

SESSION 1

PREPARATION

Scripture text: Exodus 20:1-2

Key verse: Then God spoke all these words: I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. (Exodus 20:1-2)

Faith focus: The Ten Commandments help people understand the character of this saving God and how they should treat each other, so together they respect who God is.

Session goal: Help youth see that God gave people the Ten Commandments out of love and wants us to live in the most life-giving way.

GOOD LIFE UNDER GOD'S RULE



Materials and advance preparation needed:

- Driver and a vehicle for each small group. Copy of “Rules for the Road” bingo for each recorder (Focus, Option 1)
- Tent (Focus, Option 3)
- Paper and pencils
- Inexpensive key chains
- Small candies (M & M’s, Skittles, etc.) (Focus, Option 2)
- Copies of handout, “God’s Rules for Life”
- Bibles
- Blindfold or kerchief (Apply, Option 2)
- Copies of *Hymnal*, *A Worship Book* or *Sing and Rejoice*

EXPLORATION

Option 1: Enlist the aid of an adult driver for each vehicle. Divide into small groups of three or four and assign a recorder and a timer for each group. Give each team’s driver a route to drive, and each recorder a copy of “Rules for the Road Bingo” (don’t let the driver see you do this) and pile into the vehicles for a strictly timed five-minute drive. As the team observes their driver obeying a rule of the road, the recorder crosses out that square. After five minutes, return to your room and compare lists. Reward each member of the winning team with an inexpensive key chain.

FOCUS
(10 minutes)

Go on to Connect, Option 1.

Option 2: Greet each youth cheerfully as he or she enters the room. Say, *We are going to test some new group rules today. When I ask you a question, I will call on a person who blinks their left eye! A correct answer will be rewarded.* Ask the group to complete the words of the following well-known rules. Read the normal print, the answer is in bold italics. Reward with several small candies. After a couple of answers, add another task, (scratch your head, rub your elbow, or stomp your foot, and more). Soon the group will be required to do a goofy series of tasks in order to be recognized. Ask the group to suggest other everyday rules.

1. No shoes, no shirt, ***no service.***
2. Don't talk to ***strangers.***
3. Look both ways before ***crossing the street.***
4. Don't play with ***matches.***
5. Always say please and ***thank you.***
6. Just say ***no.***
7. Brush your teeth after ***every meal.***
8. Do unto others as you would have them ***do to you.***
9. If you don't have anything nice to say, don't ***say anything at all.***
10. Don't drink and ***drive.***
11. Stay in ***school.***
12. No running in ***the halls.***

(This activity adapted from an idea by Mike Knowles.)

Go on to Connect, Option 2.

Option 3: Bring a tent in its bag, or folded up, and invite two or three enterprising people to set it up. **Catch:** Do not supply poles for the tent. Let youth flounder for a bit. Encourage them to use their imagination for a way to set up the tent without poles. If they show signs of out-of-control frustration, or after four minutes, whichever comes first, provide poles and continue setting up the tent.

Go on to Connect, Option 3.

CONNECT (3 minutes)

Option 1: Invite youth to identify specific moments in the experience when disobeying a rule for the road could have resulted in serious consequences. For example, *If we had ignored the stop sign, we would have hit the car crossing in front of us.* Ask: *What then is the purpose of the rules for the road?* The answers, among other things, might include: "They keep us safe and help us to drive in the best possible way."

Option 2: Ask the following wondering questions, allowing time for quiet reflection and responses. *I wonder what would happen if everyone ignored these simple rules? I wonder what would happen if everyone followed these rules? I wonder if it is important that we have these rules?*

Option 3: Debrief about the frustration of trying to set up a proper tent without benefit of poles. Did youth come up with another way to set up the tent? If so, how well did it work? If you can fit, sit in the tent for the rest of the session.

Transition comment

Options 1 and 2: *All of life has rules. We can't avoid them. They help us know how to live, work, and play together. That was the purpose of the rules God gave Israel as a gift.*

Option 3: *At Mt. Sinai, God gave the people two very valuable gifts: the Law and a renewal of the Promise. The two go together: Promise without law is like a tent without poles. The whole point of promise is to give people a way of life that works. "Here," says God, "is the list of ten rules for a way of life that works."*

Introduce the story by saying, *At the beginning of their story, God's people the Israelites were slaves in Egypt. The Egyptians put them to work in the fields and making bricks for their building projects. They lived under the rules of slavery.*

Assign the following verses and with the youth, reconstruct the story line of how God freed the people of Israel. Draw a timeline on the board with the beginning labeled **slavery** and the end labeled **freedom**. Now add the following points as your youth define them.

Exodus 1:8-14	Slavery in Egypt
Exodus 3:4,7-8a	God calls Moses
Exodus 5:1-2	Let my people go! Pharaoh refuses
Exodus 7-12	The ten plagues
Exodus 12:50-51	Oh freedom! Almost
Exodus 14:21-29	Crossing the Red Sea
Exodus 14:30-31	Oh freedom! For sure

Say: *When they were freed, the people needed new rules that would help them live together. Because God was their Savior, God defined the rules and gave them the Ten Commandments.*

**HEAR AND
ENTER**
(12 minutes)

APPLY
(15 minutes)

Option 1: If someone says to you, “Don’t eat those cookies,” what other options do you have? Though you can’t eat cookies, you probably can come up with lots of other options, such as eating cake or sandwiches, running around the block, etc.

Give each youth the handout, “God’s Rules for Life” and invite them to rewrite the commandments in contemporary, youth-friendly language. Suggestions are in parenthesis. Also, if the commandment is a “Do not,” list at least three things they may do as alternatives. They may enjoy working together on this in groups of two or three. For example:

1. You shall have no other gods before me. (Put God first)
2. You shall not make for yourself an idol. (Worship only God)
3. You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God. (Praise God’s name)
4. Remember the Sabbath day, and keep it holy. (Set aside time to worship with others)
5. Honor your father and your mother. (Respect your parents)
6. You shall not murder. (Choose life)
7. You shall not commit adultery. (Keep your promises)
8. You shall not steal. (Respect other’s property)
9. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. (Tell the truth)
10. You shall not covet. (Be happy)

If you think you will have time, record a contemporary version of God’s Rules for Life on the board using your youth’s new phrases. Try to use at least one response from every person or group.

Option 2: Create a talk-through obstacle course. Another term for Ten Commandments is the ten words—the *decalogue*. The object of this activity is to use words only to guide a blindfolded person through the obstacles. This is an example of words providing guidance in dark places.

RESPOND
(3 minutes)

Option 1: If your group enjoys singing, try one of these as a closing song:

“You shall go out with joy” in *Hymnal: A Worship Book* #427

“I will sing unto the Lord” (song of Moses and Miriam) in *Sing and Rejoice* #43

Option 2: Close by crafting a prayer. You as leader begin with phrases such as *Thank you, God, for the rule about...* mentioning several from both the commandments and the youth lists. Invite responses such as... *we can't live well without resting (sabbath)*. Continue until you have at least four or five prayer sentences.

Consider sharing this litany project in larger worship settings.

REFLECT AND LOOK AHEAD

Did your youth begin to see the Ten Commandments as guides for life more than just a set of rules to restrict their lives? Did everyone in the class participate? Invite each youth to wear their favorite T-shirt with a logo to the next session. Bring extras for those who come without one.

DIGGING DEEPER

Rules. Sometimes it seems you can't live with them, but you know you can't live without them. Rules are all around us, from the games we play to the worlds we work in. Pre-adolescents usually accept the rules and structures around them. But around junior high age, they begin to challenge some of the rules and test defining the rules themselves. It's all part of developing a sense of personal identity.

The people of Israel were at just such a place when they found themselves on the other side of the Red Sea. Scholars have discovered that although the majority of the group may have descended from Abraham, many other peoples who may have been enslaved by the Egyptians had probably joined the Hebrews on their exodus. When they got to Mt. Sinai, their leader went up the mountain and the people found themselves caught up in a celebration of liberation. Moses the taskmaster was gone, the people were free, and it was time for a party.

Meanwhile Moses was up on the mountain receiving the "limits" from God. At Mt. Sinai, God gave the people two very valuable gifts: the Law and a renewal of the Promise. So how do they fit together? Do we now have to obey the Law in order to earn God's promise of life? God is not poised to snatch away the promise at the least infraction of the rules. If that were the case, God might never have bothered, since the

commandments were already being broken even as Moses trudged down Sinai weighted with the gift of words. The people were already dancing around an image of their own making, and they *still* got the gift of the Law, a structure for their journey with God.

Yes, we have the promise no matter what, and the Law helps us live towards that promise. Writes Presbyterian pastor Ben Dake: “Promise without law is like a tent without poles.... God knows that there are ways of life that work, and ways of life that do not work, and the whole point of promise is to give people a way of life that works. “Here,’ says God, ‘is the list of ten rules for a way of life that works.’”

We know them as the Ten Commandments and they defined the boundaries of proper behavior towards God and others. As Moses received them, most of them were being broken by the people celebrating at the base of Mt. Sinai. And the worst of it was that they forgot so quickly that God was the One who had brought them out of slavery in Egypt.

For this reason the first word of the commandments is a reminder to the people, “I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt.” By this statement God reminds the people that they have a relationship—a relationship they both entered into and which God guarantees. No matter what, God will be their God. All the commandments rest on this relationship. God’s saving act did not rest on their obedience because God saved them first. All they did was follow God and Moses into salvation. The commandments help the people understand who this saving God is and how they should treat each other so together they respect who God is. The gift of the “ten words” is not some obsolete set of arbitrary rules from a divine naysayer. They set us on the road to a life that works.

HANDOUTS

Rules of the Road Bingo

God’s Rules for Life

RULES of the ROAD

Free	Looks both ways before proceeding	Right turn signal	Free	Left turn signal
Stops at stop sign	Fastens seatbelt	Checks all seatbelts	Carries a driver's license	Free
Does not follow a vehicle too closely	Dims lights when another vehicle approaches	Free	Makes complete stop	Does not cross the center line
Free	Allows pedestrians right of way	Drives within distance of headlights	Stops at a red light	Free
Observes speed limit	Free	Parks only in legal area	Checks rearview mirror before changing lanes	Slows down at school crossing

God's Rules for Life:

- You shall have no other gods before me.

- You shall not make for yourself an idol.

- You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God.

- Remember the Sabbath day, and keep it holy.

- Honor your father and your mother.

- You shall not murder.

- You shall not commit adultery.

- You shall not steal.

- You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

- You shall not covet.
