



grow. pray. study.



Yahweh: No Other Gods Scripture: Moses said to God, “If I now come to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,’ they are going to ask me, ‘What’s this God’s name?’ What am I supposed to say to them?” God said to Moses, “I Am Who I Am. So say to the Israelites, ‘I Am has sent me to you.’” God continued, “Say to the Israelites, ‘Yahweh, the God of your ancestors, Abraham’s God, Isaac’s God, and Jacob’s God, has sent me to you.’ “This is my name forever; this is how all generations will remember me.” *Exodus 3:13-15*

I am *Yahweh* your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You must have no other gods before me. *Exodus 20:2-3*

[Jesus said,] “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me will live, even though they die.

Everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.” *John 11:25-26*

Questions in this GPS marked with an arrow bullet point are particularly recommended for group discussion. Group leaders may add other discussion questions, or substitute other questions for the marked ones, at their discretion.

The first commandment in a world of many “gods”

MONDAY Exodus 20:2-3, Exodus 3:11-15, 2 Kings 17:7-14

Before listing any of the commandments, God reminded Israel that he alone had freed them from slavery.

The commandments were not a way to earn God’s favor: “The giving of law presumes that mutual love and loyalty have been established between Israel and her divine suzerain. The Ten Commandments come to Israel *after* God redeems her from Egypt.” * The commandments defined how Israel could live in faithfulness to God’s covenant with them. “In form they look as much like definitions as commands, though ‘You will’ or ‘You will not’ is also a strong command.” **

- God’s personal name, revealed in Exodus 3, played a huge role in Israel’s faith. “The name Yahweh (appearing in texts as only the four consonants, *yhwh*, the Tetragrammaton) and its short form Yah occur over 6,800 times in the OT—more than any other word....God is revealed as One who cannot be fully comprehended in a word.” *** There is no single clear definition of the meaning of this unique Hebrew word, though it appears linked to “being” or “creation.” **** What do both the meaning(s) and the mystery of God’s name teach you about the God you worship?
- The Jewish and Christian faith in the Bible (and, later, the Muslim faith too) taught what we call “monotheism”—that is, that there is only one God. Remember, the Israelites had just left Egypt, a land that worshiped multiple “gods” of nature, in addition to their Pharaohs. How did this

commandment reflect God’s effort to embed the principle that there is only one God for us to worship, rather than many “gods”?

Prayer: Lord God, you made me. You freed me. You are the source and sustainer of all that exists. Help me to worship and serve you, and you alone. Amen.

* Article “Law” in Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit and Tremper Longman III, general editors, *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*.

Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998, p. 491.

** John Goldingay, *Exodus and Leviticus for Everyone*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010, p. 80.

*** Article “Name” in Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit and Tremper Longman III, general editors, *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*.

Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998, page 584. Modern English translations generally render YHWH as LORD, a style the GPS follows. However, in this series we will use YAHWEH in the commandments to remind ourselves of the original Hebrew name. **** Scholar John Walton lists as suggested meanings “Truly He!”; “My One”; “He Who Is”; “He Who Brings into Being”; “He Who Storms” in *NIV, Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible, eBook* (Kindle Locations 20540-20541). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

Only God

TUESDAY Psalm 62:1-2, 5-8 You must have no other gods before me.

Psalm 62 was a particularly focused poetic reflection on Israel’s faith in the one God. There were two key words in psalm. The word “only” from verse 1 “occurs also in Psalm 62:2, 5-6. The effect is to intensify the profession of faith in God alone.” * The other key word is “trust.” Whereas the peoples around Israel sometimes had to “shop” for one of their multiple “gods” to help them, this poet was sure Israel could always depend on the one and only God.

- Most of us at times “find rest” from everyday stress in a wide range of activities—taking a nap, binge-watching a favorite show, watching our favorite sports team, shopping, listening to chosen music, and the like. What are the more serious issues for which those everyday sources of rest do not work very well if at all? When do you, like the psalmist, find it essential to “find rest in God only”?
- The psalmist extended his thought after verse 8. Verse 10 listed destructive things unworthy of trust: “Don’t trust in violence; don’t set false hopes in robbery. When wealth bears fruit, don’t set your heart on it.” Verse 12 ended the psalm by listing the quality that makes God uniquely trustworthy: “faithful love comes from you, my Lord.” ** What makes the only God’s faithful love particularly important to you as you face all of life’s happy or unhappy developments?

Prayer: Lord God, my hope comes from you. But there are times when I feel shaken indeed. Keep teaching me and reminding me that you are my strong rock even at those times. Amen.

* J. Clinton McCann, Jr., comment on Psalm 62:1 in *The CEB Study Bible*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013, p. 906 OT.

** “Faithful love” renders the Hebrew word *hesed*, “one of the most important words in the Old Testament...it occurs often in all types of psalms.” (J. Clinton McCann, Jr., sidebar on “God’s Faithful Love” in *The CEB Study Bible*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013, p. 845 OT.)

God: the spring of living water

WEDNESDAY Jeremiah 2:5-13, John 7:37-38 You must have no other gods before me.

In the semi-arid world of the Biblical Middle East, thirst was often scary and life-threatening. When Jeremiah told Israel they were leaving God, the spring of living water, he was using an image that

spoke of a life-threatening spiritual condition. John 7 was set at the yearly Festival of Booths. Each year priests drew water daily at the Pool of Siloam, and poured it out in the Temple, reciting Isaiah 12:3: "With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation." Jesus said, in effect, "This ceremony points to me. I will quench your inner thirst."

○ Pastor William Willimon wrote, "The Bible's issue is invariably idolatry ('Who is the god who is there?')

[In Jeremiah 2,] God accuses Israel of idolatry, or forsaking the Creator, who has steadfastly loved Israel. Forsaking that love, that 'fountain of living water,' people instead dig their own wells, seeking water that is self-derived." * How has committing yourself to the living God drawn you away from things that "aren't really gods at all" that you might have followed?

- Israel's festival was an annual public ritual, but Jesus' addressed his invitation to each person. "All who are thirsty should come to me! All who believe in me..." Are you personally drinking the water of eternal life Jesus offers? If yes, how does your church support your walk with Jesus? If no, what is blocking you from accepting Jesus' offer?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I thirst for meaning, for purpose, maybe most of all for forgiveness and grace.

Thank you for being the one source who can quench my inner thirst. Amen. * William Willimon, study note on Jeremiah 2:13 in *The Renovare Spiritual Formation Bible*. HarperSanFrancisco, 2005, p. 1085.

Serve only the Lord your God

THURSDAY Matthew 4:8-11 You must have no other gods before me.

"All the kingdoms of the world and their glory"—an offer like that would surely capture your attention, wouldn't it? And the temptation made the price sound almost trivial: just "bow down and worship me." But Jesus, with crisp decisiveness, dismissed the temptation and the tempter because it called him to violate one of the basic building blocks of his life. Deuteronomy 6:13, he said, made it clear that the ultimate, appropriate object of our worship is always and only the one God.

○ Scholar N. T. Wright wrote, "The temptations we all face, day by day...may be very different from those of Jesus, but they have exactly the same point. They are not simply trying to entice us into committing this or that sin. They are trying to distract us, to turn us aside, from the path of servanthood to which our baptism has commissioned us." * What has helped you to recognize the larger life consequences of what you may want to rationalize as just "this or that sin"?

- Popularity, prosperity, prestige—all of us at times feel the inner drive to acquire the "kingdoms of the world and all their glory." Hebrews 4:15 said Jesus "was tempted in every way that we are, except without sin." Which "kingdoms of the world and their glory" have most tempted you to leave God's kind of life? How can you, like Jesus, resist that temptation? (One of Jesus' strategies was Scripture memorization. Try memorizing Matthew 4:10 from today's reading.)

Prayer: Lord Jesus, keep teaching me that ultimately worship is not about dressing up or "going to church."

Worshiping God means making God and God's kingdom my highest priority. Help me do that every day. Amen.

Did You Know?

EarthCOR, COR's Social and Environmental Justice Ministry, recycled 70 pounds of plastic packing material, several pounds of cardboard, 6 boxes of glass, and multiple boxes of electronics, batteries, textiles, and scrap metal at this year's Rummage Sale. Volunteers also sorted 80 pounds of candles and multiple boxes of craft supplies for donation to outside groups. These volunteers diverted all these materials from the landfill to serve God and care for God's creation. (Information provided by Kelly Shorten, member of the EarthCOR ministry. [Click here](#) for more information about EarthCOR.) * N. T. Wright, *Matthew for Everyone, Part 1: Chapters 1–15*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004, p. 27.

“You cannot serve God and wealth”

FRIDAY Matthew 6:19-24

You must have no other gods before me.

J. K. Rowling told a Harvard commencement audience, “Personal happiness lies in knowing that life is not a check-list of acquisition or achievement.” * Jesus Sermon on the Mount similarly told his hearers that the human heart has room for only one supreme allegiance. Give that loyalty to God, not wealth, Jesus said. It is the better (and the safer) investment.

- Conduct a simple life audit. Review your calendar and your checkbook. Based on the time, energy and resources reflected there, what “master(s)” do those tools say you are serving? Can you see ways your loyalties are shifting as you choose to invest in heavenly treasure? Are there other changes you could make to give you greater freedom to fully serve God as Lord of your life?
- Jesus knew our hearts. Pastor Rick Warren wrote, “Money has the greatest potential to replace God in your life....When Jesus is your Master, money serves you, but if money is your master, you become its slave. Wealth is certainly not a sin, but failing to use it for God's glory is.” ** Have you ever faced the temptation to serve God on Sunday, but serve money the rest of the week? What steps have helped you to break money's power to rule your life?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, calling you “Lord” isn't just a nice, polite title. It means you rule my life and my priorities. Give me the courage and devotion to truly mean it when I call you “Lord.” Amen.

* Quoted from text of speech at <https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2008/06/text-of-j-k-rowling-speech/>.

** Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life: What on Earth Am I Here For?*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002, p. 267.

Jesus, the “I Am” who is the source of life

SATURDAY John 11:17-26 You must have no other gods before me.

If you have time, read the whole story in [John 11](#). Jesus' friend Lazarus fell ill. However, Jesus did not arrive in Lazarus' hometown of Bethany until four days after his friend's death. The man's grieving sister Martha greeted Jesus with an “if only” type of statement. His answer began with the explosive words “I am”: “I am the resurrection and the life.” With that “I Am,” as scholar N. T. Wright noted, “He is challenging her, urging her, to exchange her ‘if only ...’ for an ‘if Jesus ...’.

If Jesus is who she is coming to believe he is ...

If Jesus is the Messiah, the one who was promised by the prophets, the one who was to come into the world ...

If he is God's own son, the one in whom the living God is strangely and newly present ...

If he is resurrection-in-person, life-come-to-life ...” *

○Martha and her sister Mary had “if-only” questions for Jesus—“if only” he had done things differently, they thought, things would be better. Jesus made seven “I am” statements in the gospel of

John (we'll study them more next week). His words to Martha are probably the most cherished of those statements: "I am the resurrection and the life...everyone who believes in me will never die." Jesus has many ways of bringing good news, hope, and new possibilities into the mess and grief of life. He asks us for trust, as he did Martha and Mary. Often our "if-only" questions, like theirs, reflect our time-limited, earth-bound understanding. We face the question Jesus asked Martha: "Do you believe this?" How easy or hard do you find it to trust that Jesus is working for your good, even when what you wish would happen doesn't? **Prayer:** Lord Jesus, sometimes it is hard for me to trust you amid my "if-only" questions. Thank you for offering me an eternal hope when I put my faith in you. Amen.

Family Activity: God commands us to have no other gods before Him. Using the alphabet as your guide, create an "Adoration Book" as one way to honor and praise God. Attach 26 pieces of paper together to create a book. In alphabetical order, write one letter of the alphabet at the top of each page. Encourage your family to name all of the qualities of God that begin with each letter. (For example, on the "A" page, you might write "active in my life" and "awesome power.") Include pictures your family members have drawn or cut from magazines as well. Use your book to learn more about God and grow in your faith. Pray and thank God for who He is in your life and remember to always keep Him first!

* N. T. Wright, *John for Everyone, Part 2: Chapters 11–21*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004, p. 8.