



grow. pray. study.

August 25, 2019 *Reading the Ten Commandments through the Eyes of Jesus*

“Idols, Images and the Invisible God”

Scripture:

Do not make an idol for yourself—no form whatsoever—of anything in the sky above or on the earth below or in the waters under the earth. Do not bow down to them or worship them, because I, Yahweh your God, am a passionate [jealous] God. *Exodus 20:4-5*

The people saw that Moses was taking a long time to come down from the mountain. They gathered around Aaron and said to him, “Come on! Make us gods who can lead us. As for this man Moses who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we don’t have a clue what has happened to him.”... Then he made a metal image of a bull calf, and the people declared, “These are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!” When Aaron saw this, he built an altar in front of the calf. Then Aaron announced, “Tomorrow will be a festival to Yahweh!”... The Lord spoke to Moses: “Hurry up and go down! Your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, are ruining everything!” *Exodus 32:1, 4-5, 7*

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 make an idol for yourself.

Before the second commandment

MONDAY 8.26.19 Genesis 31:3, 14-19

This is a part of the story of Jacob, one of Israel’s founding patriarchs (cf. for example Jesus’ use of Exodus 3:15 in [Matthew 22:31-32](#)). At first it may be a bit startling to read that this Hebrew patriarch’s wife stole the “divine images” (what we’d call “idols”) from her father’s household as Jacob and his family moved away. Of course, Rachel (and Jacob) hadn’t heard the second commandment. Most people in that world valued tangible images of their multiple “gods,” which made the second commandment important in shaping Israel’s faith.

- Genesis called the items Rachel took *teraphim* in Hebrew. That word showed up at several points later in the Old Testament: “According to Ezekiel 21:21 and Zechariah 10:2, these images were consulted in order to learn what a person should do in particular situations. According to Judges 17:5 and 18:14-20, they were held in high regard by the people.” * What are some sources today you might consult about what to do instead of God? When can those sources become spiritually perilous?
- Laban said he’d learned about God’s blessing “by divination” (cf. [Genesis 30:7](#). Later, [Leviticus 19:26](#) and [Deuteronomy 18:10-12](#) forbade that practice). Then Rachel, Jacob’s favorite wife, stole her father’s household’s *teraphim* (“divine images”)! What does God’s continued presence to build a covenant relationship with these “idol believing” people tell you about what the old hymn called “the wideness in God’s mercy”? Is your understanding of God’s love wide enough?

Prayer: Lord God, so many of Jacob's family ways seem ancient, foreign, even offensive. Teach me how much I am like them beneath the outward trappings of culture and custom. Help me learn about you from their story. Amen.

* William D. Reayburn and Euan McG. Fry, *A Handbook on Genesis*. New York: United Bible Societies, 1997, p. 717.

Right after the second commandment

TUESDAY 8.27.19 Exodus 20:4-6, 32:1-8

After God gave the commandments in Exodus 20, he called Moses up Mount Sinai to meet (cf. [Exodus 24:12](#)). While Moses was gone, the Israelites relapsed into their Egyptian ways, demanding, "Make us [visible] gods who can lead us." (Unspoken, but clearly implied in their demand: "Ignore the second commandment"). Moses' brother Aaron gave in to their pleas, sculpted a golden bull, and identified the statue as "Yahweh" (verse 5).

- It is haunting to recall that just before this story, the Israelites said, "Everything that Yahweh has said we will do, and we will obey" (Exodus 24:7). Did you ever make a promise (to someone else, yourself or God) fully intending to keep it—and then crash into the reality that you'd forgotten or ignored your promise? How important does God's grace, God's willingness to give you a fresh start, become at those times?
- The second commandment might seem obsolete. In our developed world, who worships hand-carved stone or wood figures? What (besides money and fame—the most obvious, easy answers) do some people worship? "I am a passionate God" was the *Common English Bible's* translation of God's self-description in verse 5 (not the "jealous" God of many other translations). How can it deepen your link with God to see him, not as petty or possessive, but as passionately eager to start and sustain a loving relationship with you?

Prayer: Loving God, you call me to be faithful. I really want to be. But I thank you that I can trust your grace more than you can trust my faithfulness. Amen.

A God who carries us, not self-made "gods" we have to carry

WEDNESDAY 8.28.19 Isaiah 44:14-20, 46:3-7

The prophet posed a pointed question in Isaiah 44:19: "Should I bow down to a block of wood?" In chapter 46, he pictured people in Babylon carrying around the images of their gods to protect them from conquerors. "Here is a moment of crisis in Babylon's life, a moment when it needs a deity that can stop it collapsing, but instead of its gods carrying and protecting their people, the people are having to carry and protect their gods. What's the use of a God you have to carry, instead of the God carrying you, Yahweh asks." *

- We choose any real estate we own, any vehicles we drive and usually where we keep our savings, whether in large or small amounts. As we learned last week, those things should not claim God's place by claiming our ultimate attention and allegiance. But the fact that you choose those things is one thing that can make them tempting as "gods." We might ask, "Shall I bow down to my own wisdom, my own decisions?" How can you make wise, responsible choices without worshiping their results?
- God's message through the prophet is poignant. "I've carried you since the beginning of your life and I'll carry you until you're old, Yahweh promises.... These images correspond to no reality; the sad implication is that when you cry out to them in a crisis like the one coming to Babylon, you get no answer." ** What has helped you discern the value of a God who can "carry" you, rather than any god you have to carry on your own strength?

Prayer: Lord God, when I was little, I pushed my parents away, insisting “I can do it myself.” Help me learn and remember that in life’s ultimate issues I can’t do it myself. I need your strength and wisdom—and you offer them to me. Amen.

Did You Know? (from our friends at EarthCOR)

You can buy high quality, re-blended latex paint at the Johnson County, Kansas Household Hazardous Waste facility. If you have a project coming up, consider this second-hand option to reduce waste and support proper disposal of hazardous waste. Sale of the paint helps fund the [Johnson County Household Hazardous Waste Program](#). (Information provided by Kelly Shorten, member of the EarthCOR ministry. [Click here](#) for more information about EarthCOR.)

* John Goldingay, *Isaiah for Everyone*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015, p. 179.

** *Ibid.*

The true Lord who brought peace

THURSDAY 8.29.19 Luke 2:8-15

Why read the Christmas story in August while studying the second commandment? Because when Rome crowned an emperor, they gathered an audience of nobles, declared the new leader “Savior” and divine, had choirs praise the new ruler, and called the emperor the giver of peace, the “pax Romana.” Luke shaped his story (and heaven may have ordered the events—audience (shepherds), Savior, choir (angels), divinity on earth bringing God’s peace) to imply that the Roman emperor was just a flawed image of Jesus. * Jesus, not Caesar, was the true Savior, King and God.

- Was Jesus born on December 25? Probably not. “That shepherds were watching their flocks outside at night, rather than having them in pens, suggests that the season was warm. (The date of Dec. 25 was selected later, probably to fit a Roman festival.)” ** How can the story of the shepherds watching their flocks outdoors, probably on a warmer night, remind you that the good news of Jesus’ birth applies all year, not just on wintry December nights?
- We are used to shepherds in manger scenes, Christmas pageants and paintings. But in Jesus’ day, most priests shunned shepherds because, caring for flocks, they couldn’t observe “holiness” rituals. But God made them the first “audience” for Jesus. And after hearing the angel choir, the shepherds said, “Let’s go right now to Bethlehem and see what’s happened.” What moves you to “go right now” to learn more about God, especially as revealed in Jesus?

Prayer: Lord, by my world’s standards, it was odd that you’d send the good news first to shepherds. But you chose well—the shepherds listened and worshiped. I join the shepherds in worshiping you. Amen.

* Documented in *NIV, Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible*, eBook (Kindle Locations 232374-232379). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

** HarperCollins Christian Publishing. *NIV, Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible*, eBook (Kindle Locations 232417-232419). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

“The image of the invisible God”

FRIDAY 8.30.19 John 1:18, Colossians 1:14-20

Scholar William Barclay wrote of John 1:18: “When John said that no man has ever seen God, everyone in the ancient world would fully agree with him.... But John does not stop there; he goes on to make the startling and tremendous statement that Jesus has fully revealed to men what God is like. What has come to men is what J. H. Bernard calls ‘the exhibition to the world of God in Christ.’ Here again the keynote of John’s gospel sounds: ‘If you want to see what God is like, look at Jesus.’” * The letter to the Colossians said Jesus was “the image of the invisible God,” a living person being what a carved image could never be.

- The Greek word *monogenes*, translated as “the only Son” in John 1:18, expressed utter uniqueness. Jesus bridged the gap between God (creator) and humans (creatures), because Jesus, and only Jesus, was both. Scholar N. T. Wright observed that “John knows perfectly well he’s making language go beyond what’s normally possible.” ** When did you first begin to realize the power and the implications of Jesus’ uniqueness in human history?
- Jesus came to earth, not to change God, but to change us. Colossians 1 said, “Once you were alienated from God and you were enemies with him in your minds, which was shown by your evil actions. But now he has reconciled you by his physical body through death.” List all the actions and qualities of Jesus that Colossians 1 named. Which of them mean the most to your spiritual journey? In what ways has Jesus changed you, and drawn you closer to God?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you told Phillip, “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9). With so many distractions in my world, help me keep my heart’s gaze focused on you as God’s true image. Amen.

* William Barclay, *Daily Study Bible Series: The Gospel of John—Volume 1 Chapters 1–7 (Revised Edition)*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1975, pp. 73-74.

** N. T. Wright, *John for Everyone, Part 1: Chapters 1–10*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004, p. 5.

“We are ambassadors who represent Christ”

SATURDAY 8.31.19 2 Corinthians 4:16-18, 5:18-20

Most Roman, Greek and Canaanite religions offered gifts and sacrifices to try to reconcile their angry, displeased gods to them. But Paul said that was backward. We were the alienated ones. The good news, Paul said, was and remains that God is NOT angry or alienated from us, but came in Jesus to draw us back into the circle of heaven’s love. As we become a “new creation” in Christ, God shapes us into nothing less than “ambassadors who represent Christ.” That makes it our mission to be “the body of Christ” through whom God remains visibly at work inviting others to “be reconciled to God.”

- Gordon Jensen wrote a gospel song that says, “You’re the only Jesus some will ever see.” * So the crucial first question, of course, is are you reconciled with God? Since many GPS readers are likely to answer “yes,” the next question is, are you open for God to work through you to let people see Jesus in you, sharing the good news of freedom in Christ? What historical person seems to you to present the most vivid picture of God’s reconciling work in the world (e.g. John Wesley, Nelson Mandela, Mother Teresa)? In what ways did God work through that person or event to give the world a clearer picture of God? In what ways do you have the chance to embody some of the same godly qualities as that person?

Prayer: O God, what mystery and what love there is in the message that you were in Christ reconciling the world to yourself. Help me grow in my ability to become a channel through whom others can see you more clearly. Amen.

Family Activity: Before you gather as a family, invite each family member to choose one person, living or dead, whom they admire or consider to be a hero or a heroine. Suggest ideas such as athletes, singers, scientists, performers or teachers. Ask each person to bring a picture or an item that represents this person. After you have gathered, have each person share about why they admire their chosen person. Affirm the Christ-like qualities in each admired person and gently point out the not-so-Christ-like qualities in each. Next, bring out a Bible. Talk about the characteristics of God. Remind everyone that no matter who we admire in life, God always needs to be placed at the top of our list of those we admire and follow. Pray and ask God to help each person place God first always.

* [Click here](#) to hear Gordon Jensen sing "You're the Only Jesus."

<https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=you%27re+the+only+jesus+by+gordon+jensen&qvvt=you%27re+the+only+jesus+by+gordon+jensen&view=detail&mid=C675BDF6DFE28D151AE7C675BDF6DFE28D151AE7&FORM=VRDGAR>

Prayer Requests – cor.org/prayer *Prayers of peace and comfort for:*

To Lucinda Holmes and family following the death of Lee Holmes (Father), 6/14/2019

To Cindy Vickers and family following the death of Ron Roots (Father), 7/10/2019

To Natalie Bass and family following the death of Bev Caldwell (Grandmother), 8/2/2019

To Michelle Kelly and family following the death of Michael L Kelly (Father), 8/8/2019

To Pam Westhoff and family following the death of Lena Chrest (Mother), 8/8/2019

To Brooke Poindexter and family following the death of Linda J. Cannon (Mother), 8/13/2019

To Tiffany Moran and family following the death of Eva Sue Thomas (Mother), 8/18/2019

To Rod Hennig and family following the death of Ervin O. Hennig (Father), 8/18/2019

To Carolynne "Kelly" Garvin and family following the death of James (Jim) Edward Garvin (Son), 8/18/2019

To John Hamilton and family following the death of Gayann Hamilton (Wife), 8/19/2019