

March-May Church-wide Small Group Sessions

The 10 Commandments

Session #7: Who Are You Kidding?

OVERVIEW

Sunday Message Series: The 10 Commandments: Set Free to Live Free, Love God, Love Others

Resource: *The Ten Commandments: Living God's Way* by Mary Evans (CWR 2011)

Homework: Participants are asked to read the Scripture passages ahead of time in order to allow the Holy Spirit to inspire the understanding of their meaning.

Items needed for this session: Handouts of Session #7.

A way to view the videos (laptop, screen, etc.)

LOVE: ENGAGE GOD AND OTHERS (10 minutes)

WELCOME

Prayer: Begin with a prayer asking the Holy Spirit to lead the session, to inspire the understanding of the Scripture read and to help you apply the session to your daily discipleship.

Say the week's memory verse:

Grow Group Series: 9 Sessions to this Grow Group cycle. Planned to finish by May 24.

ICE BREAKER.

Think back to the commercials we used in worship last fall. Share one that you remember (or tell about one you've seen recently). Why does it stick in your mind? Share what you think may be the marketing strategy or message in that commercial. In what way does it make you want something? If your group is watching the video, write your response in an email or text and share it with your group participants. As you read one another's responses, notice any particular marketing strategy that seems very effective amid your group members.

SERVE: ENGAGE THE WIDER COMMUNITY

SERVICE PROJECT:

Your group is encouraged to find a creative way to still do a service project of some sort!

GROW: ENGAGE GOD'S WORD (50 minutes)

INTRODUCTION

Read: Exodus 20:16-17

Read: Proverbs 19:5, 21:28, 25:18, 26:18-19

Volunteer reader:

Think of a time when everyone got presents but they were not all the same value. Remember a time that clearly your gift was far inferior to the gift others received. Reflect on your feelings of wanting what somebody else got and your inner compulsion to try to find some way of getting it. What constrains you to not act on these feelings? Call to mind times when you acted out on these kinds of feelings, and consider how now, after the fact, how you feel about what you did.

The aim of this study is the exploration of issues relating to both truth and coveting, to work out what the Bible says and how it might affect us in our everyday lives. The 9th Commandment is about bearing false witness, and the 10th Commandment is about coveting.

Issues relating to the nature of truth, trust, deceit and misrepresentation (false news?) are all relevant here. How does our understanding of the nature of God affect our view of these things?

Is it sometimes kinder to lie, for example, telling someone that they look good when it is obvious that their new outfit really does not suit them? Opinions may vary, but what would truth-telling look like in these situations?

Greed, jealousy and discontent lie at the heart of all coveting. It sometimes seemed as if our whole economic system depends on the encouragement of these things that the Bible consistently sees as sinful. What biblical resources do you draw on to assist you in resisting these pressures of society?

The biblical concept of being content is key here. Yet, does contentment stifle ambition, and if so, is this a good or a bad thing? The Bible condemns selfish ambition (Galatians 5:20, Philippians 2:3, James 3:16), but encourages striving for good (2 Corinthians 13:11, 1 Thessalonians 5:15, 1 Timothy 4:10). How do we achieve balance between these?

CONTEXT:

Video: “9. Do Not Bear False Witness” by Dennis Prager of Prager University

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dd0LpVe3Lkk> (5:43 minutes)

Discuss: Dennis Prager makes the startling claim that truth telling is more important than compassion or kindness. He uses examples of how slavery, the Jewish Holocaust, and communist totalitarianism were all based on lies. What are your thoughts about this?

Discuss: He also points out the temptation when advocating for good causes to lie in order to solicit a desired outcome (examples are homelessness and breast cancer cases). How does this impede our ability to keep our priorities straight and allocate resources?

OPENING OUR EYES

Read: Isaiah 29:19-21

Read: Deut. 5:20-21

Volunteer reader:

There are several instructions within the Old Testament legal sections that speak to the responsibility toward neighbors. These are usually assumed to be fellow Israelites living nearby, although Jesus' discussion with a legal expert in Luke 10:25-37 we see it applies to others. The last two commandments pick out two of these specific responsibilities. However, Leviticus 19:18 “love your neighbor as yourself”—also used by Jesus—shows that these responsibilities do indeed go much wider than the two examples given here.

A) Not Bearing False Witness

It may not always seem like it today, but all legal systems are dedicated to finding out the truth. Doing that is almost always dependent on the testimony of witnesses. Therefore giving false testimony may not only damage the individual concerned, it opens cracks in the whole system. It destroys not only truth but trust, and both of these are fundamental to the well-being of any society, and in particular, it's justice system. This is why giving false testimony is often known as “contempt of court” and is treated very seriously. The language of this commandment shows it certainly applies in the court case scenario, but the concepts of truth and trust involved go far beyond that. That

Yahweh can be trusted is affirmed constantly throughout Scripture: it lies at the heart of Israel's covenant relationship with Him. Truth, too, is a fundamental aspect of God's nature seen throughout the Bible. Anyone who claimed to follow God must be trustworthy and truthful in every aspect of life. The right to privacy has become a given in Western society and confidentiality is seen as a primary virtue. Other societies sometimes take it for granted that information about community members is public property and for them, the Western concept of privacy is incomprehensible. But in both instances it is absolutely vital that any information shared should be correct. Even outside the courts, false testimony is unacceptable.

B) Not Coveting

There are many pressures and expectations on us today. Peer pressure common often controlled by commercial interests, tells us that we must have this phone, wear these clothes, by this furniture or drink this drink. Sometimes this pressure is dressed up in seemingly good value judgments: we must send our children to this kind of school, give them this kind of holiday or that kind of present. It is very easy for this to turn into coveting what our neighbor has. Coveting has two aspects. On the one hand, craving for what others have is in itself problematic because it leads to discontent or jealousy. But, secondly, coveting also involves wishing that we, instead of they, owned certain things. And, as we see when Ahab desired Naboth's vineyard (1 Kings 21) or in Micah to 12:2, the step between coveting and taking is not a long one. But even if we don't have the power to take (Micah 2:1), coveting is still disrespecting not only our neighbor but also both God and ourselves: God, by suggesting that His provision is not adequate; and ourselves, by failing to recognize the value in who we are and what we have. In today's terms the commandment says: don't long that your neighbor's spouse could be yours. Don't get yourself in a state over how much richer she or he is, or how much bigger and better their property or business may be. And don't even think about wishing their car was really yours. In fact, accept them as they are for what they have and learn to be content with your own situation (cf. Philippians 4:11).

INTO THE BIBLE

Read: Micah 2:1-5

Read: Ephesians 4:14-21

Read: James 4:1-3

Discuss the following as time allows:

1. Leviticus 19:11 condemns all kinds of deceit, not just false testimony. Does this mean that lying is always wrong?
2. When the Bible uses the term gossip, it usually means passing on negative information about someone (Proverbs 26:20, 22; 2 Cor. 12:20). Is all talk about other people unacceptable, or only that which is either wrong or negative?
3. Discuss times when you have heard or passed on information that later turned out to be incorrect. Does this matter? How important is it to check what we have heard before we pass it on?
4. Is there a difference between false testimony that CAUSES someone to be wrongly convicted and false testimony that STOPS someone from being convicted? Does it make a difference whether the person who was stopped from being convicted was actually guilty or innocent?
5. Discuss how far advertising campaigns increase the temptation for us to covet it. Is it wrong to buy something just because someone we admire already has it?

6. Peer pressure is very strong. How can parents and the church equip children to deal with the phenomenon of “keeping up with the Joneses?” Is our natural desire for our children or grandchildren to have the best actually part of the phenomenon?

7. What more would you need to make you content with what you have?

8. “Passing thoughts can't be helped but allowing those thoughts to take root in your mind is your own responsibility.” Is this true, and does it have relevance to the commandment about coveting?

SEEING JESUS IN THE SCRIPTURES

Volunteer reader: Jesus said "I am ... the Truth ..." (John 14:6). John's Gospel constantly stresses truth and how important a concept it is for Jesus. He sends us the “Spirit of Truth” (John 16:13) and calls us to testify to the truth. His word is truth. Truth-telling seems to be a vital ingredient for those who are called to speak of "the truth." Matthew 8:20 and 19:21-23 tell us something of Jesus's attitude about possessions. If He called you to give up _____, would you still want to follow Him?

PERSONAL APPLICATION:

Volunteer reader: We are all tempted in different ways and by different things. Those who are not overly interested in other people are not tempted to talk about them, but is this necessarily a good thing? There are always gray areas but, in general, I think we all know when our talk is generous and good-hearted and when it is unkind or reveling in someone else's difficulties or failures. Sometimes when we've heard only one side of the story we can get a false impression. When we pass this on, or allow this impression to influence other people, it could be seen as giving false testimony. We all know the difference between a generous-hearted appreciation of what I have someone else has and a jealous or greedy desire to have it for ourselves. This week, take a few minutes each evening to look back over the day and consider whether, for you, if either false testimony or coveting has been a part of it. Talk to God about your conclusions.

Discuss: How will you apply what you learned in this lesson to your life this next week?

LOVE: ENGAGE GOD (5 minutes)

LOOKING AHEAD:

Invite someone new to come next week! I will invite:

Do we need to call/text/email and remind one another? I will remind:

Homework: Read Matt. 5:17-48, 19:16-25; Mark 12:28-34; Luke 10:25-37; Romans 7:1-6, 13:8-11.

CLOSING PRAYER:

Contentment has been a struggle for all Christians throughout history. Close by saying together this prayer of St. Ephrem the Syrian (4th century):

O Lord and Master of my life, take from me the spirit of laziness, meddling, lust for power, and complaining. Grant your servant instead a spirit of contentment, humility, patience, and love. Yes, O Lord and King, Open my eyes to see my own failures and to not judge my neighbor, for blessed are you for ever and ever. Amen.