-27. How does Jesus change the way we think about the connection between our speech, actions, and worship?
4. How did William Tyndale honor God's name in the midst of a time when many were misusing God's name? What are some takeaways from his story?
5. Is there anything you need to confess or repent from to receive forgiveness from Jesus?
6. What are ways you practice this command of honoring God's name as beloved child of God?

5 Honor rest and worship

“Observe the Sabbath day and keep it holy, as the LORD your God commanded you. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God; you shall not do any work—you, or your son or your daughter, or your male or female slave, or your ox or your donkey, or any of your livestock, or the resident alien in your towns, so that your male and female slave may rest as well as you. Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.” Deuteronomy 5:12-15

“I tell you do not resist an evil person...give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who want to borrow from you.” Matthew 5:39

Jesus does not implicitly address the Sabbath day in his Sermon on the Mount. He does reveal the heart of Sabbath as part of the transformation God wants us to experience in our hearts. It seems Jesus makes a connection between the 3rd command of observing the Sabbath day with the seventh command on stealing. It is important to observe in the text that the Sabbath day command is tied not only to creation but also the story of God’s salvation and deliverance of Israel from slavery to the Promised Land.

Jesus flips the command about not stealing to focus on the experience of being stolen from. “If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt...” What if Jesus is helping us see the Sabbath day from God’s perspective? Many times, we think about Sabbath as a requirement or restriction. God views it as a holiday or a special day for a good purpose. When we turn the Sabbath into something different than God intended it is like stealing from God and ourselves. When we use the Sabbath for our own selfish gain it is like robbing God of His shirt. The surprising thing is God responds with grace and generosity instead of condemnation in Jesus Christ. This is because He is Lord of the Sabbath and no one can interrupt His rest and joy. He invites us to do the same towards others. When we are rested in our worship and identity in God our Father, we do not need to be upset by those who would try to rob from us. Jesus says, “Give to the one who asks you and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you. (Matthew 5:42).

Sabbath living gives us the margin to share and give to others. Because we have received all the blessing and goodness from God, we can give our time, energy, and resources to others.

Jesus expounds on this idea in the Sermon on the Mount when he says, “Therefore, I tell you, do not worry about your life” (Matthew 6:25). This way of living is rooted in the goodness of God’s creation to provide for all of our needs as we follow God’s created order of work and rest. Sabbath is rest in the goodness and provision of God. In this place of rest, we can “seek first His kingdom and righteousness”. Our priorities change and we have all the resources we need to live and share with others. When Jesus healed on the Sabbath and He was confronted by the religious leaders, his response was, “I ask you, which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, so save life or to destroy it?” Luke 6:9

The Sabbath command is rooted in the story of God’s creation and salvation. We can rest in God and His provision and we can be the kind of people that can give instead of taking because we have received from God. Sabbath rest is all about giving out of the place of rest in God! “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” Acts 20:35

Story of Eric Liddle

Eric Liddle was born in China to English missionary parents in 1902. Eric was educated in boarding schools and lived in London and Scotland. He was a gifted athlete who excelled in Rugby and running. The famous quote in the Chariots of Fire movie on Eric's life stated, "I believe God made me for a purpose—for China. But he also made me fast, and when I run, I feel his pleasure."

Eric developed a deep faith and love for Jesus. He was known for his integrity of character and discipline in living out his faith in Jesus. As one of England's most gifted athletes, he competed in several Olympic competitions. His fame grew when he refused to compete in the 1924 Paris Olympic 100m race, even though it was his best competition because it was held on a Sunday. Instead of winning a gold medal, Eric worshipped God with God's people. He did run the 400m race and won a gold medal and a world record in this race. Liddle was criticized for not being a good sportsman or a good patriot because he put his devotion to God above country or sport.

If this was Eric's only testimony to keeping the Sabbath, it might not be that instructive or impactful to all of us. The power of his testimony was not only honoring and resting in God in the Olympics but throughout the remainder of his life and ministry in China. He tirelessly served the Chinese church and people by modeling a deep abiding and rest in Jesus that carried him through several trials. This even included the Japanese invasion of China which resulted in Liddle's imprisonment in a concentration camp.

Liddle spent much of his life focused on learning and practicing Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. (Matthew 5-7) This life of love flowed through Liddle's life in China as he gave himself to the least of these in order to point them to Christ. In the end, he refused to abandon the people God called him to serve and he died in the Japanese prison camp. Truly there is no greater love than to lay down one's life for his friends.

This obedience to Jesus' words and abiding life in Jesus enabled Liddle to live out the transformation and righteousness of God in a way that shines bright in our world. Liddle was truly a blessed man!

Sources:

<https://www.ericliddell.org/biography/>

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/reviews/for-the-glory/>

Study questions to ponder and discuss

1. Read Deuteronomy 5:12-15. What observations do you make about this command? Why do you think rest is so important to God and to us? What is the connection between the created order (6 days of work 1 day of rest) and God's rescue of His people from slavery to freedom?
2. Today there is a lot of confusion and different interpretations of the Sabbath command. What are some ways you have heard or seen people apply this command to their lives?
3. How did the Pharisees misuse this command bringing dishonor of God's name and bringing harm to others?
4. How did Jesus live out the Sabbath command? What is the significance of Him serving others and healing others on the Sabbath day? How did Jesus use this command to bless others?
5. Read Matthew 6:25-34. How does this passage change how we think about work and rest for our physical needs?
6. Is there anything you need to confess or repent from and receive forgiveness from Jesus? What are ways you can practice this command of Sabbath rest as a beloved child of God?

6. Honor of others in forgiveness is part of our worship of God

“You shall not murder.” Deuteronomy 5:17

“I tell you anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment...leave your gift there in front of the altar. First, go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift (to God).” Matthew 5:22;23,24

It is important to note the connection Jesus makes with the first commandment and the fifth commandment. The 1st commandment has to do with God's image abused in idolatry and the 5th commandment has to do with God's image abused in people. Murder is grievous because of the inherent value God stamps into the being of every person and to take the life of that image is to profane who God is, as a life-giver.

Jesus begins with this commandment of “do not murder” in the Sermon on the Mount because it is connected to the greatest of all the commandments to love God and to love others. The spirit of the devil is to hate God and to hate people. Anger is the emotion and desire of hatred that is born into the human heart. Jesus addresses anger and resentment because it is the root of all murder. Not all people are murderers but all people have the temptation of anger and bitterness in their hearts. Jesus makes this issue of anger personal for all people. God is concerned with the condition of our hearts towards people. Because how we feel about people is a reflection of how we feel about God. If love for people is not in our hearts then love for God is not in us either (1 John 4:7-12). Jesus makes the worship of God and relationship with others inseparable.

If there is a danger for the human heart, it is anger. But the life-giving possibility is reconciliation. Jesus says settle matters quickly. Later in the sermon, Jesus talks about forgiveness as the gateway to reconciliation. “Forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors” is the prayer of those who have a relationship with God.

The greatest dilemma in human relationships is the fracture of conflict. In fact, all of human history is marked by the conflict of people. This is true of individuals, families, and nations. Jesus introduces us to the only way we can truly live with each other. Without forgiveness, there is no possibility for life giving relationships for individuals, families, and nations.

This is why the good news of Jesus is centered on the power of the cross. Jesus was brutally murdered on the cross. The cross represents all the anger, violence, hatred, resentment, bitterness, and judgment of this world. Jesus the perfect son of God was spit on, beaten, whipped, nailed, and pierced for our transgressions in the area of anger and murder in our hearts. What did Jesus say on the cross? “Father, forgive them for they do not know what they do”. Jesus reveals the way of forgiveness and reconciliation as the way of worship of our Heavenly Father.

Story of Jim and Elizabeth Elliot

Jim and Elizabeth lived out this command as they made God their highest love and priority in life. Jim Elliot said, “Lord make my way prosperous, not that I achieve high station, but that my life may be an exhibit to the value of knowing God”. The power of Jesus is evident not only in how Jim died as a martyr but in how Elizabeth forgave and chose to love her enemies as Jesus teaches in the Sermon on the Mount and in the cross. Because of the love and forgiveness of Jim and Elizabeth, the Waodani people were able to receive the love and salvation of Jesus Christ and became worshippers of the God of the Bible.

Jim Elliot (1927-1956) was a passionate evangelist, devoted husband, and father, and martyred Christian missionary. His life and legacy are an exemplary testament to the world of the absolute worthiness of Christ, and the costly call of the Christian to follow Jesus. The defining pursuit of his life was to intimately know God, to tell others of Him, and to obey His every call.

Elliot was inspired from an early age by the examples of Christian missionaries, including David Brainerd, William Carey, and Amy Carmichael. Resolved to commit his life to evangelism and international mission work, Elliot attended Wheaton College to study linguistics. It was there he would meet Elisabeth Howard, the woman who would become his wife. In equal devotion to God, their courtship and eventual marriage would exemplify a matchless love story of hard-won purity and lived-out truths of the Bible. Partners in ministry following the call of the Lord, Jim, and Elisabeth traveled into the Ecuadorian jungle. On January 8, 1956, while attempting to make contact with the people of the Auca/Waodani tribe, Jim and four other missionaries were speared to death; slain by those they came to minister to. Elliot’s most famous words were written in a journal on October 28, 1949. They represent the great paradigm of the Christian faith and the hope of the Gospel. His most famous quote from the journal is:

“He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose”.

His life’s work and legacy would continue as Elisabeth later moved into the Auca/Waodani village with their young daughter to live among those who had killed him.

Jim Elliot’s own writing of personal reflections on faith, work, and love can be found in *The Journals of Jim Elliot*. His wife chronicled his life and testament in *Shadow of the Almighty*, and immortalized the stories of the five missionaries martyred in *Through Gates of Splendor*. Most recently, the story of the couple in their own words can be found in *Devotedly: the Personal Letters and Love Story of Jim and Elisabeth Elliot*, which was published by their daughter.

His faith has since inspired generations. He is survived by his daughter Valerie Elliot Shepard and eight grandchildren. “For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it” (Matthew 16:25).

Source: <https://elisabethelliott.org/about/jim-elliott/>

Study questions to ponder and discuss

1. Read Deuteronomy 5:17; Genesis 9:4-7; Matthew 5:21-26. What do these passages reveal about God and the inherent value of human life?
2. What is the significance of Jesus beginning his teaching on the 10 Commandments in the Sermon on the Mount with this command on murder? How does this relate to the first command to love God?
3. Read Matthew 18:21-35. Jesus introduces the possibility of reconciliation and forgiveness. How do His life and sacrificial gift on the cross make this possible? Describe forgiveness and what it means for all our human relationships? What does it look like to practice forgiveness?
4. How does Jim and Elizabeth Elliot's story honor this commandment and the power of Jesus and His Holy Spirit in us to forgive and be reconciled? What are some takeaways from this story?
5. Is there anything you need to confess or repent from and receive forgiveness from Jesus? What are ways you practice this commandment of honoring life and giving forgiveness as a beloved child of God?

7. Honor marriage

“You shall not commit adultery.” Deuteronomy 5:18

“You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife.” Deuteronomy 5:21

“I tell you anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” Matthew 5:28

Jesus puts the heart struggle of lust right up there with anger because it again devalues and destroys the image of God in human beings. Marriage is the foundational relationship. God created Adam and Eve to be one flesh to be the source of love and care for creation and children. It is one of God’s greatest gifts to bring blessing to all of humanity. Adultery breaks the blessing of God. It breaks the unity and bond of trust of one flesh and introduces brokenness into all other relationships. Jesus goes beyond the breaking of the marriage covenant to the heart of every person. He points out the source of adultery is lust in the heart. The desire for someone outside of the marriage covenant is a hellish desire. It is the essence of selfishness and abuse as it separates the body from the whole person that God made.

Lust reveals a heart condition that leads to the destruction of your soul. It is important to take it seriously! Jesus uses stark language, like gouging out an eye to show us how serious it is and that we need to deal with these desires in our hearts. So how do we take it seriously? We need to be crucified with Christ. Jesus died so that our flesh and its desires might be put to death. When we place our faith in Jesus and look to Him we begin to look at other people with new eyes and a new heart. We stop looking at people as objects of desire. Our thoughts are made captive and we become obedient to God. So instead of thinking about someone in a sexual way, think about them as a mother, sister, father, or brother. In Christ, people can be viewed as those with infinite value and worth that we can honor and respect. Then we begin to see the personhood of each person. Think about the beauty of marriage and God’s design for fulfillment in a covenant relationship. When we begin to honor marriage in our thinking then we begin to see the transforming work of the Holy Spirit in us so we can enjoy the blessing of marriage whether we are married or single. “blessed is the pure in heart, for they will see God”.

Truett and Jeannette Cathy

Truett Cathy was born in Georgia in a family deeply affected by the great depression. He helped his parents with a boarding house and then with paper routes as the family was forced to live in government housing project because of the economic depression. Truett and his brother Ben started their first restaurant out of their experience working together on the paper route. From the very beginning, they would work hard to serve food 6 days a week and close the restaurant on Sunday to worship and rest.

During this time Truett reconnected with a childhood sweetheart named Jeannette. They dated and grew a friendship and love relationship. They married in 1948.

A year later the family experienced tragedy. Truett’s brother and business partner was killed in a plane crash. Truett cared for his brother’s family, but it meant that he had to run the restaurant business alone. His wife, Jeanette, became his partner in running the restaurant and in raising their family together. Both Truett and Jeannette had a deep abiding faith in Jesus Christ. Truett said of that time, “For us, family, business, and church weren’t separate aspects of our life. They all blended in together. Those early experiences shaped our children’s viewpoints about life and work.”

Together Truett and Jeannette not only developed their restaurant business but they also ran a foster care ministry for disadvantaged kids together. The way of Jesus shaped their marriage and out of the faithfulness of this relationship, they were able to bring blessing to so many, including probably you through a chicken sandwich. Today their children run the business they started called, Chick-fil-A.

Truett said he wants to be remembered as a man who “kept his priorities in order”.

Source: <https://thechickenwire.chick-fil-a.com/inside-chick-fil-a/a-life-centered-on-family>

Study questions to ponder and discuss

1. Read Deuteronomy 5:18,21; Genesis 2:21-25; Matthew 5:27-32. What is the significance of marriage in God’s created order and who God designed us to be as people made in His image?
2. Why do you think Jesus addresses marriage as a heart issue for each person in how they think about sexual desire and other people?
3. How did the Cathys follow God’s command of honoring marriage and how did this bring blessing into their lives and all those around them? What are some takeaways from this story?
4. Read Ephesians 5:21-33. According to this passage, how is marriage a blessing and reflection of God’s purpose?
5. Is there anything you need to confess or repent from and receive forgiveness from Jesus? What are some ways you can practice this command as a beloved child of God?

8. Honor relationships from God

“Honor your father and your mother, as the LORD your God commanded you, so that your days may be long and that it may go well with you in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.” Deuteronomy 5:16

“I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven.” Matthew 5:44

The most controversial portion of Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount has to do with the issue of love towards others in our lives. Jesus asks, “if you love those who love you what reward will you get? Do not even the tax collectors do that?”

The parental relationship is probably one of the most intimate relationships we experience in this life. It is instructive that Jesus refers to God in the sermon as “Father”. This tells us a lot about how God views us and how we are to understand God. For many people, the relationship with parents is both a blessing and a source of pain in their lives. Even though this relationship reveals the beauty of unconditional love it also reveals the inadequacy of our love towards each other. Most people carry pain in their lives as they feel deeply the disappointment of their human fathers' and mothers' limitations and sinful tendencies.

The command has to do with unconditional love and honor of our fathers and mothers. We don't get to choose who our parents are or what kind of parents they are. It does not say, “just honor those parents that are good parents”. Honor of fathers and mothers has to do with our hearts molded and transformed by the unconditional love of God.

This is what Jesus is talking about in the Sermon. Love can't be dependent on what we get. It's dependent on what we give. The fulfillment of this kind of love is rooted in an abiding relationship with God as our Father through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. If we are blessed by Him, then we can be the kind of people that give our love regardless of what other people do or don't do. Love of enemies comes from this kind of love.

The Bible reveals, “God demonstrated his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). The kind of love God gives and he is growing in us is the kind of love that is not circumstantial but rather intrinsic to who we are.

This definition of love is why there is so much controversy around this passage. Love is impossible on our own, but for God all things are possible. We think that we are not capable of this kind of love, but Jesus thinks and tells us differently. He says we are capable through our heavenly father. He says, “be perfect as your heavenly father is perfect” (Matthew 5:48). In other words, to live this out you must **be** instead of do. To be a child of the Heavenly Father is to honor the way of the Father. This word “perfect” is not perfection in the sense of never failing. Rather it is the sense of completeness or wholeness: to live out the design we were made for. The Apostle John puts it this way, we are to “abide” in Christ. To remain in relationship with Him is to share His life and power. To be with God is to allow His lifeblood of love to flow through our being. This union with God through Jesus Christ becomes the means of living out the kind of unconditional love the command demands and Jesus makes possible in our lives. God as our Father means we can be as He is.

This command to love unconditionally is the ultimate fulfillment of our design as made in God's image. God has given us everything we need to obey and live out the command to love as He has loved us.

Story of Corrie Ten Boom

Corrie Ten Boom and her family lived in Holland during the time of Nazi Germany. She and her family are credited with saving 800 Jewish lives from the Nazis. Corrie was born in 1892 as the daughter of a jeweler and watchmaker with other sisters and a brother. She was named after her mother. They lived in Haarlem above the jewelry and watch making shop that her father owned. They were devoted followers of Jesus who were part of the Dutch reformed church. They practiced their faith through generous living towards others in their community as well as those in need.

In 1940 the Germans invaded the Netherlands, forever changing the simple and quiet life of the Ten Boom's. The Germans began the Nazification of the Netherlands by rounding up Jews, other minorities, and intellectuals to taking them to concentration camps. The Ten Boom family did not stand idly by. The whole family became active in the Dutch resistance movement. They began to shelter Jews and refugees in their homes. They quickly constructed a false wall in Corrie's room where refugees could hide whenever the Germans would do their sweeps through their neighborhood. By becoming a safe house, they aided in smuggling Jews out of harm's way. In 1944 a Dutch informant tipped the Nazis to the Ten Boom's activities and the whole family was arrested. Even though the Germans searched the house they did not find the Jews hiding in Corrie's room. Even though the Ten Boom family was arrested the Jews escaped with their lives.

The entire family was sent to a concentration camp. Both of Corrie's parents died in prison and her sister Betsie who was in a concentration camp with her also died. In 1944 for no apparent reason, Corrie was suddenly released from the concentration camp.

In her later writing Corrie talks about the trauma and pain of seeing her family murdered but also the light of peace of hope of Jesus gave her even in these terrible dark times. After her release, Corrie did many things to show her heart in Christ. Corrie established a rehabilitation home for those in concentration camps. She also began a ministry to those who colluded with the Nazis. Corrie even extended forgiveness to the very prison guard who caused her sister's death in the concentration camp.

Corrie had a worldwide ministry sharing the hope and healing and forgiveness of Jesus. God used her to help bring healing to war-torn Europe. She recorded her story in a book called "The Hiding Place".

Corrie died in California in 1983 on her 91st birthday, living out the commandment to love and forgive through Jesus. Corrie's obedience and honor of her own father and mother extended through Jesus to everyone she encountered. Whether Jewish refugees or even the cruel prison guards who harmed her and her family. Corrie shines the unconditional love that Jesus came to give us as children of our Father in heaven.

Source: <https://www.biography.com/activist/corrie-ten-boom>

Study questions to ponder and discuss

1. Deuteronomy 5:16; 1 Corinthians 13:1-13. How does the honor of parents as children influence and define how we love in all our other relationships? Why do you think this is the only command with a promise?
2. How does honoring of parents enable us to love others? Jesus says the love of enemies is a sign of being “children of heaven”. How does being a beloved child of God enable us to love others?
3. How does Corrie Ten Boom’s story reflect obedience and faith in Christ to this command to honor parents and unconditional love for others? What are some takeaways from this story?
4. Is there anything you need to confess or repent from and receive forgiveness from Jesus? What are ways you practice this command as a beloved child of God?

9. Honor other people's possessions

"You shall not steal." Deuteronomy 5:19

"Neither shall you desire your neighbor's house, or field, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor." Deuteronomy 5:21

"You cannot serve both God and money." Matthew 6:24

Stealing has to do with a selfish need or desire that disregards others. It is a shortcut to get what you want that violates someone else. The Bible assumes that each person has dignity and responsibility in caring for the property and possessions given by God. We are designed by God to create wealth and goodness not just for ourselves but for others. God never demands or forces He only freely gives out of what he has. Love at its foundation is a free choice. Abuse becomes evident when someone is forced into something or away from something. Violation happens when something is taken that is not freely given.

Stealing is destruction and the marring of the image of God in people just like murder. The inward thought of coveting (just like anger) leads to the action of robbery. God is the definition of contentment and giving love and stealing and coveting is the antithesis of contentment and giving love.

Stealing is also a reflection of what we treasure. Jesus said, "don't store up for yourselves treasure on earth...where thieves break in and steal" (Matthew 6:19). Just like the Sabbath commandment, Jesus flips the "do not steal commandment" to another perspective. Possessions in and of themselves have no moral value, but how we think about possessions in our hearts is the key to who we are. The thief obviously treasures the possession enough to risk stealing it. The covetous person wants or desires what other people have instead of being content with what God has given. It is interesting that much of our economy is built on creating a desire for new possessions and experiences. Marketing can feed into covetousness which can lead to treasuring possessions and stealing.

Jesus flips the commandment and asks the question to the one who has possessions or money; how do you think about your wealth and what you have? How we think about something shapes who we are. Jesus uses the illustration of eyes to show the power of our thoughts about money and possessions. If our eyes are bad the whole body is unhealthy! This is an illustration that helps us understand what shapes and forms the treasures of our hearts. What you behold and desire will lead you to worship. Stealing, coveting, and treasuring your wealth and possessions all have the same result, a worship that is not of God. What if what you possess is lost, broken, or stolen? Will you be healthy in your heart? Will you be content with who you are and not what you have or don't have? Can you be satisfied with the wealth God has given you?

Jesus lays it out simply in saying, "You cannot serve two Masters; you cannot serve both God and money you will love the one and hate the other." Matthew 6:24. We only have room in our hearts for one treasure above all things and God will not share that room with anyone else.

Jesus gives us a way to think and deal with this reality of a worship struggle over what we treasure in our hearts. It is interesting the more you possess the more you worry. People with lots of money and possessions have more to preoccupy their thinking and emotions with how to protect and keep what they have. People with little money or possessions can easily worry about their lack and how they are going to survive. Both extremes can lead to stealing. All people whether they have much or little are prone to worry and anxiety. This is why Jesus says, "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life..." (Mt. 6:25) because your heavenly Father knows what you need!

If you know who you belong to and who your provider is then you can be free to not worry or be anxious whether you have much or little. Then you can be a giver and producer like our Heavenly Father.

Story of Samuel Morris

Samuel Morris reflects the beauty and power of a life lived without coveting other's possessions because of simple trust in his Heavenly Father. Ironically it was Samuel's life of trust in Jesus that ended up preserving Taylor University in a time of great financial need.

Over 130 years ago, in a small Liberian village in West Africa, Samuel Morris was born Prince Kaboo, the eldest son of a Kru tribal chieftain. While still a child, a neighboring clan defeated his people, took Kaboo, and demanded Kaboo's father pay a hefty ransom for his son's return.

The conquering chief subjected Kaboo to terrible treatment and cruel labor. During one of many intense whippings, Kaboo said he saw a bright light and heard a voice from Heaven telling him to flee. Kaboo recalled the rope binding him fell to the ground; he gathered his strength and ran into the jungle.

Traveling at night and hiding in the hollow of trees by day, Kaboo navigated blindly through a jungle dominated by jungle law. Eventually, he arrived at Monrovia, the one civilized city with thousands of Liberians under governmental law. There, a young boy invited Kaboo to church where Miss Knolls, a missionary, and graduate of Taylor University (then known as Fort Wayne College), spoke on the conversion of the Apostle Paul. Kaboo immediately saw similarities between his story and Paul's. Shortly afterward, he accepted Christ as Savior and was baptized under the name of Samuel Morris in honor of the missionary's benefactor.

Morris spent the next two years painting houses in Monrovia, the capital of Liberia. He became a zealous member of the Christian community and displayed a fervent desire to learn about the Holy Spirit. Lizzie MacNeil encouraged him to travel to America and seek the instruction of her mentor, Stephen Merritt, former secretary to Bishop William Taylor. With no money or means of transportation, Morris began his journey on foot.

Sleeping on the beach at the Roberts port harbor, Morris waited several days before finding passage on a ship in exchange for work. The journey was difficult; Morris was often beaten and assigned to the most dangerous tasks. However, by the time the ship docked in New York in September 1891, the captain and most of the crew had accepted Christ because of Morris' witness.

Once he arrived in America, Stephen Merritt warmly received Morris. He contacted Thaddeus Reade, then president of Taylor University, and requested to enroll Morris at the school. Due to Taylor's financial debt, Reade personally started a fund for Morris. Reade's effort would later be known as the "Faith Fund."

In December 1891, Morris arrived on Taylor's campus. When asked by Reade which room he wanted, Morris replied, "If there is a room nobody wants, give that to me." Morris' faith had such a profound impact on the Fort Wayne community that he was frequently invited to speak at local churches. At night, he could be heard in his room praying, which he simply called "talking to my Father."

President Reade once said, "Samuel Morris was a divinely sent messenger of God to Taylor University. He thought he was coming over here to prepare himself for his mission to his people, but his coming was to prepare Taylor University for her mission to the whole world. All who met him were impressed with his sublime, yet simple faith in God."

On May 12, 1893, Samuel Morris died after contracting a severe cold. His death inspired his fellow students to serve as missionaries to Africa on his behalf, fulfilling his dream of one day returning to minister to his own people. Hundreds of spectators lined the streets of Fort Wayne as Samuel Morris' body was carried to Berry Street Methodist Church.

Lindley Baldwin, the author of *Samuel Morris*, writes, "The burial ceremony in Lindenwood cemetery, his last earthly resting place, was attended by a multitude such had never before accompanied there." Morris' untimely passing prevented him from participating at the laying of the cornerstone at Taylor's new Upland campus, where he was scheduled to speak and sing.

Morris' burial at Lindenwood Cemetery in Fort Wayne drew hundreds from near and far. The location of his original gravesite, however, remains unknown. In 1928, Taylor's senior class had Morris' grave relocated to a more prominent place in Lindenwood Cemetery in Fort Wayne, IN, and dedicated a new monument. It remains one of the most frequently visited graves in the cemetery.

Source: <https://www.taylor.edu/about/samuel-morris>

Study question to ponder and discuss

1. Read Deuteronomy 5:19, 21; Matthew 6:19-24. What is the connection between our money and possessions and our heart's treasure?
2. What are the consequences of stealing both for ourselves and others? What are ways that we can steal? How is coveting related to stealing?
3. Read Acts 5:1-11. How does this story of Ananias and Sapphira illustrate what Jesus is talking about in the Sermon on the Mount?
4. How does Samuel Morris' story reflect obedience to God in this command to not steal or covet the possessions of others? How does Morris reflect trust in God and honor of others that result in God's blessing for others?
5. Is there anything you need to confess or repent from and receive forgiveness from Jesus? What are ways you practice this command as a child of God?

10. Honor your neighbor above yourself

“Neither shall you bear false witness against your neighbor.” Deuteronomy 5:20

“So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and Prophets.” Matthew 7:12

The second half of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount focuses on our relationships with others. In chapter 7 of Matthew, Jesus zeros in on this command of not bearing false witness against a neighbor, and also on the positive sense of how we should treat others. Jesus says it this way, “So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and Prophets.” Matthew 7:12

One of the most harmful and dishonest things we can do against our neighbor is to bring judgment against them. Even though we may not intentionally be lying in our accusation or charge against them, Jesus makes clear every judgment is inherently dishonest. Why? Because no one is perfectly right in how they understand someone else. We have inflated egos that minimize our own shortcomings and amplify the faults of others. This distortion makes it impossible for us to fairly judge another person. The Scriptures are clear. God alone can judge rightly.

Jesus points out all human relationships are broken through judgment and deception. So how can relationships be healthy, good, and a blessing? Jesus makes 3 key points on how we can do to others as we want to be done to us.

One is to listen well and give people what they really need (v.6). Dogs and pigs don’t want sacred things and pearls. They would much rather have a bone and some food. Jesus is using a figure of speech to help us understand that we need to take time to get to know people, really listening to and trying to understand what they need. Don’t just assume or throw them what you think they would like. Jesus was very intentional in noticing and paying attention to people. He spend more time asking questions than telling people what to do. Jesus modeled this way of loving people.

Second, Jesus says you need to ask if you want a healthy relationship. “Ask and it will be given you; seek and you will find” (Mt. 7:7). One of the most difficult parts of a relationship is communication. Many people have desires or needs but they hide them from others or they lie about their true needs or desires. Jesus says it is unloving to hide or deceive in your intentions and desires. Make them known! When we do this relationship with others can flourish and our needs and desires can be met.

Thirdly, Jesus says we need to give to others as our Heavenly Father gives to us. A father’s intention is to give to his son what is good and what he needs. Jesus says God our Father is the same way. He hears our prayer and gives good gifts to us because he wants us to be happy, fulfilled, and provided for.

Because we have this amazing unlimited resource of our Father in heaven we are to share and give the same way here on earth with our human relationships. The way we honor our neighbor is by being free and open to love them for who they are and not who we want them to be. We are to be open and transparent and honest with our needs to receive love from others. We do not judge. We find out what they really need. We do not lie. If we have a desire or need, we make it known. We give generously to others as God has given to us. In this way, we can truly be blessed by being free to be who God made us to be!

Story of Watchman Nee

Nee was born in 1903 as a son of second generation followers of Jesus in China. Nee's grandfather had been the first pastor for a congregational church in his province. Nee had two older sisters and his mother and father prayed for a son. His mother promised God if He gave her a boy, she would consecrate her son to the Lord. After Nee was born his father told him that, "before you were born, your mother promised you to the Lord".

Nee was intelligent and excelled in his studies. He was the first in his class and was told he could be successful in whatever decided to study and pursue. At the age of 17 after a period of struggle in his life, he surrendered his life to Jesus Christ. He said, "From the evening I was saved, I began to live a new life, for the life of the eternal God had entered into me."

He adopted a new name of "Watchman" to signify the calling he had from Jesus to sound out a warning to people of the darkness and come into the light of Jesus. He adopted a new name of "Watchman" to signify the calling he had from Jesus to sound out a warning to people of the darkness to come into the light of Jesus.

Watchman did not enter formal theological education rather he was discipled by a Christian missionary named Margret Barber. He also began to study the Scriptures on his own and began to read extensively on theology and growth in Christ. He rejected a western imperial approach to church in China and believed strongly that God would raise up a true Chinese church like the New Testament church in Acts. Watchman believed that the church was the body of Christ and revealed the power of Jesus' resurrection in the world. He wrote, shepherded, and preached extensively to encourage the churches he started called "God's little flock" towards Jesus.

Watchman Nee also saw that the church as the Body of Christ was simply the enlargement, expansion, and expression of the resurrected Christ. His vision of the church as the Body of Christ in resurrection was far advanced. His ministry concerning the crucified and resurrected Christ was a stewardship of grace that ministered the resurrected Christ into the believers for the building up of His Body. He saw both the universal aspect of the Body, which is detailed in the book *The Glorious Church*, and the local expression of the Body, which is presented in the books *The Assembly Life*, *The Normal Christian Church Life*, and *Further Talks on the Church Life*

Watchman's passion and love for Jesus and his church caused much suffering in his life. He suffered from poverty and sickness but his greatest suffering came from colonial denomination churches that saw him as a threat to their control over Christians. He also suffered from accusations and divisions among the Christians in his own churches. He was also imprisoned by the new communist government in China that saw Christianity as a threat to socialism. Even though he suffered much from people who falsely accused him and sought to discredit him he continued to preach the unity and love of Jesus over God's people.

He was arrested in 1952 for preaching the gospel and falsely accused and sentenced to 15 years in prison. He died in prison.

His ultimate burden was the spread and the building up of the church as the house of God, God's tabernacle. Although his own earthly tabernacle (physical body) has been taken down, the building of God obtained through his ministry remains and still is growing and spreading throughout the earth. By the time Watchman Nee was arrested in 1952, approximately four hundred local churches had been raised up in China. In addition, over thirty local churches had been raised up in the Philippines, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, and Indonesia. Today there are over twenty-three hundred local churches worldwide because of the rich and faithful ministry of Watchman Nee.

His books have been translated into many languages around the world. His passion and depth of love for the gospel and willingness to suffer to love God's people has impacted millions of people around the world. Watchman Nee truly shined brightly by the word of the covenant in the honoring of neighbor above himself for God's glory!

Source:

<https://www.watchmannee.org/life-ministry.html>

[https://thirdmill.org/magazine/article.asp/link/https:%5E%5Ethirdmill.org%5Earticles%5Ehue_mountfort%5ECH.Mountfort.watchman.nee.bio.html/at/Watchman%20Nee%20\(1903-1972\):%20A%20Biographical%20Study](https://thirdmill.org/magazine/article.asp/link/https:%5E%5Ethirdmill.org%5Earticles%5Ehue_mountfort%5ECH.Mountfort.watchman.nee.bio.html/at/Watchman%20Nee%20(1903-1972):%20A%20Biographical%20Study)

Study Questions to ponder and discuss

1. Share the experience of being honored or loved by someone. How did this affect your life?
2. Deuteronomy 5:20; Matthew 7:1-11 How does lying affect our human relationships? How is this related to the judging Jesus talks about in the Sermon on the Mount?
3. Read the story of Zacchaeus in Luke 19:1-10. How does Jesus transform Zacchaeus from a person characterized by deception and judgment to a person who is open, honest, and generous?
4. How does Watchman Nee's story reflect obedience to this command of honoring one's neighbor?
5. Are there things you need to confess and repent and receive forgiveness from Jesus? In what ways are you obedient to this command of honoring your neighbor above yourself as a beloved child of God?

11. Faith vs. Fear

“See, the Lord your God has given you the Land. Go up and take possession of it as the Lord, the God of your ancestors, told you, do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.” Deuteronomy 1:21

“I said to you, do not be terrified; do not be afraid of them...In spite of this you did not trust in the Lord your God.” Deuteronomy 1:29-32

“Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised” Romans 4:20-21

The words of the covenant are given in the context of a relationship with God. God initiated this kind of relationship with Abraham through a promise of blessing (Gen. 12). God kept His promise through generations and reiterated it to Moses and to the people of Israel, delivered from Egypt, as they stood on the edge of the Promised Land that God had given to Abraham. Yet at that moment fear filled the hearts of the people. How many times have you been overwhelmed with fear that kept you from trusting and obeying God? The devil's most basic lie is, “did God really say?”

Fear leads us away from God and to justify ourselves in our actions that come out of fear. Fear drives us away from God's blessing and life. Fear drives us to doubt, self-justification, and despair.

The opposite of fear is faith. In the story of Deuteronomy, only Caleb and Joshua had faith to go into the Promised Land. Faith says yes to God and gives us the confidence to step out. The Bible tells us this is the only way we can have a relationship with God. Faith is to trust and what God says and obey by acting upon that promise. The disciple Peter in the boat in the middle of the storm saw Jesus walking on the water. In faith, he believed in Jesus and he stepped out on the water. His faith activated the authority and power of God in him. As Peter walked, fear crept up in his heart. He took his eyes off Jesus and began to sink. Jesus lifted him out of the fear and said, “You of little faith” “why did you doubt”? (Matthew 14:22-33)

This is the basic struggle we have when we come to the commandments of God. Will we have faith to know that if we walk in obedience to God's command will it bring blessing? Or will we choose to focus on other things and the fear leads us to do what we think is right in our own eyes and sink?

I believe there are two primary things we need to have faith in God concerning our purpose in this life. One is to believe in Jesus as Lord and the full revelation that we are truly loved by God as sons and daughters. This is the faith of identity in who God is and who we are in Him. The second is to believe in the purpose and calling God has for us as sons and daughters. Jesus said, “You are the salt of the earth”. You are, “the light of the world”. This mission to bring glory to our Father and bring His goodness to others is made clear in Jesus' final words to His disciples before he ascended in heaven to prepare for His glorious return.

Just as God told Israel to take over the land and He would bless them. God mandates His church today that there is a mission we are called to fulfill by faith, When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” (Matthew 28:17-20)

Will we be those who disobey because of fear? Or will we be those who have faith and obey the purpose and calling God has for us? Jesus has

Study Questions to ponder and discuss

1. Read Deuteronomy 1:19-46. Recount the story in your own words? What was the primary issue that caused the Israelites to miss out on God's blessing?
2. How would you define fear? How does fear play a role in our decisions and what you do with your life? How do you recognize fear in your own life?
3. Read Romans 4:20-21; 1 John 4:7-18. How does God help us overcome fear with faith and love?
4. Is there fear you need to confess and repent from and receive Jesus' forgiveness? In what ways are you walking in faith right now? Is God asking you to walk in faith instead of fear in a particular situation in your life?

12. The Wilderness

“38 years passed from the time we left Kadesh Barnea until we crossed the Zered Valley. By then, that entire generation of fighting men had perished...” Deuteronomy 2:14

“Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the wilderness these forty years, to humble and test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands.” Deuteronomy 8:2

“Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tested by the devil. After fasting for forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. ’ Matthew 4:1-2

Every person who lives has been through lonely painful periods of time. There are times of lack and need with no seeming end in sight to the pain and discomfort. The Bible illustrates these times as desert or wilderness seasons in a person’s life. The desert is a place of danger and death, but it is also a place where new strength can be born and character forged. The wilderness is the place the devil seeks who to devour, but it is also the place where the devil is defeated.

In the story of God and His people, wilderness times play an outsized role in the transformation of people and the fulfillment of God’s purposes. Instead of seeing the 40 years of Israel’s wandering in the wilderness as punishment, could it be that this was preparation? What happened during those 40 years? This period of time was marked by God’s presence, provision, and power. The people were tested in their faith so that their faith could grow in God replacing fear. This was a time of learning their true identity as God’s people and learning the purpose God had for them in the Promised Land. Deuteronomy 8 makes it very clear. God wanted them to see what was “in their hearts”.

My greatest times of growth in faith in God and in my character have come in times of testing, in those seasons of desert and wilderness. Isaiah 40 says, “In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God”.

The very times that are the most painful for you are the times when you are most able to see God make a way to bring blessing to you and others. Don’t run away from the wilderness, but allow God’s Spirit to lead you through these times. Learn to depend on God’s Word, his presence, his provision, His power.

Every person in the story of God has been through the wilderness, including Jesus. Read in Hebrews 11 of the great cloud of witnesses. Don’t be surprised by the wilderness in your story. Be encouraged that God is doing something in you that will reveal a greater glory (Isaiah 40:5).

Psalm 22 is a wilderness prayer that Jesus prayed on the cross. Notice God's victory and purpose fulfilled in the wilderness!

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
Why are you so far from saving me,
so far from my cries of anguish?
² My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer,
by night, but I find no rest.
³ Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One;
you are the one Israel praises. ^[c]
⁴ In you our ancestors put their trust;
they trusted and you delivered them.
⁵ To you they cried out and were saved;
in you they trusted and were not put to shame.

Study questions to ponder and discuss

1. Read Deuteronomy 8 and Psalm 22 How do these words help us understand God's purpose in wilderness times? How do both these passages point to Jesus?
2. Why is it important for God to test what is in our hearts? How does this fit into His good plan of salvation and blessing for our lives?
3. List Biblical characters who went through times of wilderness and testing? What are some of the common themes in their stories? What encouragement can we gain from their stories?
4. Psalm 22 ends with some amazing promises in Jesus. How can you apply these promises to your life?

13. Faith vs. Fear: When we are experiencing God's goodness, we tell others about Jesus

"Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise; his greatness no one can fathom. One generation commends your works to another; they tell of your mighty acts. They speak of the glorious splendor of your majesty-and I will meditate on your wonderful works. They tell of the power of your awesome works- and I will proclaim your great deeds" Psalm 145:4-6

"For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved" Romans 10:10

Goodness is never meant to be held on to, rather it is meant to be shared. People are always telling others about the good things they have experienced. They can't help it! If they find an amazing restaurant, they tell someone about it. If someone finds a good product, they share it with their friends. If someone has an amazing vacation or trip, they want to show the pictures and share the experience with others. Why? Because goodness is too good to keep to ourselves. We are designed to share and by sharing we experience even more goodness as others share our joy.

The problem of not sharing the goodness of Jesus with others has very little to do with your discipline, fear, ambition, or drive. I believe it has everything to do with you not experiencing God's goodness. Those who have experienced this goodness can't stop talking about it! When you have been blessed by Jesus you will bless others. This is why Paul says, "For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all..." (2 Corinthians 5:14). If we believe and experience the sacrificial love of Jesus for ourselves and we truly know that he offers it to others. We would be unloving to not share it with others. In fact, it is our joy and privilege to share it with others because we know from experience that it would be for their good and blessing.

So how can I experience God's goodness today? Choose to receive God's Word by faith. Today is the day of salvation and the day of His favor. Ask Him to show you His favor and love. Maybe you need to deal with some sin in your own heart. Are you actively going against one of God's commandments? If you confess your sin, He is faithful and just to forgive. When you receive His forgiveness, you experience God's goodness! Ask God to show you someone to share His goodness today. Maybe you need to forgive someone? Is He asking you to give a gift to someone? Is He inviting you to read and receive His promises in the Bible? Maybe you just need to count your blessings one by one and give thanks to God? As you obey Him by faith you will begin to experience His goodness and you will want to share your experience with someone else!

Study Questions to ponder and discuss

1. Think about or share an experience of someone sharing God's goodness with you? How did this sharing affect your life?
2. Read Psalm 145; Acts 1:7-8; Romans 10:8-15. What is the connection between God's work of rescue and our telling, witnessing of that work? What is the significance of God including us in His purpose and plan of rescue and salvation?
3. How did you hear about the good news of Jesus Christ? Who told you and helped you understand the blessing in Jesus?
4. How have you experienced the goodness of Jesus personally?
5. Who is God asking you to share the gospel with? How can you show God's love to that person today?

14. Easter – We must always remember what God has done for us

“For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, ‘this is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me’. In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, ‘this cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me’. For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.” 1 Corinthians 11:23-26

“For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, and then the Twelve...But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead also comes through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.” 1 Corinthians 15:3-5; 20-22

Jesus has risen and that changes everything. The resurrection guarantees new life and the making of all things new. Praise God!

The Exodus story is a resurrection story that points to the person of Jesus. Jesus is the fulfillment of the Exodus story, the spotless lamb whose blood takes away the sin of the world. Enslaved and as good as dead, the people of Israel were brought to freedom and life. The Red sea was a reminder of death with Pharaoh’s Army behind and the water in front of them. Yet God made a way through the deadly waters on dry ground to a new life of freedom. The Israelites sang this song,

“In your unfailing love, you will lead the people you have redeemed. In your strength, you will guide them to your holy dwelling.... You will bring them in and plant them on the mountain of your inheritance-the place, Lord you made for your dwelling, the sanctuary, Lord, your hands established. The Lord reigns forever and ever” (Exodus 15:13-18).

We too will join their voices in singing this song in our day of resurrection glory.

“Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb....

Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God forever and ever. Amen!”
(Revelation 7:10; 12)

FATHER'S KINGDOM

LOVE

- SON
- PLEASED
- ABUNDANCE
- FAVOR
- LIFE
- LIGHT

LIFE
AND GOD SAID!

ROM. 12:1 PRACTICES OF SPIRITUAL WORSHIP

JOHN 17:3 * ETERNAL-LIFE-VIEW
* KINGDOM OF HEAVEN
RULED BY MY FATHER'S

I JOHN 4:16-18 LOVE

GATE JESUS

GEN 3:29
JOHN 10:9
REV 2:7

PATH - HOLY SPIRIT

TO K^{ING} D^{EATH}
DID GOD REALLY SAY?

ROM 12:2 PATTERNS OF THIS WORLD
aka HOW WE BEHAVE
* (WORLD-VIEW) aka WHAT WE BELIEVE
KINGDOM OF THIS WORLD
DOMINATED BY

→ * FEAR I JOHN 4:18

FEAR

- INSECURITY
- WORRY
- STRESS
- ANXIETY PHIL. 4:6
- DEPRESSION
- SUICIDE