

*Use this format as a family, a couple, or with a small group.

Message Summary

While many people think of laws as “rules that keep me from happiness,” God’s commandments are just the opposite: they show us the activities and attitudes that lead to freedom. The Ten Commandments in particular put limits on behaviors that enslave, and they are a guide (a tutor, as the Apostle Paul called them) to bring us to Christ. God’s laws show us the healthy rhythms of life: work, rest and worship. To turn away from these is not only harmful; it is a rejection of God’s love, grace, protection and provision for us. In so doing, we inevitably turn toward (or worship—give “worth” to) other gods, analogous to the children of Israel making the Golden Calf. While it is true that many of the laws given by God to the infant nation were meant only for a limited time in that culture, they all show us God’s jealous love for his people. That nation—like the church today—is his chosen bride, and he is roused to anger when his lover leaves him for another, or when another threatens his beloved. God’s laws and his presence, symbolized by the Tabernacle, were meant to connect the people to him in a daily walk of obedience. God now “tabernacles” with us through his Spirit, and Jesus (Immanuel, “God with us”) demonstrates the lengths God will go to be among us. For our part, we show a loving response to his initiative by choosing to worship him and living holy lives of obedience. This obedience doesn’t earn God’s approval, but is rather the lifestyle of the approved ones—and demonstrates who has truly approved of him.

Opening Question

Describe a time when you entered a strict training regimen. What were some of the rules you had to follow, and why did you do that?

Discussion Questions

Describe a time when you entered a strict training regimen. What were some of the rules you had to follow, and why did you do that?

Discussion Questions

Note: All page numbers below are from *The Story*, 2008 edition. Additional group discussion questions for this chapter can be found on page 391-2.

1. Many people seem to have a natural aversion to rules, whether man-made or God-ordained. What do you think explains that dislike (and don’t just answer, “sin”!)? On the other hand, some people seem to like the structure and simplicity of well-laid-out rules, especially in the spiritual realm. What do you think explains that tendency? Which side of the continuum do you lean toward and why?
2. People often think of the Ten Commandments as “thou shalt not’s”. But each one has a positive intention and action associated with it. Go through each commandment (page 49 or Exodus 20:1-17) and state the positive action that fulfills each command. Why is it not enough merely to avoid what is wrong—but necessary to do what is right?
3. How does each one of the Ten Commandments show something of who God is by what it directs us to do (or not do)? Which aspect of God do you need to focus on as you head into this week?
4. G.K. Chesterton wrote, “If men will not be governed by the Ten Commandments, they shall be governed by the ten thousand commandments.” What do you think he meant? How have you seen that true in your life?
5. Most of us would not be tempted to melt down our possessions, like the Israelites did, into a god we would then worship (page 51 or Exodus 32:2-5). But how in fact do we let our possessions control us, like a god? How do you sometimes allow things you own to interfere with supreme affection for and obedience to God?
6. Note that Aaron constructed an altar in front of the calf idol (page 51 or Exodus 32:5) and spoke of having a festival to the Lord—as if to justify the idea that as long as we include the true God, we can have other gods as well. What might be a modern parallel to this kind of spiritual dishonesty? How can you protect yourself from such self-deception?
7. The text says God spoke to Moses “face to face, as one speaks to a friend” (page 53 or Exodus 33:11). Jesus once told his disciples that they were also his “friends” (John 15:15). What do you suppose it is about God that friendship is what he wants most (even though we keep sinning)? What stands in the way of you becoming a better friend to God?
8. In the human realm, jealousy is a flaw and gets in the way of a good relationship, yet God describes himself as “a jealous God” (page 55 or Exodus 34:14). Why is it a good thing for God to be jealous? What in this past week might have provoked God’s jealousy over you?

As a final question, you can ask group members who did the personal reflection assignment if there is anything from that material they would like to share or ask the group about. Close in prayer.