

FALL 2020

LifeWay

YOU



AFTER GOD'S
OWN HEART:

A FRESH LOOK AT THE
TEN COMMANDMENTS

+ + +

ALL IN:

A LIFE OF
COMMITMENT

GOD'S UNFAILING PROMISE

+ + +

We've messed up. You have. I have. We all have. And no matter how good our intentions or efforts are, we can't make up for the wrong we've done.

The Bible uses a much stronger word—sin—to describe how we have failed to live according to God's perfect standard (Rom. 3:23). The result of our sin is death (Rom. 6:23).

Thankfully, we do not have to stay in this condemned state. In spite of our sin and rebellion against God, He loves us and made a way for us to be forgiven and receive a new, eternal life, freed from the consequences of our sin. That way is Jesus Christ, who paid the penalty of our sin and brokenness with His own death (John 3:16; Rom. 5:8). When we turn away from our sin in repentance and turn to Christ in faith, He gives us a new life, freed from the penalty of sin. We are made new in Him (2 Cor. 5:17).

God's unfailing promise—His commitment to us—is the best guarantee we can be offered. "For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Rom. 10:13).

To receive a new life in Christ, you can pray a prayer like this:

"Dear God, I know I am a sinner. I believe Jesus died on the cross to forgive me of my sins and rose from the dead to give me new life. I'm sorry for all the wrong I've done and ask You to forgive me. I now accept Your gift of eternal life. Thank You for Your love, forgiveness, and a new life in Jesus Christ. From this day forward, I choose to follow You. In Jesus' name, Amen."

Share your decision to follow Jesus with a pastor or those in your Bible study group. Be baptized as an expression of your faith. Get involved in a church that will help you grow in your faith.

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CONTENTS

- 5 A WORD FROM MARK CROSTON
- 6 GETTING THE MOST OUT OF YOU
- 7 FOR THOSE WHO WANT TO GO DEEPER
- 8 DISCIPLESHIP PLAN

STUDY 1 SESSIONS

AFTER GOD'S OWN HEART: **A FRESH LOOK AT THE TEN COMMANDMENTS**

9	INTRODUCTION
11	SESSION ONE // PLACE GOD FIRST Exodus 20:1-6; Psalm 16:1-4a,9-11
17	SESSION TWO // HONOR GOD Exodus 20:7-11; Psalm 145:1-7
23	SESSION THREE // HONOR PARENTS Exodus 20:12; 2 Samuel 15:7-14
31	SESSION FOUR // HONOR LIFE Exodus 20:13; 1 Samuel 26:7-11,22-25
37	SESSION FIVE // HONOR MARRIAGE Exodus 20:14; 2 Samuel 11:1-5
43	SESSION SIX // HONOR ALL RELATIONSHIPS Exodus 20:15-17; Psalm 37:1-6

STUDY 2 SESSIONS

ALL IN: **A LIFE OF COMMITMENT**

51	INTRODUCTION
53	SESSION ONE // CHRIST'S COMMITMENT TO US Romans 5:6-12,18-21
59	SESSION TWO // OUR COMMITMENT TO CHRIST Mark 10:13-22
67	SESSION THREE // COMMITTED TO HIS WORD Psalm 119:1-11
73	SESSION FOUR // COMMITTED TO HIS CHURCH Romans 12:3-16
79	SESSION FIVE // COMMITTED TO PRAY Colossians 1:3-12
85	SESSION SIX // COMMITTED TO HIS WORSHIP Psalm 99:1-9
91	SESSION SEVEN // COMMITTED TO HIS MISSION Romans 10:9-17

ARTICLES

29	AFTER GOD'S OWN HEART
49	TEACHING THE TEN COMMANDMENTS TO THE NEXT GENERATION
65	LEAVES ARE FALLING, CHRIST IS CALLING
98	PSALM 119: A HYMN TO GOD'S LAW
142	RECLAIMING GROUP MEMBERS
160	THREE WAYS TO TAKE THE TEMPERATURE OF YOUR GROUP

LEADER PAGES

101	STUDY ONE LEADER PAGES
129	STUDY TWO LEADER PAGES
162	COMING NEXT QUARTER

Find out more at lifeway.com/you

ON THE COVER

Singer-songwriter, Keesha, graces the cover of this issue of *YOU*. In her career, Keesha has shared the stage with top gospel artists on BET's *Bobby Jones Gospel*, The Word Network, and Impact Network. Baptized at an early age because of the influence of her God-loving family, Keesha has been in church all of her life. She affirms that her parents had a huge impact on her Christian walk. "They were spiritual guides that kept me on the straight and narrow," she says. Keesha grew up singing in the church choir, and recently embraced a calling into church leadership as minister of music. In addition, she and her brother are the sole caregivers for their mother who in recent years was diagnosed with dementia. Despite a demanding schedule, Keesha enjoys working out and playing volleyball. Currently, she sings both the United States and Canadian national anthems for the Nashville Predators ice hockey team. Her music is available digitally worldwide.



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EDITORIAL

MARK CROSTON

It is always so exciting to receive something new. The new must be tried out, tried on, and explored—new clothes, a new gift, a new job, or even a new love. How about a new *YOU*? In 2 Corinthians 5:17 God lets us know He wants to make you new! “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, and see, the new has come!” In fact, God is working to make everything new. Revelation 21:5 says, “Then the one seated on the throne said, ‘Look, I am making everything new.’” He also said, “Write, because these words are faithful and true.”

This quarter we are giving you a new *YOU*! We have a new style, a new pace, and a new look, but most of the same features that caused you to love *YOU* are still here. *YOU* is still a three-in-one resource: a Learner Guide; Daily Readings (now with five); and a Leader Guide. This quarter we are “All In” to be “After God’s Own Heart”! Try us out this quarter and please send me your feedback directly at mark.croston@lifeway.com.

Plan to join me at our Black Church Leadership and Family Conference, July 19-23, 2021, in Ridgecrest, North Carolina. Each year we plan something new to keep it fresh and to make it better every time. There is a full program for every member of the family! This is the place to bring your church leaders and their families to be edified, encouraged, and energized. Get all the details at LifeWay.com/BlackChurchLife. Now, grab your Bible and allow God to speak through *YOU*!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark". The signature is stylized with a large, sweeping flourish that loops back under the name.

Mark A. Croston Sr.

National Director of Black Church Partnerships

www.lifeway.com/BlackChurchLife

GETTING THE MOST OUT OF YOU

YOU is a three-in-one learner and leader resource with inspirational and educational features to enhance Bible study that leads to spiritual maturity and life change. Here is information to help you get the most out of *YOU*.

LEARNER PAGES

The first half of *YOU* includes pages for personal study. These should be read by the learner and leader prior to group time. Included in each session:

Memory Verses encourage filling the mind with the Word of God to strengthen every aspect of spiritual life.

Digging Deeper provides a deeper look at a word, character, or other aspect from the session.

Did You Know? provides an African-American or urban historical fact or update connected to the session.

DAILY READINGS

Included with each session are five devotionals to be read by the learner and leader. The benefits of a daily devotion are innumerable. Their primary purpose in this resource is to focus attention on the biblical content of each session for application of and conformity to the Word of God.

LEADER PAGES

The second half of *YOU* includes pages to guide teaching each session. Leaders can use the leader pages to guide learners through the passage and its key emphases as detailed on the learner pages. Here are suggestions on how to teach:

Prior to the session, read and study the Bible passage, keywords, and learner pages.

Plan teaching using the leader pages. Keep in mind that because of time, it may not be possible to use every teaching suggestion. Also the teaching suggestions are in sequential order for easy use.

Features to use when teaching include: The Point, which is readily recognizable on the learner and leader pages; the question at the top of the first page of each learner session; Keywords on the Scripture pages; “Object Lessons”; “Digging Deeper”; “Did You Know?”; Pack Items*; and Commentary at the end of each session on leader pages.

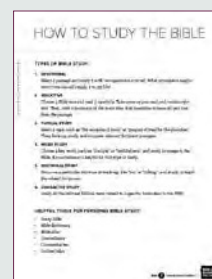
Refine your teaching plans when necessary.

PRAY

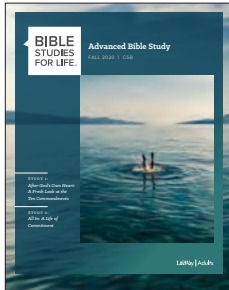
Because the Holy Spirit is the guide for your study, invite Him to show you how to “rightly divide the word of truth” as you teach your group. Read the Bible passage several times, asking the Holy Spirit to show you its meaning and application.

*PACK ITEMS

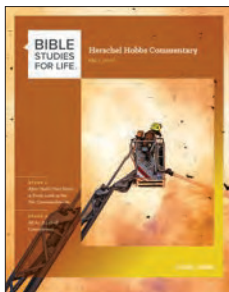
These are posters, charts, and handouts that can provide another layer to your teaching and add needed variety that makes learning more interesting. The *YOU* Leader Pack is located at lifeway.com.



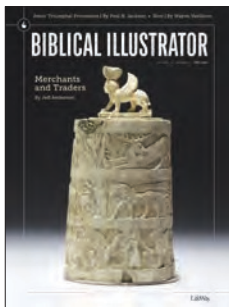
FOR THOSE WHO WANT TO GO DEEPER



The **Advanced Bible Study** is written for group members who desire more extensive commentary. It includes exposition of each session's Scripture passage, an examination of keywords, an introduction to the setting of the passage and biblical life and times, questions to guide the study, and interactive responses to help readers apply God's truths to their lives today.



The **Herschel Hobbs Commentary** is designed specifically for leaders and provides a comprehensive exposition of each session's Scripture passage. Specific attention is called to items in the biblical text that readers would miss without a commentary. This commentary is based on the King James Version but interacts with all major English translations.



Each quarter, **Biblical Illustrator** offers in-depth background information on Bible customs, history, culture, archaeology, and word studies through vivid photography, engaging maps and graphics, and lesson-targeted articles. You can subscribe to *Biblical Illustrator* by going to lifeway.com/biblicalillustrator or by calling 1-800-458-2772. Forty additional articles (in PDF form) that support this quarter's Bible studies are available at lifeway.com/biblicalillustrator.

YOU DISCIPLESHIP PLAN

THE PATHWAY OF DISCIPLESHIP

Growing in Christ is a journey—a lifelong journey—but what does that look like? LifeWay’s research reveals eight signposts that indicate believers are on the discipleship pathway that leads to spiritual maturity. Each year, *YOU* engages all eight of these areas. Following this intentional plan for discipleship ensures progress on the pathway to becoming more like Christ.

Visit BibleStudiesforLife.com for a fuller picture of this discipleship plan through 2022.

8 Signposts	Fall 2020	Winter 2020-21	Spring 2021	Summer 2021
Build Relationships	After God's Own Heart			
Seek God	All In: A Life of Commitment			
Obey God and Deny Self		When Emotions Rise		
Engage with Scripture		Spiritual Disciplines: Becoming More Like Jesus		
Exercise Faith			The Essentials of Christianity	
Share Christ			How to Share Christ	
Live Unashamed				Walking in Confidence
Serve God and Others				Discovering and Using Your Spiritual Gifts

STUDY 1 AFTER GOD'S OWN HEART: A FRESH LOOK AT THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

HOW THIS STUDY FITS YOUR'S DISCIPLESHIP PLAN

+ + +

Build Relationships.

We have no greater way to build good relationships than what we find in the Ten Commandments God provided. In the briefest and clearest of statements, God has revealed the way to relate to Him and others.

Writer Bio

Tony Evans

wrote the learner pages. He is senior pastor of Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship and president of *The Urban Alternative*. He's been preaching for more than fifty years and can be heard on the radio broadcast, *The Alternative with Dr. Tony Evans*. Learn more about Dr. Evans at tonyevans.org.

Marshelle Jackson Wilburn

adapted the learner pages for the *YOU* audience. She is an inspirational speaker, author, leadership trainer, and urban missionary to the San Francisco Bay Area. She also partners in ministry with her husband, Port, in church planting and associational missions. They have five children.



A BIBLE STUDY ON THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

+ + +

Morals and beliefs have become slanted in today's world. People want to live life on their own terms in a "YOLO" (you only live once) culture; therefore, we are encouraged to "do you," "get yours," and so much more that focuses on self-satisfaction and instant gratification. This way of life runs counter to God's desire for us.

Because God loves us and wants to be in relationship with us, He made sure that we have a direct and clear path to follow through the Ten Commandments. These commandments show us that God is intensely concerned with how we live. Unfortunately, too many people see these commandments as outdated or a negative list of don'ts, but obeying them leads to a rich and full life. Jesus summarized the Ten Commandments in two brief and powerful statements: (1) love God and (2) love others (Matt. 22:37-40). When our

lives are Christ-centered in love, we live out God's moral expectation for us. We live out the Ten Commandments.

King David knew this. He was identified as a "man after God's own heart" (Acts 13:22), and he loved and valued the commands of God. This study encourages us to take a fresh look at the Ten Commandments through the life of David and his psalms. He gave us good examples of what happens when we follow the Ten Commandments, and examples of bad things that can happen when we don't.

God will never leave us on our own, trying to guess how to live life. Instead, He wants us to have a full understanding of His expectations and plans for our lives. Our well-being has always been one of His greatest concerns. That's important to know in this world in which we live.

SESSION 1

PLACE GOD FIRST

THE POINT:
GOD IS TO HAVE FIRST
PLACE IN EVERY
ASPECT OF LIFE.

EXODUS /// 20:1-6;
PSALM /// 16:1-4A,9-11

Ex. 20:1 Then God spoke all these words: ² I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the place of slavery. ³ Do not have other gods besides me. ⁴ Do not make an idol for yourself, whether in the shape of anything in the heavens above or on the earth below or in the waters under the earth. ⁵ Do not bow in worship to them, and do not serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the fathers' iniquity, to the third and fourth generations of those who hate me, ⁶ but showing faithful love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commands.

Ps. 16:1 Protect me, God, for I take refuge in you. ² I said to the LORD, "You are my Lord; I have nothing good besides you." ³ As for the holy people who are in the land, they are the noble ones. All my delight is in them. ^{4a} The sorrows of those who take another god for themselves will multiply.

⁹ Therefore my heart is glad and my whole being rejoices; my body also rests securely. ¹⁰ **For you will not abandon me to Sheol; you will not allow your faithful one to see decay.** ¹¹ **You reveal the path of life to me; in your presence is abundant joy; at your right hand are eternal pleasures.**

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MEMORY VERSE

KEYWORDS

a: Sheol (Ps. 16:10) – This is the abode of the dead (the underworld, "the pit," "the grave"), where it was believed everyone went after death. Even so, God is there (Ps. 139:8).

HOW CAN I PUT GOD FIRST IN MY LIFE?

Have you ever felt disappointed? Frustrated? Hurt? Confused? We all have. Life comes with issues—and these issues can show up in so many ways. When enough issues arise, life begins to feel like one big mess.

A man visited a doctor because his entire body hurt. From the top of his head to the bottom of his feet, he felt pain. Every single place he touched brought great pain to him. The doctor examined him and said, “I don’t see anything wrong.” He asked the man to touch different places on his body. But each time, he cried out in pain.

After a few minutes of this, the doctor diagnosed the problem. “Sir,” the doctor said, “You have a dislocated finger.”

While it felt like everything was wrong, it was only one thing. This can be true for our lives as well. Even though it may seem like everything in life is a mess, the solution comes down to three words: Put God first. This one action affects everything.

God Alone Is God // Exodus 20:1-6

We put God first because He alone is God. This statement covers more than we realize. Some of us would say, “God is first,” but is He? For some people, what’s “first” in their lives is money, careers, pleasure, social media, sports, a person, or a special possession. When we give to anyone or anything the devotion, authority, and worship God alone deserves, the Bible describes that with one word: *idolatry*.

True, in our culture, we don’t bow down to wooden idols or statues. We don’t declare our devotion through rituals or sacrifice. Even though we don’t, it can be deceiving. Because we don’t physically bow to a person or a possession, we can blindly think they aren’t idols. The reality is, there are idols in our culture, and yet we mistakenly believe God is first in our lives.

God calls us to devote ourselves to Him first because He alone is God. In Him we find true life, both in this world and in eternity. As King,



He sits over all. He rules over all. He governs all. God's rules are rooted in love, and He calls us to love Him. Jesus summed up what our devotion to God looks like: Love God and love others (Mark 12:29-31).

WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE TO PLACE GOD "FIRST" IN TODAY'S CULTURE?

To put God first means to live a life punctuated by a love which stems from a spirit of gratitude. Many who study the Ten Commandments skip the important opening verses of Exodus 20, when God first reminded the Israelites what He had done for them. "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the place of slavery" (v. 2). He reminded the Israelites of the redemption and freedom He had provided. Their gratitude to God for what He had done would serve as their foundation for putting Him first. Their gratitude displayed what was in their hearts and their desire to put God first.

It is the same today. When God asks us to put Him first, He's asking for our hearts. If we give Him our hearts, He knows our actions will follow.

WHAT ARE THE CONSEQUENCES OF PUTTING OTHER THINGS BEFORE GOD?

God Alone Is Good

// Psalm 16:1-4a

When David said he had "nothing good besides" God, he wasn't making a blanket statement that everything was terrible. Instead, he was focusing on an important truth: God alone is good and He is the originator of all that is good. Based on this truth, we know two things: Good has one source: God. And if something is not good, it doesn't come from God.

This doesn't mean that if something doesn't "seem" good, it doesn't come from God. A lot of things may not "seem" good to us, but God uses them to create good (Gen. 50:20). Yet Satan seeks different ways to use these seemingly bad things to plant doubt in our hearts concerning God's goodness.

1. In trials or difficulties, Satan wants us to focus on the pain rather than the purpose. Satan sought to confuse Paul by giving him a "thorn in the flesh" to torment him. Paul could have blamed God for the difficulty rather than looking to God in the midst of the difficulty. He could have turned His back on God, but Paul chose to look to God for wisdom in his

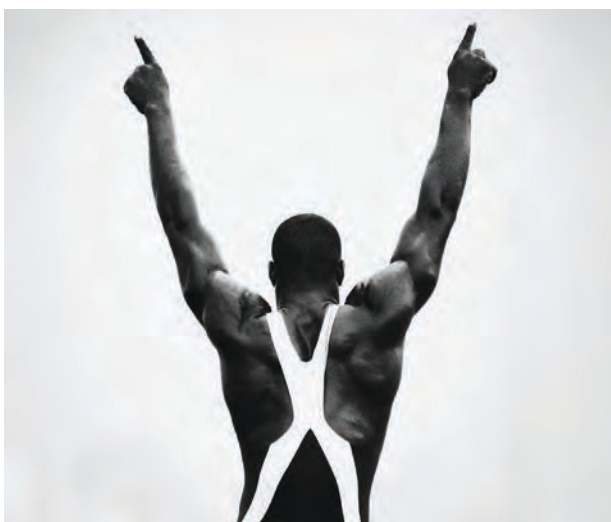


DIGGING DEEPER

THE DECALOGUE

Apart from Moses' citation of the Decalogue (Ten Commandments) in Deuteronomy 5, the Old Testament gives little if any evidence of giving the Decalogue greater authority than any of the other Sinai laws. This does not mean these tablets were not treated as special. On the contrary, Moses notes the Decalogue contained the only revelation that was communicated by God directly to the people (Deut. 4:12-13; 5:22) and committed to writing on tablets of stone by God's own hand (Ex. 24:12; 31:18; 34:1; Deut. 4:13; 5:22; 10:1-4). All subsequent revelation at Sinai was communicated indirectly through Moses, the covenant mediator.¹

Why do you believe there was and is such a strong emphasis on teaching and learning the Ten Commandments?



suffering. Paul received the good that God intended: the perfecting of his strength in weakness (2 Cor. 12:6-10).

2. Satan causes doubts about the goodness of God by tempting us to develop a “victim mentality.” Satan attempted this with Job by striking down and destroying all the people and things Job loved and cherished, and then wreaking havoc on his health. Yet Job remained firm, trusting in the goodness of God (42:1-6).

Like Paul and Job, our experiences may not always feel or seem good. But we’re assured all things will be used for good when we love God and put Him first (Rom. 8:28-29). This promise in Romans 8:28-29 is for those “who love God” and live “according to

His purpose.” Translation: It’s for those who put God first.

WHAT EXPERIENCES IN YOUR LIFE REFLECT THE TRUTH THAT GOD IS GOOD?

God Alone Is the Way to Eternal Life

// Psalm 16:9-11

Most of us go through life feeling little need to know how to get where we’re going. Instead, we spend money on fancy apps to help us navigate through life like pros. Have you ever tried using your GPS in a area where road construction is taking place? You’ll quickly discover how important it truly is to know the way to where you are going. This also applies to where we’re going in our lives and for eternity. It’s important to know the way.

David knew “the path of life” was God Himself. God

showed him (and still shows us) the path of life on earth through His guidance, teachings, and directions.

God’s way is the only way which leads to both “abundant joy” in the present and “eternal pleasures” beyond time. Jesus described the importance of knowing the way and choosing God’s way when He said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). He is our GPS.

When we remain in Jesus and align ourselves under Him (John 15:1-8), He takes us where we need to go. He calms the difficult seas in our lives. Eternal life is a gift we receive by placing faith alone in Christ alone for the payment of our sins. The good news of the gospel is that we don’t have to pay for any of it. Jesus is the way. He is the gift.

THE POINT: GOD IS TO HAVE FIRST PLACE IN EVERY ASPECT OF LIFE.

Too many people think God should let them in heaven because they've kept the Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments were never given as an entry point for eternity. While it's true God expects us to obey His commands, the ultimate purpose of the law is to show us our inability to keep those laws. In other words, it reveals our need for a Savior (Rom. 7:7).

WHAT ARE SOME WAYS THIS CLASS HAS HELPED YOU DISCOVER GOD'S PATH FOR YOUR LIFE?

God has allowed a permanent sacrifice—Jesus Christ—to substitute for the punishment each of us deserves. “He made the one who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor. 5:21). Does this mean we ignore and shun righteous living, as well as the commands of God? “Absolutely not!” (Romans 6:2). But it does mean we have been set free from legalism and condemnation through the gift of salvation in Jesus Christ. This allows us to willingly and gratefully pursue a life pleasing to God by placing Him first over everything else.

DID YOU KNOW?

The idea of God was at one time problematic in the African-American experience. The God who is Jesus was the God white Westerners introduced to the Gikuyu, Masai, and Wakamba people of East Africa. The problem? This God was believed to be responsible for the suffering of slavery. Also, He was not Ngai, who was the god of the African. They believed Ngai was god alone. When Ngai was stripped from the African culture, it left a terrifying darkness and void. But that was a long time ago. African-Americans have overcome this troubling experience, because many accepted the presentation of Christ and believe the one true God has delivered them from much suffering. According to Pew Research, today 83% of African-Americans are more likely to say they believe in God than other cultures.²

WHAT IMPACT DOES THE HURTS OF OUR PAST HAVE ON OUR ABILITY TO PUT GOD FIRST?

LIVE IT

How will you actively seek to put God first in your life?

The starting point for any personal change begins with honestly acknowledging what needs to change. If there is any area in your life where you do not put God first, confess that to God. Then make a commitment to begin each day by putting God first. This will look different for each person, but it could mean simply saying a prayer or reading your Bible when you first wake up.

+ + +

- Make a new habit by listing one action you will replace to demonstrate your recommitment to put God first in your life.
- Identify three personal characteristics or habits which could lead someone observing your lifestyle to conclude that you place God first.
- Consider keeping a notepad or journal this week where you write down every time you sought to put God's perspective and His guidance first in your life.

DAILY READINGS

1. DEVOTED TO YOU // EXODUS 20:1-2

What's your response to someone who displays devotion to you? Gratitude and appreciation are common responses. God displays His devotion to His people when He identifies Himself as belonging to them. Our acceptance of His devotion becomes apparent through our expressions of appreciation and obedience to Him. He deserves it. In many instances throughout Scripture, God displays faithfulness as our Protector, Provider, Healer, and so much more. We can trust a God who is devoted to us like that.

Let us commit our hearts in sincere obedience to the ways of the one God who is devoted to us.

2. NOTHING BUT GOODNESS // PSALM 16:2

It's challenging to find goodness with so much evil in the world. Daily news is filled with crime, death, terror, and hatred. So, where can we find goodness among so much distress? The answer is clearly God. There is no one good but God (Luke 18:19). The goodness of God is one of His attributes. This means God will always do what is true and what is right. Therefore, we can have confidence that none of the evils of the world is caused by Him. He will uphold us when those distresses encroach upon our lives.

As you walk with God, look for His goodness to show up in your life every single minute of the day.

3. FULL-NESS OF JOY // PSALM 16:11

Got Joy? It's easy to confuse joy with feeling happy because joy is often defined as happiness. The suffix "-ness" means a state of being. While it's OK to be in a state of happiness, it can be fleeting

because being happy is based entirely on circumstances. This verse provides another option. It reminds us that the abundance or full-NESS of joy is lasting and found only in the Lord.

Therefore, focus on getting your joy from the One who provides it completely. God's joy is eternal.

4. LAW AND ORDER // ROMANS 7:7

Have you ever been pulled over for a traffic stop? When we run a stop sign, the traffic laws convey we have disobeyed the local authorities. God's law acts the same way. Paul said, "I would not have known sin if it were not for the law." Without God's instructions, we would wander aimlessly through life, living as we please, with no regard for sin, for God, and His laws. Just as we avoid traffic infractions, even more so, we must avoid breaking God's law because He is the highest and greatest authority.

Need help? Store God's laws in your heart so you can follow them and avoid sin (Ps. 119:11).

5. FIRST THINGS FIRST // DEUTERONOMY 6:4-5

God made His desire for His people clear. He commanded that He be first in our lives. Jesus repeated this truth with more details in Mark 12:30. We are to "love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength." Loving God is exemplified when we make His kingdom more important than anything else in our lives. This kind of love does not happen all at once. It's a day-to-day learning process.

We must seek it, think about it, and learn about it on a daily basis. Soon His love will encompass everything we say and do.

Sampler Note: This article is for everyone's benefit and is printed in the members section.



Teaching the Ten Commandments to the Next Generation

NATASHA MENIFEE

When you hear The Ten Commandments, what comes to mind? Law—Love—Restriction—Rescue. Most often we say God’s law, and for many adults that translates to His love. This is not the case however with younger generations. Generation Z and even some millennials have a different opinion when it comes to the word “law” and the legal system in general. The social injustices and divisive government practices they have witnessed gives a different meaning to the word law. For them, law does not necessarily translate to love. For this generation, it equates to restriction and has a negative connotation. Whether their thinking is accurate or not, it is where we are in 2020.

Therefore, we have a responsibility to the generations coming behind us to share the truth of what God has given to His people through the Ten Commandments. God does not save us, turn us loose and say “do your best!” He loves us too much for that. Rather, believers have a clear and concise set of directions on how to navigate life. The first three laws are given to show us how to be in relationship with God. The remaining

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seven, teach us how to have a relationship with one another. Unfortunately, many people see them as outdated and irrelevant. Nothing could be further from the truth. God's Word is timeless and will stand forever (Isaiah 40:8). But the question remains, how do we re-present this Old Testament truth to a new generation? Allow me to offer three suggestions on how to guide this generation to love God's law.

Know Your Audience

In order to teach the upcoming generation, you must get to know the generation. Gone are the days when adults tell you what you should believe and you just believe it. Today young



people do not take everything at face value just because someone says it is so. They want to know the “why” behind it. Why is the Bible important to my life? Why should I read what I don't understand? Take some time to build a relationship with your youth or young adults. Once trust has been established, receiving instruction from you becomes easier for them. Paul stated, “I have become all things to all people, so that I may by every possible means save some” (1 Cor. 9:22). Are you willing to do whatever is necessary to reach across generations so that they will have a relationship with Christ?

Trade Translations

Most young people (adults too) cannot understand all the thee's and thou's of the King James version of the Bible. Not that there is anything wrong with this translation; however, it is important to encourage younger generations to read a version they can understand. If their version of the Bible causes a lack of understanding, a lack of application will potentially follow. The majority of youth and young adults don't even use an actual print Bible; instead, they tap and scroll. Their world is one of technology and apps, why not use technology to guide their spiritual growth. This means we will see phones in Bible study, Sunday School, even worship. We have to allow ourselves to be stretched beyond our comfort zone in order for our generation to teach the next one.

Connect the Dots

Whether it is in daily conversation or Bible study, we have an obligation to connect the dots of Scripture to this generation. They need to know why what happened yesterday is important to their lives today. Using this teaching model provides biblical context (then) and life application (now).

Natasha Menifee is a writer and teacher who serves as the Christian education director at First Baptist Church, Winchester, Ky. She holds two master's degrees from Georgetown College, one in learning/behavior disorders and the other in teacher leadership. She is the proud mother of two daughters.

LEADER GUIDE

STUDY 1 AFTER GOD'S OWN HEART:

A FRESH LOOK AT THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

INTRODUCTION

Ethics and morals have become skewed. People want to live life on their own terms, but God has given us a succinct and clear path to follow through the Ten Commandments. Unfortunately, too many people see these Commandments as a negative list of don'ts, but obedience to these Commandments leads to a rich and full life. King David knew this. David was identified

as “a man after God's own heart” (Acts 13:22), and he loved and valued the commands of God. Through David's life and psalms, he gave us good examples of what happens when we follow the Ten Commandments and bad examples of what happens when we don't.

Writer Bio

Dieuner Joseph

wrote the leader pages for this study. He holds dual master's degrees in divinity and theology from Princeton Theological Seminary as well as a D. Min. from Pittsburgh Theological Seminary. He serves as the associate pastor at Pleasant Grove Church in Cary, N.C. Dr. Joseph and his wife Colette are the proud parents of Lysandra and Uriah.

BEFORE YOU TEACH

Review the entire study

In this study, we will be taking a fresh look at the Ten Commandments. Take the time to review all the sessions to develop a broader understanding of how obedience to the Ten Commandments can lead to a Christ-centered life.

Put in a plug

Consider taking a few minutes to introduce learners to the new *YOU* Sunday School curriculum. Use pages 6, 7, and 163 to guide you. Another useful page to explore would be the “God’s Unfailing Promise” column on page 2. Invite them to use it to share Christ with a lost person.

LOOK BACK

Last week’s session focused on standing strong dressed in God’s armor during our spiritual battles. Remind learners to put on God’s armor so they can stand firm against the enemy’s attacks. **ASK:** “How did the lesson empower you to fight your spiritual battles?” Remind them that they already have the victory against the enemy in the name of Jesus.

TEACHING PLAN

INTRODUCTION

Before the session, download the *American Idol* Disney® Night Performances video from YouTube® or go to lifeway.com/YOU for the video. Begin the session by watching the first performance on the video. Explain that sometimes we show what we idolize or what has first place in our lives by our behavior. In the video, the audience demonstrated they idolized the singer.

PACK ITEM: Use **Pack Item 1: After God’s Own Heart** poster to identify the six sessions in this study.

TRANSITION: Read **The Point: “God is to have first place in every aspect of life”** to transition.

DIG INTO THE TEXT

God Alone Is God // Exodus 20:1-6

ASK: “When has a simple solution taken you by surprise?”

SUMMARIZE: Provide a summary of the paragraph that begins “Have you ever . . .” and the two subsequent paragraphs (p. 12).

RECAP: Read aloud this paragraph (pp. 12-13):

God calls us to devote ourselves to Him first because He alone is God. In Him we find true life, both in this world and in eternity. As King, He sits over all. He rules over all. He governs all. God’s rules are rooted in love, and He calls us to love Him. Jesus summed up what our devotion to God looks like: Love God and love others (Mark 12:29-31).

READ: Invite a learner to read aloud Exodus 20:1-6.

DISCUSS: Lead learners to discuss what it looks like to place God “first” in today’s culture. Explain that though we do not bow down to wooden idols or statues or declare our devotion through rituals or sacrifice, there are idols all around us. Refer to the first two paragraphs under the “God Alone Is God” heading (p. 12).

ASK: “Do you have an idol that’s taking your focus away from God? What is it?”

OBJECT LESSON: Use the “Object Lesson” on page 104 to help learners evaluate their priorities.

GUIDE: Use the commentary for Exodus 20:1-2 on page 104 to discuss why God gave the Israelites the command to give Him first place in their lives.

DIGGING DEEPER: Use “Digging Deeper” to highlight what makes the Ten Commandments special, and ask the question that follows (p. 13).

PACK ITEM: Distribute **Pack Item 2: The Ten Commandments** handout and review with learners to provide an overview of all the Commandments.

SAY: “Obedience to the first command means we will place God first in our lives.” Emphasize that the first commandment reflects an inward focus—related

THE POINT: GOD IS TO HAVE FIRST PLACE IN EVERY ASPECT OF LIFE.

to the heart. If we do not love God with our whole heart, we will not place Him first.

ASK: “How can following the commands of God help to build a loving relationship with Him?”

SAY: “God’s rightful place in our lives should not be upended by any person, place, thought, or thing.”

READ: Enlist a volunteer to read the paragraph that begins, “To put God first . . .” (p. 13). Then ask learners to share their reaction to the statement: “God is a jealous God.”

SAY: “God wants to have an exclusive relationship with us that is predicated upon our love for Him.” Remind learners that putting God first demonstrates our gratitude to Him for His many blessings.

God Alone Is Good // Psalm 16:1-4a

GUIDE: Direct learners to share a definition of “good,” then remind learners that all good comes from God because He alone is good.

READ: Enlist a volunteer to read Psalm 16:1-4a.

RECAP: Invite a volunteer to read the paragraph that begins “When David said . . .” (p. 13).

GUIDE: Use the commentary for Psalm 16:1-2 on page 105 to discuss David’s confession that reminds us we cannot experience what is good without God.

ASK: “What experiences from your life reflect the truth that God is good?”

SAY: “When things are not good, Satan plants doubt in our hearts about God’s goodness.”

READ: Invite two volunteers to read the two points on pages 13-14.

ASK: “When are you most tempted to put your trust in something besides the Lord?”

DISCUSS: Remind learners that when their experiences do not feel or seem good, they have to trust that God will use those experiences to create good in their lives.

RECAP: Read the following paragraph (p. 14):

Like Paul and Job, our experiences may not always feel or seem good. But we’re assured all things will be used for good when we love God

and put Him first (Rom. 8:28-29). This promise in Romans 8:28-29 is for those “who love God” and live “according to His purpose.” Translation: It’s for those who put God first.

God Alone Is the Way to Eternal Life // Psalm 16:9-11

READ: Invite a volunteer to read Psalm 16:9-11.

GUIDE: Use the commentary for verses 9-10 (p. 105) to highlight the fact that David rejoiced in his relationship with God, and praised the Lord for revealing the path of life to him. Without God, we cannot know where we’re going.

READ: Recruit a volunteer to read the paragraph that begins, “Most of us . . .” (p. 14).

ASK: “How important is it for a Christian to choose God’s way instead of following his or her way?”

SAY: “David teaches us that God shows us the path of life on earth through His guidance, teachings, and directions.”

READ: Enlist a volunteer to read the paragraph that begins “God’s way . . .” (p. 14) to discuss the “abundant joy” and “eternal pleasures” God gives to those who follow His way.

ASK: “What has God done recently that has made you glad and led you to rejoice?” Remind learners that God will lead them along the path of life that leads to eternity if they love Him and value His commands.

DID YOU KNOW? Use “Did You Know?” to highlight the early African-American attitude toward God, and ask the question that follows (p. 15).

READ: Enlist a learner to read the paragraph that begins, “Too many people . . .” (p. 15) to discuss the real purpose for the law.

SAY: “It is by grace through faith in Jesus Christ that we are saved and not by obeying the Ten Commandments.” Remind learners that Jesus is the way to true life on earth and in eternity.

CLOSING THE SESSION

Encourage learners to share some of their key takeaways from today's lesson. Remind them of the three main points of the lesson: "God Alone Is God;" "God Alone Is Good;" and "God Alone Is the Way to Eternal Life." Putting God first is the best remedy for living in a messy world. Remind them not to take the goodness of God for granted, and not to devise their own path. Instead, they should remain in Jesus and align themselves under Him. Challenge them to include the applications from "Live It" on page 15 in their plans this week.

PRAY: Conclude with a prayer of thanksgiving that God alone is the provider of true life both now and for eternity. May we always put Him first and seek Him before and above everything else.

OBJECT LESSON

Encourage learners to pull up their calendars on their phones and to spend a few minutes examining any commitments they have recorded there for the month.

ASK: "How many of you use your calendar to keep track of appointments and events? If you do, what do you think those appointments say about your priorities?"

ASK: "Do you ever feel your calendar is in control of you instead of you being in control of your calendar?"

SAY: "Many times our daily routines, schedules, and appointments drive what we do. However, God alone is God and deserves to be first in our lives."



COMMENTARY

EXODUS 20:1-6

Verse 1. God led the Israelites to Mount Sinai where He gave the Israelites a set of decrees, chiefly and most succinctly expressed in the Ten Commandments. These words express how all people of every age should approach God, life, and relationships.

Verse 2. Before God pronounced His covenant stipulations and moral expectations, He emphasized the personal relationship He had with the Israelites. He was the God who had made and knew the Israelites. He also reminded them that through the exodus from Egypt, God had set Himself apart from the false gods of other nations.

The words that follow were not conditional requirements for the establishment of a future relationship; instead, they were covenantal responsibilities emerging from the ongoing relationship the Israelites had with the Lord based upon God's past act of deliverance. As the Israelites obeyed these words of God, they could experience the continued blessing of a relationship with a loving, perfect Master who was ultimately concerned for their well-being.

Verse 3. God prohibited them from taking, worshiping, or loving any other gods besides Him. This first command reflects an inward focus—related to the heart. Without this "heart" commitment to God (Deut. 6:5; Matt. 6:33; 22:37), the Israelites would have neither the inclination nor the motivation to obey the other commandments.

Verses 4-5a. This second command builds on the first by discussing what is improper related to the worship of Yahweh. Idol refers to any image (carved, shaped, or molded) made to depict their invisible God.

Verses 5b-6. In elaborating on the second command, the Lord said He is a jealous [zealous] God. Those who reject God, as well as later generations, will face the ongoing consequences of their sin. Love and hate refer to a person's

loyalty (obedience) or disloyalty (disobedience) to God's covenant.

PSALM 16:1-4A

Verses 1-2. David knew his life was in God's hands. He asked God to protect him. The only trustworthy and consistent refuge is found in God. David recognized the Lord (Yahweh) as his Lord (Adonai). In calling God Yahweh, David recognized both God's self-existence and that God is the Creator and Sustainer of all that exists. David's use of Adonai reflects his submission to God and reverence for Him as sovereign over all creation. David also acknowledged he had nothing good besides the Lord. No matter what wonderful things David possessed, they did not compare with what he had in his relationship with the Lord. All David possessed came from the Lord as well.

Verse 3. After reflecting on the uniqueness of God, David thought about the holy people (literally, "the holy ones"). Since the Hebrew word *qadosh* ("holy") can refer to heavenly beings (Ps. 89:5-7) as well as humans (34:9), David clarified that he was referring to those who are in the land—most likely referring to the Israelites who were set apart by God. These people, though by no means perfect, heeded God's command to "be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy" (Lev. 19:2). David loved these faithful people, noting that all his delight was in them.

Verse 4a. Not everyone, however, is faithful to God. David called attention to those who take another god for themselves, which may be a reference to the people of pagan nations who worshiped false gods or to the people of Israel who had turned away from God. Rather than receiving the increasing blessings that come from being devoted to God, those people would experience only sorrows that multiply.

PSALM 16:9-11

Verses 9-10. Reflecting on the many blessings that flowed from his relationship with God, David proclaimed that his heart was glad and his whole being rejoiced. Both expressions emphasize the joy of his relationship with God.

David added "my body also rests securely" (v. 9), most likely referring to his resurrection after death. But David was not thinking only of himself with these words. Both the apostles Peter (Acts 2:25-28) and Paul (13:35) quoted from this psalm in reference to Jesus, the Messiah. God the Father did not abandon Jesus (God's faithful one) to Sheol (the grave). Nor did God allow Jesus to see decay—a reference to the natural process that happens after a body is buried. While David was "dead and buried" (Acts 2:29) and his body "decayed" (13:36), God raised Jesus to life again on the third day. Only because of Jesus' death and resurrection can we have a relationship with God and experience forgiveness of our sins and eternal life. While David prophesied about the Messiah, his words also expressed his own confidence that even death itself could not separate him (or any believer) from the Lord (see Rom. 8:31-39).

Verse 11. David continued praising God, who had revealed the path of life to him. David knew true life goes beyond what we experience in this life. Thus David expressed confidence that God would faithfully bring him to the life to come, where God's people will experience abundant joy and eternal pleasures as they dwell forever in His presence.

David's words are a reminder that this life is finite; the path or way to true life comes only through faith in Jesus Christ (John 14:6). Through faith in Jesus we can experience eternal life (3:16) and joy that is "complete" in Him (15:11).



Read the article "The Law as God's Gracious Gift" in the Fall 2020 issue of *Biblical Illustrator*. Previous *Biblical Illustrator* articles "The 10 Words and Ancient Near Eastern Laws" (Winter 2015-2016), "The Attraction of Idolatry" (Summer 2013), and "Before Me" (Fall 1996) relate to this lesson and can be purchased, along with other articles for this quarter, at www.lifeway.com/biblicalillustrator. Look for Bundles: *Bible Studies for Life*.

Sampler Note: These articles are specifically for leaders and are printed in the Leader Guide section.



Making guests feel welcome

TARRA TAYLOR

Have you ever shown up some place for the first time and no one acknowledged your presence? Perhaps someone said hello to you, but you still felt unaccepted because no one went the extra mile to make you feel a sense

of belonging? As teachers, we should always be cognizant of establishing community within the Sunday School class. In order to grow the body of Christ and our classes, it is imperative that we have a plan in place to

encourage newcomers to return. This plan should be inclusive of learners. Below you will find seven simple ways for you and your learners to make guests feel welcome.

1. Send a hand-written card.

Even in our technology-driven world, never underestimate the power of a hand-written note. After a guest attends your class, contact should be made within three to five days. The goal of this note is to extend your gratitude for his or her attendance as well as let the person know you are looking forward to seeing him again. This heartfelt message lets the reader know that he was noticed, making the guest feel valued.

2. Create an engaging activity.

Prior to teaching a lesson, create a handout with ten of the big ideas in the lesson. Have learners interview as many different people as possible within a predetermined amount of time to ascertain what others know about the various topics. This activity allows students to come away with knowledge about the day's lesson while building community within the classroom.

3. Give a small gift.

A small token of appreciation goes a long way, especially with someone new. Gift bags are simple and inexpensive. Be sure each gift bag includes your contact information as well as contact information for a learner in the class. This way, the guest can reach out to whomever he or she feels more comfortable. Each bag may also include a pen, highlighter, notepad, bookmark, Christian magazine, or any other item you think will make the guest feel more comfortable. A gift shows you thought about her.

4. Make a short phone call.

This one small act can be completed by the teacher or learners. Checking on someone to see how the guest is doing can mean the world to that person after a long, hard day of work or school. A phone call brightens one's day and lifts the spirit when done out of love and concern. Focus the call on how you may be of service to the person. If you have a massive number of guests to call, split up the task amongst learners. Picking up the phone doesn't cost us anything but a little time, yet the dividend is well worth it.

5. Have a purposeful exit plan.

After class is over, we quickly run to familiar faces. We talk and laugh with those closest to us with no thought of the person who knows absolutely no one in the group. So, be intentional about linking up with someone who has an unfamiliar face. Introduce yourself. Find out his or her interests. What does this person need? What brings him here? Does the person have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ? Let's ensure that our mingling is intentional by getting to know others.

6. Communicate using a first name.

There is nothing more pleasing to the ear than the sound of one's name. Having guests complete a contact card upon entering class can easily give you access to this information. These cards should be kept at your fingertips so that as you give examples and illustrations, you can simply insert the names of guests. You can also invite guests to enter the conversation by using their names. Because names are unique, the use of them welcomes the individual.

7. Assign a special role.

There is always something extra that needs to be done at group time. Someone may need to pass out papers, Bibles, or writing utensils. Someone may need to take up the collection or even give a report. No matter the task, in most cases, anyone can do it. Why not let that someone be a guest? Members are special but no more special than our guests, and they need to see and feel this. The appointment of a specific role provides a sense of belonging. As you can see, there are very simple things that can be done to let others know that we notice them. I challenge you to incorporate a few of these strategies into your Sunday School class. Not only will guests feel better, but you will too.

Tarra Taylor is an eighth-grade language arts teacher, pastor's wife, and discipleship group leader. She serves at The Rock Church in Southaven, Miss., and enjoys reading, writing, ice skating, and spending time with family.



RECLAIMING GROUP MEMBERS

BY KEN BRADY

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Reclaimed wood is popular these days—it mainly comes from timbers and decking rescued from old barns, warehouses, factories, and homes. Simply put, reclaimed wood is wood that has been rescued and repurposed, rather than scrapped and destroyed. Reclaimed wood can be cut up, reshaped, and used in new ways. Perhaps you have some reclaimed wood in your home? If you watch HGTV long enough, you'll see many "fixer upper" shows using reclaimed wood in their home renovation projects. When the reclamation is done right, the wood—once discarded—becomes the focal point of a home. When people see reclaimed wood put back in service, they say things like, "I can't believe that beautiful wood was almost lost forever!"

Reclaimed wood and reclaimed group members are the same. They are people who often were in Bible study groups but have slipped through the cracks of ministry and need to be reclaimed. Once active in their groups, these people became inactive for a variety of reasons. Perhaps a need went unmet. Maybe they felt underappreciated. Perhaps they were ignored. It could be that the group's other members tacitly communicated that those who left were not important to the Bible study group when weeks and months went by before someone finally noticed they were gone.

Reclaiming wood and reclaiming people have some commonalities.

Here are 3 things that reclaimed wood and reclaimed group members have in common:

1. Reclaimed wood doesn't reclaim itself.

And neither do “scrapped” group members. Once a person drops out of a Bible study, the group leader and his or her group members will need to go to work to reclaim former group members. I’ve never seen people who’ve dropped out of a group suddenly show up again and get plugged back into the life of the group. It takes a “reclaimer”—the leader or a group member—to initiate the process of reclamation. People may feel awkward for having dropped out. They may be embarrassed because of the reason they slipped away. Jesus told a parable about the importance of leaving ninety-nine sheep in order to reclaim the one lost sheep—and that’s a good reminder to us to go out and reclaim those lost group members—no matter why they wandered away.

2. The process can take time.

If you are committed to reclaiming group members, go in with your eyes wide open and accept the reality it will take some time to reclaim former group members. It would not be unusual for the process to take months—or longer. Be persistent, be prayerful, and be persuaded that you are doing the right thing. Stick with it. But be in it for the long haul. Wood that is reclaimed must be gathered, evaluated, and prepared—and this is not a quick process!

3. The end results are worth it!

I led a Bible teaching ministry at a growing church in Texas some years ago. On a particular Monday morning, I received a phone call from a well-intentioned group member who belonged to one of my Bible study groups. She was acting as the group’s “secretary,” and was in charge of marking people’s attendance each week. She’d asked the church office to drop several couples from the roll because of their inactivity. I asked her to reach out to them and make contact, explaining how difficult it is for people to re-engage once they quit attending a group. She was skeptical, but agreed to try. True story: the very next Sunday, two of the couples showed up for class, and thanked her and the group for not dropping them! Reclamation works, and the results of reconnecting people to the body of Christ are certainly worth any discomfort on our part. Go and reclaim a lost group member this week!

Ken Braddy is Director of Sunday School of LifeWay Christian Resources. He leads his church’s groups ministry, and blogs daily on Sunday School and small groups at kenbraddy.com.



THREE WAYS TO TAKE THE TEMPERATURE OF YOUR GROUP

BY MICHAEL KELLEY

My family will tell you that I'm a thermostat control freak. I have a day marked on my calendar when I have arbitrarily determined it's acceptable to flip on the air conditioning or the heater, depending on the season. And even when those systems come on, they're never set quite how my family would prefer.

They'd sure like the AC to flip on before it gets to be 76 degrees, and they'd probably enjoy the heater coming on before it gets to 65. Thing is, though, I like it just fine. I actually get quite a bit of satisfaction when I'm sweating in our living room, or when I'm bundled up at the kitchen table. It makes me feel tough; it makes me feel frugal. (Notice I said frugal. Not cheap. Can I get an amen from the dads out there?)

But even as I write this, I'm realizing that those under my care don't have the same sensibilities I do. I have created an environment in the home that I like, appreciate, and enjoy, but those within the environment I've created might not be having the same reaction. Sure, I can simply dismiss their feelings and keep the thermostat the way I like it, but as a leader in the home I would do well to "take the temperature" of my family to see how they're responding to the temperature of our home. It's a bit of a silly illustration, but the principle is strong, I believe. As a Bible study leader, you've set a certain temperature for your group. As godly leaders, we are not only responsible for setting the temperature; we are responsible for knowing how the temperature we have set is affecting those who have to live inside it.

When you take the temperature, you are ensuring you are not doing something detrimental to the people living in it. You are humbly acknowledging that the culture you have intentionally created is having its desired effect, which is moving people closer and closer to Jesus. And you are also acknowledging that you are not the ultimate authority, and that like any other human, you might have made a mistake and created an environment that is having unintended consequences.

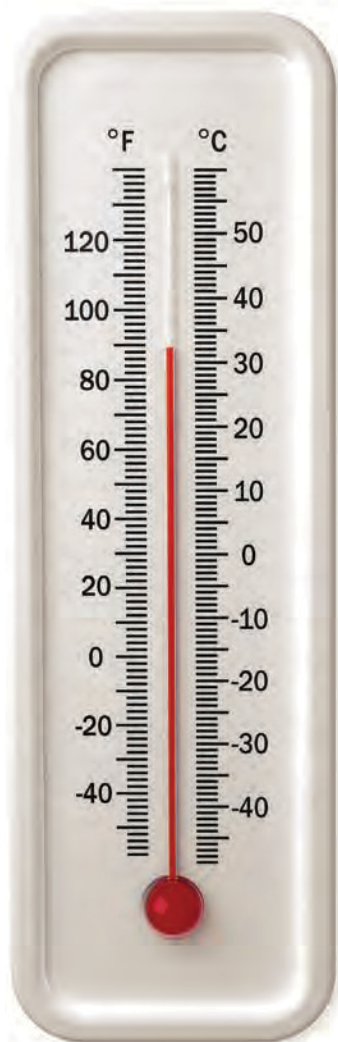
**So how can
you take the
temperature
inside the
environment
you lead?**

1. Listen.

If you really want to know the temperature of the environment you've created, you've got to make sure your ears are open. Of course, you must also be listening to the voice of the Holy Spirit. That's because not every voice you hear will be right or even helpful. So through the wisdom that only God will provide, learn whom and what to listen to and when is the right moment to take heed.

2. Observe.

It's possible that my sweet wife knows by now that I like the thermostat set at a certain temperature. And though she might not like it that way, she has decided to not press the



issue; instead, she has decided to wear a scarf and gloves to the dinner table.

Many times observation is an even more helpful method of taking the temperature because people always communicate even when they're not speaking. They communicate through their body language, their gestures, and even the indirect questions they ask. Watch, observe, take note—people will tell you what the temperature is even when they don't tell you what the temperature is.

3. Ask.

Of these three, this is the most obvious, but it's also the one we do the least. We can actually, verbally, ask the question. Why don't we do this more?

I would posit it's because we already know what the answer is, and we don't really want to hear it. That's because when we do, we have to react to what we suspect but are unwilling to admit to ourselves. This is a humbling thing; it means we may have to adjust the "perfect plan" we had in place, and it means we have to admit that we, too, make mistakes.

But in those moments, we would do well to ask ourselves whether we would rather live with an illusion or pursue a better future? We may actually find someone we know and trust will tell us the truth, and actually ask the question. Don't be afraid to take the temperature of the environment you are stewarding. Don't be so married to your good intentions that you fail to embrace reality and make a change when it's needed.

Michael Kelley lives in Nashville, Tenn., with his wife, Jana, and three children: Joshua (13), Andi (10), and Christian (8). He serves as Senior Vice-President of Church Ministries for LifeWay Christian Resources.

COMING NEXT QUARTER

STUDY 1 // WHEN EMOTIONS RISE

WALKING IN GRIEF //	PSALM 116:1-9,15-17
SHAKING OFF FEAR //	PSALM 91:1-6,9-16
EMBRACING JOY //	PSALM 95:1-3; LUKE 2:4-14
REDIRECTING ANGER //	PSALM 35:1-3,13-18
OVERCOMING WORRY //	PSALM 23:1-6
WEATHERING THE BLUES //	PSALM 31:1-8

SPECIAL FOCUS // CREATED FOR A PURPOSE

CREATED FOR A PURPOSE //	JEREMIAH 1:4-10
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STUDY 2 // SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES: **BECOMING MORE LIKE JESUS**

THE BENEFIT OF SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES //	1 TIMOTHY 4:1-10
KNOWING GOD //	PSALM 119:17-24
INTIMACY WITH GOD //	JOHN 17:1-5,21-26
MAINTAINING FOCUS ON GOD //	DANIEL 9:1-7,17-19
CONNECTING TO CHRIST'S BODY //	1 CORINTHIANS 12:12-24
JOINING GOD'S WORK //	JOHN 15:1-8

Footnotes

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Tony Evans is senior pastor of Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship and president of *The Urban Alternative*.

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OVERVIEW

+ + +

Commitment is a rather loose word in our culture, but we have no greater idea of what commitment means than when we look at the commitment Christ made for us. Our response to Christ calls for nothing less than a full, all-in commitment to Him. In this study, we will dig into what that commitment entails, and in the process, we will discover there is no greater place to be than "all in" for Christ.

Matt Carter is the pastor of preaching and vision at The Austin Stone Community Church in Austin, Texas.