



grow. pray. study.



Words of Life: Reading the Ten Commandments through the Eyes of Jesus

“Do Not Kill: Overcoming Evil with Good”

Scripture: Do not kill. *Exodus 20:13*

“You have heard that it was said to those who lived long ago, Don’t commit murder, and all who commit murder will be in danger of judgment. But I say to you that everyone who is angry with their brother or sister will be in danger of judgment. If they say to their brother or sister, ‘You idiot,’ they will be in danger of being condemned by the governing council. And if they say, ‘You fool,’ they will be in danger of fiery hell... You have heard that it was said, You must love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who harass you. *Matthew 5:21-22, 43-44*

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.

This week we are memorizing:

Do not kill.

Only kill when authorized MONDAY Exodus 20:13, Numbers 35:16-21

The 1611 *King James Version* of the English Bible rendered Exodus 20:13 as “Thou shalt not kill.” Later scholarship on Biblical Hebrew has showed that “the command uses not the ordinary word for kill but a word for slaying someone without warrant.” * Even without that scholarship, a set of laws like those in Numbers 35 would show that the Hebrews’ understood the command to allow some sanctioned killing. They took the sixth commandment to say “Do not murder” (or “kill another human being without the permission of the larger community” **).

- Many Christ-followers want the Ten Commandments to be a final, timeless set of rules. Israel’s understanding of the sixth commandment makes us aware that just quoting four words doesn’t resolve all ethical questions. Scholar John Walton wrote, “The term used... specifically refers to homicide, meaning this verse cannot easily be brought into discussions of pacifism, capital punishment or vegetarianism.” *** In what ways did Israel value life more highly than surrounding cultures that practiced child sacrifice, revenge killings and the like?
- Later this week we’ll read Jesus’ teaching about this commandment. He brought deeper meanings from it than his Hebrew children seem to have discerned. Could it be that this was one of those issues (like, say, slavery) where God led God’s people as far as they could go in their time and culture, while having more to reveal at a later time?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, some of the commandments sound simple, until I set out to live them. Guide me by your Spirit, so that I may treasure your gift of life. Amen.

* John Goldingay, *Exodus and Leviticus for Everyone*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010, p. 82.

** Dennis T. Olson, study note on Exodus 20:13 in *The CEB Study Bible*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013, p. 117 OT.

*** Zondervan, *NIV, Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible*, eBook (Kindle Locations 21505-21507). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

Murderous violence broke God's heart TUESDAY Genesis 4:18-19, 23-24; 6:11, 13

In Genesis 4, we read a curious little story fragment about a descendant of Cain named Lamech. In his only appearance in the Bible story, he “recites the first human poem....But the lyric concerns a murder he committed.” * And he was bragging to his wives about it! That odd, ugly little poem may have set the stage for Genesis 6, in which God was heartbroken by the constant level of violence that humans practiced.

- In the early years of the 20th century, many people said humanity had progressed far beyond our primitive, violent past. Then World War I began and seriously damaged that confidence in human moral progress. World War II and the Nazi genocide happened about two decades later. More recently, genocidal actions have killed tens of thousands in Rwanda and Darfur. Should it humble us to realize how much like the violent people in the primeval history in Genesis we tend to be?
- If we notice at all God's “heartbroken” reaction to human violence (cf. [Genesis 6:6](#)), we sometimes think it was selective. Surely God is happy when bad things happen to bad people? Methodist scholar Maxie Dunnam wrote, “No one should rejoice at the death or defeat of another human being. Rather, the story symbolizes the death of evil—God's victory in ‘the struggle between good and evil.’” * Do you believe it is possible to hate evil without hating the human beings who often practice it?

Prayer: God of creation, teach me that you weep when I or anyone else allows anger and violence to mar your world. And teach me how not to follow in the steps of the long-ago Lamech who bragged about his violence. Amen.

Did You Know? Here's some good news to brighten up today's rather somber readings: Ethiopia recently set a new world record for the number of trees planted in a single day. In July, thousands of people planted an estimated 350 million trees across the countryside in just 12 hours. The effort was part of the nation's “green legacy” initiative to plant 4 billion trees to stop erosion, prevent desertification and restore lost habitat. To date, over 2.6 billion trees have been planted across Ethiopia as part of the program. ***

* John Goldingay, *Genesis for Everyone, Part 1: Chapters 1–16*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010, p. 82.

** Maxie Dunnam, *The Preacher's Commentary Series, Volume 2: Exodus*. General Editor: Lloyd J. Ogilvie. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1987, p. 163. *** Supplied by Kelly Shorten from the [EarthCOR Ministry](#). [Click here](#) to read news coverage of Ethiopia's tree-planting program.

Through Jesus' eyes: no hatred or contempt WEDNESDAY Matthew 5:21-24, 1 John 3:15

In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus startlingly widened the sixth commandment's reach. Contempt, anger, and words that aim to tear down and destroy others are as morally destructive as the physical act of murder, he said. And Jesus lived that out—he didn't seek to kill his foes, but actually laid down his life for them. In his short letter, John echoed what Jesus taught: that feelings and words of hatred toward others are a destructive type of murder.

- Scholar William Barclay said in Matthew 5 Jesus rebuked, first, “the anger over which a person broods, and which he will not allow to die;” then the Aramaic *raca*, which is “almost untranslatable, because it describes a tone ...the whole accent of contempt;” and finally the Greek *mōros*:

“To call a man *mōros* was not to criticize his mental ability; it was to cast aspersions on his moral character; to take his name and reputation.” * Do you believe Jesus’ teaching applies to the heated speech we hear (and sometimes join in) people flinging at each other today?

- What do you think makes it often feel satisfying to express contempt for people who disagree with you or are different, and tear down their reputation? Are there relationships in which you have found it possible to disagree respectfully, seeking common ground rather than “victory”? If so, how can you extend those dynamics to more of your interactions?

Prayer: Dear God, help me in all my dealings with others to focus more on what connects us than on what divides us. Help me exercise discernment, but in a generous, unifying spirit. Amen.

* William Barclay, *Daily Study Bible Series: The Gospel of Matthew—Volume 1, Chapters 1–10* (Revised Edition). Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1976, pp. 139-140.

Throw the first stone? Jesus refused THURSDAY Leviticus 20:10, John 8:1-11

John said the religious leaders, stones in hand, hoped to use this woman to trap Jesus (verse 6). And it was an ugly trap—they were glad to not just shame, but kill, a woman they had likely lured into the act of adultery. That was probably why the woman’s partner (she couldn’t commit adultery alone!) wasn’t there—the leaders may well have set her up. They posed as righteously upholding God’s law (verse 5). Jesus reframed the issue, saying, “Whoever hasn’t sinned should throw the first stone” (verse 7). This challenge sent the “righteous” people slinking away. Jesus refused to condemn the woman but invited her to a new, better life.

- Scholar Jaime Clark-Soles wrote, “Jesus skewers the ‘good old boys’ network where ‘Boys will be boys’ while women must remain pure. ...[he] raises the woman to equality with the judgmental religious authorities and invites all of them to leave their various sins (one being no better or worse than another) and embrace abundant life.” * What helps you to accept Jesus’ idea that none of our sins are better or worse? When have you needed to hear, and heard, Jesus say to you, “Neither do I condemn you. Go, and from now on, don’t sin anymore”?
- Jesus told the self-righteous accusers, in effect, “You need to be sinless to condemn others. If you are, step up and cast the first stone.” By Jesus’ standard, do you qualify to “throw stones” at anyone else? Does anyone? (Jesus was the only sinless person in the scene. But, because he was sinless, he hadn’t come to throw stones—cf. [John 3:17](#).) What steps can you take in your home, your office, your school, or your church to make “stone-throwing” a thing of the past?

Prayer: O God, you are the source of life and light, not condemnation. Guide me that I may avoid the evil of a condemning, self-righteous spirit, and pass on your life, hope and light to others. Amen.

* Jaime Clark-Soles, “Portrait” note on “Woman Caught in Adultery” in *The CEB Women’s Bible*. Nashville: Common English Bible, 2016, p. 1349.

The “great commandment” that summed up all others FRIDAY Romans 12:9, 13:9-10

The apostle Paul said God’s kingdom calls us to a standard of relating that reaches beyond particular rules or laws. “Love doesn’t do anything wrong to a neighbor” was a big challenge to people at odds with one another. Dedicating a new chapel, Methodism’s founder John Wesley urged, “Let our hearts be joined herein; let us unite our wishes and prayers; let our whole soul pant after a general revival of pure religion and undefiled, the restoration of the image of God, pure love, in every child of man!...let us, with all diligence, diffuse the religion of love among all.”

- People often think “righteous” people are not very pleasant to be around, that being a Christian makes you judgmental and unloving. That was not the apostle Paul’s view! In another setting,

John Wesley urged Methodists, “Let us provoke all men, not to enmity and contention, but to love and good works; always remembering those deep words... ‘God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him!’” In what ways has following Christ made you and your relationships more loving?

- How might death-dealing religious episodes in history (e.g. the Salem witch trials, the Inquisition) have been different if Christians had always followed “love doesn’t do anything wrong to a neighbor”? How can you stand for truths that matter to you without doing or wishing harm to those who disagree? Do you believe Paul understood Jesus correctly, or was he too soft on “law breakers”?

Prayer: Living Lord, please help me to take in, and then live out, “the religion of love.” I want to live in love, to live in you and to have you live in me. Amen.

A heart free of murderous impulses SATURDAY Matthew 15:18-20, Luke 6:27-31

Jesus taught his followers ways of living that avoided the human impulse toward violence and embodied his peace and love. The ways of living Jesus described are not natural to any of us. That was why he prefaced his teaching with the challenging words, “I say to you who are willing to hear.” We only move toward Jesus’ kind of open, fear-free life as we allow the Holy Spirit to reshape our “heart.” “Here [in Matthew 15:18] the heart is the center of a person’s thinking, feeling and will.” * It is only as we allow Jesus’ spirit to change our heart, to transform us from the inside out, that we have the fruit of kindness and gentleness growing in our lives.

- Luke linked the Golden Rule (“Treat people in the same way that you want them to treat you”—verse 31) to Jesus’ words about how to treat enemies. By almost any definition, an “enemy” is someone who is not interested in treating you the way you want them to treat you. The Golden Rule obviously works best in reciprocal relationships, where all participants seek to bless each other while maintaining healthy boundaries and self-care. Yet the Scriptures showed Jesus living by that rule even when facing haters demanding his brutal execution on the cross (cf. [Isaiah 53:7-8](#), [John 18:33-37](#), [19:9-11](#), [Luke 23:33-34](#)). In what relationships do you find it hardest to treat others as you’d wish them to treat you? How can you apply Jesus’ model to the way you relate in those difficult situations?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I’d never actually kill anyone else. But sometimes I’ve found delight in “knocking ‘em dead.” Teach me how to live out your deeply challenging understanding of the sixth commandment. Amen.

Family Activity: As we study the 10 Commandments, help your family remember that when Jesus was asked about “greatest commandment,” his answer was “You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: You must love your neighbor as you love yourself” (Matthew 22:37-39). As a family, talk about how Jesus extended the meaning of the commandment we studied this week (“Do not kill”) to show that it covers angry words, mean nicknames and the like. Discuss ways that you can more fully live out loving your neighbor (in family, in school, in neighborhood) as you love yourself.

* Eugene Eung-Chun Park and Joel B. Green, study note on Matthew 15:17-20 in *The CEB Study Bible*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013, p. 34 NT.