

The 10 Commandments A Four Week Study

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Week 1:
An Introduction

The Ten Commandments

Welcome:

The wilderness is a special place for God and God's people. Abraham was called to be the Father of a great nation while living out a nomadic life in the wilderness. The Israelites spent many years in the wilderness, preparing for the Promised Land. John the Baptist called people into the wilderness, baptizing them with water. Jesus spent 40 days in the wilderness. At the end of that time, he was tempted by devil. The wilderness can bring two attributes to God's people.

First, community can grow closer together. The Israelites gained their identity through wilderness time. They transformed from slaves to a nation. Perhaps true national identity didn't happen until years later with David, but the beginnings were in the wilderness.

Second, the wilderness helps a person or community put aside that which is not important. Any sort of struggle has the ability to do that. When in crisis or in situations where we must winnow down our life, we get rid of the junk. We discover what is really important, and what was just something we kept a hold of just for the sake of keeping a hold of it. In cleaning out our souls we make room for other things in our lives. For the Israelites, in cleaning out their need for bondage, they made room for the Ten Commandments.

Where we can find the 10 Commandments:

Historically, it has been difficult to pinpoint the exact date the exodus from Egypt happened, much less when the 10 Commandments were written. If you were to only use the bible, the date would be around 1445 B.C.E. The problem is, nothing is written about the *Israelite* exodus from other Near-Eastern Cultures. Even Egypt, which one would naturally believe would be rich with the Israelites leaving the country, is mum. The Egyptians do have a mass exodus of a slave people called the *Hyksos*. Back in 1530 B.C.E. a group of lepers were forced out of Egypt and made to work in the rock quarries of Jerusalem. A leader named Osareph, also named Moses, staged a rebellion to riot in Egypt. They were eventually kicked out of Egypt and forced back home. Josephus, a Jewish historian, preserved the tale. There would be another story of the Hyksos being the former rulers of Egypt, but this Hellenistic story is probably just late speculation. The most plausible date we can use is around the thirteenth century B.C.E.. First, Rameses II reoccupied Hyksos territory and built Pi-Rameses. Biblically, the Israelites were ordered to build Pithom and Rameses. This is the biggest clue we have to the beginning of Exodus.

Biblically, the commandments we put on our Sunday School walls, and memorize, can be found Exodus 20:1-17. This, however, is not the only place the commandments come up. It can also be found, in it's entirety, in Deuteronomy 5:6-21. It is slightly different, but all ten are there. In Deuteronomy it is included right before Mose's last will and testament.

There are other places where the commandments are mentioned but not listed. One of those places happens Exodus 24:12. While the commandments are shared in chapter 20, the story of them being put on stone and brought before the people doesn't happen until four chapters later.

There are also places where the commandments appear in part, but not in whole. These happen among legal sentences. In Deuteronomy 27:15-26 the commandments are set up as curses, cursing anyone who does not follow them. "Cursed be anyone who dishonors father or mother.' All

the people shall say, 'Amen!'" (Deut. 27:16) Leviticus is another list of legal sentences with commandments slipped in. (Lev. 19:1-18)

There appears there were also times the commandments were recited like the Lord's Prayer or the Apostles Creed is during a worship. While Deuteronomy 27 has the commandments listed as curses, it also plays out like a leader/congregation call and response. The commands themselves are made to be memorized. As most humans have ten fingers, so there is a commandment for each finger.

Israelite law can be separated into two groups: case law and categorical law. Case law are the laws that arise from actual cases brought forward by members of the Israelite community. Categorical law were more broad principles for the community to follow. The 10 commandments fall into this second group. They were considered the most important categorical laws there were, holding all other laws up. If one were to fail, order in general would fail.

The Ten Commandments in Public- More of an issue than you probably think:

A hot button issue in the United States is the separation of church and state. In the United States, we have the Bill of Rights. One of those rights protects the people from the government declaring a national religion. At the writing of the Bill of Rights, there were issues with countries telling the people which faith to follow. Those who did not follow the dictated religion could face serious consequences. This would be like the fictitious country of Fakesberg choosing Illusionism as their official religion. Anyone who doesn't follow Illusionism could face jail time or death. One of the reasons people came to America is to have the freedom to practice their chosen religion. Now, Fakesburg is not real and there isn't a religion called Illusionism. It's meant to make a point. Freedom of church and states is a negative liberty of the government to allow its citizens to have a positive opportunity at freedom.

Understood or not, this has taken a two-fold track. On one side, there are those who fight for no public statements of religion. On the other side, there are those who fight for the right to publicly display their religious beliefs. The two symbols, usually at the center of this debate, are the nativity and the Ten Commandments. I am going to put the nativity debate aside for this study and focus on the commandments. Usually when I talk to Christians about the Ten Commandments they feel confident about displaying them in public. After all, as they put it, in front of a court house or behind a judge is more of a historical nod to an earlier judicial system than a religious symbol. Also, as they put it, more than Christians see the Ten Commandments as a religious symbol, so it's believed to be more inclusive than other religious symbols.

I personally want the Ten Commandments out in the open. I think there is something important about these "ten words"; something that has survived the test of time. I find issue with the belief the Ten Commandments we see in front of a court house isn't somehow specific religiously. In fact, the second you write them out and number them, you are being especially specific.

The most obvious specificity is the language. Whether the Commandments have been summed up to be as non-religious as possible, or the good ol' King James has been pulled out, any language will include or exclude a group of people. I tend to see the King James used in traditional Southern Baptist churches and summed up versions pretty much everywhere else. (I did see Hebrew in a synagogue once. Talk about specificity.)

The less obvious specificity, the one most average people don't even consider is the numbering. This might blow you away, not all followers of the Ten Commandments order the

commandments the same. Most public versions of the commandments in the United States are Protestant. Below you will see a chart showing how different religious groups order the commandments.

The Ten Commandments based on religious affiliation

	Most Jewish Tradition	Eastern Orthodox, Anglican, Most Protestant Churches	Roman Catholic and Lutheran Churches
First Commandment	Ex. 20:2 "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery."	Ex. 20:2-3 "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, you shall have no other gods before me."	Ex. 20:2-6 "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, you shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and fourth generation of those who reject me, but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments."
Second Commandment	Ex. 20:3-6 "[Y]ou shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is	Ex 20:4-6 "You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath,	Ex. 20:7 "You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God."

	<p>in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and fourth generation of those who reject me, but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.”</p>	<p>or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and fourth generation of those who reject me, but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.”</p>	
Third Commandment	<p>Ex. 20:7 “You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God.”</p>	<p>Ex. 20:7 “You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God.”</p>	<p>Ex. 20:8-11 “Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work- you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it.”</p>
Fourth Commandment	<p>Ex. 20:8-11 “Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do</p>	<p>Ex. 20:8-11 “Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do</p>	<p>Ex. 20:12 “Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that</p>

	all your work. But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work- you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it.“	all your work. But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work- you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it.“	the Lord your God is giving you.”
Fifth Commandment	Ex. 20:12 “Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.”	Ex. 20:12 “Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.”	Ex. 20:13 “You shall not murder.”
Sixth Commandment	Ex. 20:13 “You shall not murder.”	Ex. 20:13 “You shall not murder.”	Ex. 20:14 “You shall not commit adultery.”
Seventh Commandment	Ex. 20:14 “You shall not commit adultery.”	Ex. 20:14 “You shall not commit adultery.”	Ex. 20:15 “You shall not steal.”
Eighth Commandment	Ex. 20:15 “You shall not steal.”	Ex. 20:15 “You shall not steal.”	Ex. 20:16 “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.”
Ninth Commandment	Ex. 20:16 “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.”	Ex. 20:16 “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.”	Ex. 20:17a “You shall not covet your neighbor's house.”
Tenth Commandment	Ex. 20:17 “You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.”	Ex. 20:17 “You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.”	Ex. 20:17b “[Y]ou shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.”

The numbering of the commandments may surprise you. It's a complication many don't consider when deciding if the commandments should be displayed publically. Sometimes it's important the issues are not as simple as we make them out to be. I hope, over the next few weeks I can show the complexity in the commandments, and how I follow them. I'm not going to tell you what to believe. I am going to put out what many believe and let you figure it out for yourself. It's kinda the the the Christian Church (DOC) works. We educate, not mandate. In four weeks, I hope I share a good information that will educate.

For this study we will number the commandments like a Protestant. This isn't discounting, or suggesting the other ways of numbering is any more or less correct. It is saying, this study was written by a protestant, using books written by and large by Protestants. As with any study, it's important to be honest and upfront from the beginning.

Questions:

1. The Ten Commandments came during the time in the wilderness. For this week, try to mentally place yourself in a metaphorical wilderness. Make a personal list of things you need to let go of, to prepare your heart and mind for God.
2. What do you hope to gain from this study?
3. What is your experience of public religious displays? Is there a difference between displaying the 10 commandments verses another religious icon or symbol?

Week 2:
Commandments 1-4

The first commandment:

"I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, you shall have no other gods before me."

Before we delve into the meaning behind the commandments, the first commandment begins by setting up the overarching theme. "I am the Lord, your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery." There is no way we, as a people living in a digital age, in our specific culture, can truly understand what this phrase means. We were not specifically the Israelites being brought out of Egypt. The best we can do is understand it from our own context, looking at the biblical context. What have we been set free from in accepting God into our lives? What sort of wilderness did we walk to, in a need to escape our specific bondage? When I answer these questions for myself I see the beginnings of love. God does not tell the Israelites, "I am the Lord your God, who took over as master." With God, we are set free, not held captive in a new way. Therefore, these commandments should be seen as pillars of love, not bars to hold us back. We are brought out of the land of bondage, whatever form that bondage takes.

As a child I had a difficult time understanding the difference from the first commandment and the second commandment, "You shall not make an idol." To me, the second appeared the same as the first. It was when I was older and looked closer I could see how the first has nothing to do with idol worship. Let's take it apart and look at each piece closer:

"You shall have no other gods...": Any good monotheist (believing there is one and only one God) might feel compelled to ignore this line. This is a henotheistic statement. (Henotheistic meaning someone who believes in multiple gods, and believes one of those gods are supreme.) I say this because, if it were a monotheistic statement, why mention it all? There are no other gods, and therefore saying otherwise is pointless.

Henotheism:

Believing in many gods, but only believing one god is supreme.

Why would a monotheistic faith have a henotheistic commandment? Well, the Israelites, especially the ones right out of Egypt, probably were Henotheistic. Anyone who has studied, even an hour, about ancient Egypt, knows they were polytheistic. (Polytheists believe in multiple Gods.) These Israelites were a people who spent their entire lives living in this polytheistic world. The commandment isn't about whether or not *there is* more than one God, but a group of people *who believe* there is more than one god. Can you tell the difference? Over a thousand years later Paul would tease out the difference to the Corinthians. (1 Cor. 8)

The problem lies in eating sacrificial meat. In this Roman culture, people would sacrifice an animal to one of the pantheon of Roman gods. After this sacrifice, the people gathered would eat the meat for the god. This happens even today, within the Hindu tradition. In Paul's time, there were those who were monotheists, and believed in the one God of the bible. They would eat the meat, not because they believed in the god it was sacrificed to, but because meat was meat. This confused those who still had a henotheistic approach to faith. They saw these people eating sacrificial meat and believed this meant they could worship more than one god. Paul kindly tells the meat eaters, and I'm paraphrasing, "Look, I know there is nothing special about sacrificial meat. I know there is only one

God, the God of Abraham. It is wrong because these other people don't realize it's just meat. Stop eating the meat for their sake."

I completely believe, God works with what we have. All of us have knowledge, to varying degrees. In the minds of the post- slavery Israelites, they still believed there were multiple gods. Therefore, it was important to address their belief in the form of a commandment.

"...before me." Another way to translate this piece of verse 3 is "before my eyes." There is a strong possibility this is a commandment focused on worship of God. In my research I have seen some paraphrased commandments where number one was, "Keep God first." I can see where the English translation could be understood this way. This is where understanding the context is important. The one place the Israelites were specifically in God's eyes were at the altar; the temple. For our modern culture, I would translate the whole commandment to mean, "When in the temple, before the altar of God, only use the space to worship God."

We are commanded to go into God's house to worship God and only God. Maybe we don't worship Baal, Rah, or Zeus anymore, but we do spend six days of the week giving our worship to something other than God. Our worship can come in many forms. We can give our love and devotion to a pop star. We could worship a good cup of coffee. We can worship our money. This commandment tells us, don't bring any of that into the sanctuary. God doesn't want our distractions to sway our focus.

I have been to many American churches, which have contemporary worship. There is an overarching theme in most: "Come as you are." I'm moved by this sentiment. We will get to it later, but "come as you are," in a way, is following the fourth commandment. However, "Come as you are" becomes problematic when the sacred is put aside in the process. More often than not, I see a disregard for what we are putting before God's eyes. Tons of items are brought into worship that shouldn't be. I'm guilty too. Coffee, smart phones and game systems are just some of the things we worship 6 days out of the week and bring with us on the seventh day.

The solution is to find the tension between "come as you are," and keeping the worship area sacred.

The Second Commandment:

"You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and fourth generation of those who reject me, but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments."

I mentioned, in the first commandment, the many things one could worship. Those are not the things meant for *this* commandment. It's not about the worship of money or beauty. That belongs to the first commandment. This commandment is dealing with making an image of a god, or even *the* God, and worshiping it. Why? This commandment only gives us half the answer. In relation to making images of other gods it says, "[F]or I the Lord your God am a jealous God." (I'm not suggesting you should feel satisfied with the explanation; just understand it was the explanation given.) This leaves half the question open: Why should we not make physical interpretations of God?

Four possible answers, and I believe each of these answers are true in their own way:

- 1. No one is supposed to look on the face of God, so it would be bad to create an image to look upon.** If you remember there was only one who was given permission to look indirectly at God. Moses. Even Jacob, in wrestling with God, didn't get to see the divine face. God ended the fight before dawn to save Jacob from the sacred gaze. If we were to capture the essence of God in an image would we even be able to look at it? I don't believe so.
- 2. We couldn't possibly come close to capturing the true image of God, so it would be irreverent to try.** This is the one I'm the least attached to. God is our divine parent. When I think of the images my son or daughter has drawn of me, I don't think of irreverence. I'm always touched. What kind of parent would look at the attempt to draw them and be angry?
- 3. Creating an idol could confuse the worshiper. They could begin to worship the idol instead of God.** The focus of worship should be God. An idol could confuse things. Imagine you are meeting in a place of worship. You have an idol of God, a physical statue of the divine. Let's say something happened to the place of worship. Perhaps it was a natural disaster, like a flood or lightning. Perhaps it was human-made, like a fire or graffiti. In the destruction of this place of worship, the idol is destroyed. We are uncertain how the Ancient Near East viewed and treated idols. There were some who treated the likeness like there was an actual being inside, going as far as to actually wash and feed it. Some see idols as something where a god could interact with the worshiper. Either way, if an idol was destroyed, it might create a distance between God and the worshipers. God is everywhere, not only a statue of clay.
- 4. Sometimes less is more.** A popular children's program, sweeping across mainline Protestant churches in the United States, is Godly Play. In the Christian Church (DOC) we use a program that was created from Godly Play: Children's Worship and Wonder. In the program, the stories are acted out with wooden block figures. These figures are just cut into the shape of Moses, Abraham, Jesus, and others. There are no faces. There is no specific skin color, aside from the

natural wood grain. The reason is two-fold. First, the scripture doesn't say what these biblical characters looked like, so Godly Play doesn't say either. Second, the minute you fill in the blanks you are limiting the story.

It's a trick of storytelling I learned in my college storytelling class. Let me paraphrase the example given to me: "If you are telling a fairytale and tell the children the princess was beautiful, leave it at that. Your understanding of beauty is different than their understanding of beauty. Every child in front of you is beautiful. Explaining the princess's beauty might exclude one of those beautiful children in front of you.

My sister was faced with an opposite scenario. Veggie Tales is a CGI show, popular among some Christian circles, about talking vegetables. (If you have no idea what I'm talking about, you might just want to go with it. It's a difficult show to explain to a newbie.) When it was first released there was a song titled: ["I Can Be Your Friend."](#) It's a catchy little ditty. It goes like this:

Have you ever seen a boy with funny clothes?
A girl with braces on her teeth
Or freckles on her nose?
Some kids call them "odd balls"
Some kids call them "weird"
Is it my imagination, or does Aunt Ruth have a beard?
God makes lots of people in all colors, shapes and sizes
He loves them very much and what we need to realize is
That calling people names because their different is wrong
Instead we need to look on them in love
And sing this song

This song began by stating what were considered negative attributes. It was supposed to help kids who feel left out, feel loved. One problem. My sister, at the time, had both freckles and braces. While she knew braces were not the height of fashion, she never saw freckles as something bad. This song hurt her feelings. So, by labeling something, in this case 'excluded,' it actually 'excluded' someone.

By not giving God a face we are not limiting who and what God is. Each of us is created in the image of God. Creating an icon would only exclude more, than it would include. That is why I am most married to this reason for not having icons.

The Third Commandment:

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

"The name of the Lord your God." Before we understand how we can make wrongful use God's name, first I want to delve into names. God's name, after all, is not a simplistic answer. Jacob physically fought God, and asked for a name. God's response, "Why do you ask for my name?" (Gen 32:29b) It feels like the scene from Monty Python and the Holy Grail, where Arthur wants to cross the bridge. He must first answer three questions correctly or die trying. The bridge keeper asks at the end of the triad, "What... is the air-speed velocity of an unladen swallow?" Arthur answers, "What do you mean? An African or European swallow?" The follow-up question was for clarification. I think God's follow up question to Jacob was for the same reason. How Jacob planned to use the name, was important to whether God was going to give it.

Years later, Moses would meet God at a burning bush. Moses would pose the question himself, "If I now come to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' they are going to ask me, 'What's this God's name?' What am I supposed to say to them?" (Ex 3:13) Oh, snap! Moses begins by answering the question posed to Jacob. Basically to reword Moses' question, "I'm asking because your people might ask me to know that I am the real deal. What is your name?" Moses is the messenger. What I am about to say will be way out of context, but the purpose will be the same. In Europe, when one Lord wanted to give another Lord news, they would send a messenger. The other Lord would know the message was authentic because it would be sealed with a special ring or crest. In the case of the burning bush, Moses was seeking a name to act as a crest to the Israelites. God's answer to Moses was two part. The first part is for Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." (Ex 3:14) The second answer is the crest, the proof, "The Lord, the God of your fathers- the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob." (Ex. 3:15) These are the places God expresses title prior to the 10 commandments. It's rather ambiguous.

What we have chosen to call God is less ambiguous. The most important name for God is written 6,828 times. It is not to be said out loud, and is four letters. YHWH. Whenever this word is written "Adonai" should be said instead, which is the Hebrew word for "Lord." To help the reader remember the correct word, the vowels for "Adonai" are placed within the four letters of YHWH. If the vowels and consonants are said together it creates a new word, "Jehovah." The use of Jehovah arose from a misunderstanding of the Hebrew, back in the middle ages.

There is also the God names that start with "el." "El," is the Hebrew word for divine. The most used "el" name is Elohim. There is also El Shaddai, El Elyon, El Olam, El Berith, along with others.

I mention all of this to raise a point about a modern interpretation of the third commandment. There are numerous names for God in not only Hebrew but in multiple languages and cultures. God's name is a beautiful statement of connection and wonder. Yet, we have turned this commandment into a prohibition against using the Lord's name like a curse word. There is something deeper to this commandment than throwing out a foul word. This commandment is rooted in the legal world.

When a contract was established in the Ancient Near East, the name of God was used to seal it. It added a level of seriousness to the deal. Our contracts today are made with lawyers and very carefully worded phrases. Contracts, back then were made by word of mouth, with maybe some people present. At the end, God's name would be evoked to seal it. This sort of contract exists today, in its own way, with Christian marriage. A contract is made between two people and God that they will

be bound in holy matrimony.

Therefore, promising God you will uphold your end of a contract and not doing it is making wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God. I have a sneaky suspicion Jesus was recalling this commandment when he said, ["Let your 'yes' mean 'yes' and your 'no' mean 'no.'"](#) I wrote about this in a previous meditation.

The Fourth Commandment:

"Remember the Sabbath day, and keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work- you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and consecrated it."

From 7th-12th grade I went to St. Simon's Island to participate in a regional youth assembly. Every year there was this huge billboard off of the highway which read: "Saturday is the Lord's day. Sunday is the sign of the devil." We would always laugh as we passed it and would always read it out loud, saying the last part in our best fake scary voice we could muster. It was similar to an episode of Parks and Recreation where Ben needs to make a campaign video for Leslie Knopp and [they practice saying the competitor's name](#) in preparation for it. I'm sure when the billboard was put up, no one was thinking a bunch of kids from a church would be saying, "Sign of the devil" over and over again whenever they saw it. I am also fairly confident that would horrify them. While I would eventually worship on Saturdays, (There was a contemporary worship at the church I was attending.) I never really considered my time with God to be dictated by a Western Calendar.

I would spend over a decade trying to understand the fourth commandment and what it meant to follow it. My first choice was a strict prohibition on calendars that were not made by me. Why? Because I would put Sunday as the seventh day. I was seriously zealous over it. I would redo calendars for myself. My group calendars (from my youth ministry days) were all Monday to Sunday. Perhaps I struggled with honoring my Mother and Father, but I was going to worship on the Sabbath!

Then my theology was put to the test. It was my birthday, and just for fun, I wanted to know what day I was born on. Come to find out, Friday. Well, if I was born on a Friday, wouldn't my seventh day really be Thursday? My faith was put the test. What was I going to do? Disciples of Christ churches are never open on Thursday, some not even Maundy Thursday. I had to go back to a traditional calendar, and was horrified when I realized Jesus didn't rise on the seventh day, but the first. Even Christ, in death, rested.

Before I went any further, I knew what I wasn't going to do. I wasn't going to become Seventh Day Adventist and I wasn't going to become a Messianic Jew. What's a gal to do? I shelved by zealotry and moved on with my life, trusting in Christ's redeeming love.

It would only be with a seminary education under my belt would I be able to return to this commandment with a clear heart and mind.

- 1. Unlike many of the other commandments, this commandment is directed in the positive.** Re-read the first three commandments and you will see what I mean. Don't have other gods before God. Don't make false idols. Don't make wrongful use of God's name. Then we have this commandment. Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy. In my younger years, I looked at Sabbath as a prohibition. I couldn't worship on day A B or C. I couldn't work on day D. Instead, I should have seen it as a gift. Because God created the heavens and the earth, because I was

created by God, I should remember that gift and keep that remembrance holy. I did more to break the commandment when I tried to follow it with a negative mindset, instead of the positive.

2. **This commandment includes everyone.** I have seen the damage exclusion can do to a church and those who are excluded. Maybe we'll remember the Sabbath and keep it holy, but that homeless person who smells and might have lice, they can stay outside. Maybe we'll remember the Sabbath and keep it holy, but if your sexual orientation is openly not what we agree with than you should just stay at home. Maybe we'll remember the Sabbath and keep it holy, but if you are an unwed mother, you should just stick to taking care of your kid. God created the earth for everyone including, but not limited to, those mentioned above. We should be struck to our core when we read the words, "alien resident in your town." This one inclusion speaks volumes of God's Sabbath. During the time the commandments were written, the 'alien' would be someone coming with their own gods and rituals. They might even be enemies to the Israelite people. Friends. Family. Strangers. Those who wouldn't even believe the commandments, and hold them sacred. All are included.

What I take from this commandment today is not some scary billboard on the side of the road. Today I see a commandment of celebration and inclusion. The point isn't about whether I set aside Saturday, Sunday or even Thursday to remember God's awesome act of creation, it's the fact that I do it.

[Jesus explains this commandment further, as he healed on the Sabbath.](#)

Questions:

1. A golden calf was made in the bible, breaking the second commandment before it was even read to the people. Today, Golden Calf is a term used to explain the items in a church congregants cannot let go to. Perhaps it's a memorial. Perhaps it's a piano given by a family member three generations removed. Using my definition of the first and second commandment, which commandment might be broken with modern golden calves?
2. How do you suggest we come as we are and keep the worship area sacred before God's eyes?
3. How do you remember the Sabbath and keep it holy?

Week 3:
Commandments 5-7

The Fifth Commandment:

"Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you."

What I am about to share is a [true story](#). There was a husband and wife in Paulding County, Georgia. They had a son, who they removed from school after 8th grade. For four years they kept this boy locked in the house, and barely fed him. When he turned 18 the father gave him \$200, put him on a bus, and told him not to come home. Luckily for this boy, he was found and he was given justice. His siblings were taken out of the house, and the couple put in jail. Serious question: How does this boy follow the fifth commandment?

It's really easy to talk about honor to parents who did their parental duty. It's a much more serious subject, this being a commandment, to honor someone who didn't care for the children they should have called their own. It's also cruel to ask the abused to then care for the abuser. So, what do we do? In some ways, we need to take a wisdom approach and realize there are no good answers. We should let the question sit in our gut like a rock. Parental abuse is nothing new. There have been people in all times who have abused children. We shouldn't assume the Israelites were somehow more or less righteous.

With the stone firmly planted in our gut, let's discover some of the reasons for this commandment:

This is about elder children and their attitudes towards their even older parents: Medicare and Social Security was put into place as a way to help the aging citizens of the United States. It was a safeguard for those who could no longer go out and work. Beyond Social Security, there are ways an aging parent could be cared for and the child would never have to lift a finger to do it. Some of us work really hard to save up a nest egg for a time when we will no longer be able to work. This would not have been the case for Ancient Near Eastern parents. It just wasn't possible to save in a retirement sort of way. Once you were too old to tend the fields, you were too old to gather your food, and you didn't have a way to care for your house and self anymore. This commandment is partly for the adult children of the aging parent. It was their responsibility to care for their parents. (woman who cared for her abusive father.)

This commandment is about continuing the story, and the ones who know the story are the parents: Today we put much of our trust of history in our public education system. A good school will transmit the local, national and global history appropriately. After all, anyone who doesn't know their history is doomed to repeat it. In the Ancient Near East, history and tradition were transmitted by the family. There was a time when the Hebrew Bible was a collection of verbal stories. Those stories were relayed from one tribe to another. The Israelites were a collection of 12ish tribes, and the 12ish tribes were each their own family. (The twelve tribes were formed from Israel's, or initially Jacob's, twelve sons. Technically there are more than twelve tribes, but that is for another bible study.) This makes the commandment a two way street. It is the child's responsibility to honor his or her father and mother to learn the tradition and story of his or her people. It was the responsibility of the parents to transmit the history and tradition to the children.

There is a Jewish Proverb: The parents have eaten sour grapes and set their children's teeth on

edge. You can begin see how this proverb relates to this commandment. Parents actions, or lack of actions, play negatively against the children. Not transmitting the story of God would be the parents eating sour grapes. The children would be eating the fruit of that choice, and their teeth would be set on edge.

This proverb would become one of the focuses of the Israelites in Babylonian exile. [Jeremiah specifically mentioned it](#) in relation to how the exiled felt about it.

The Sixth Commandment:

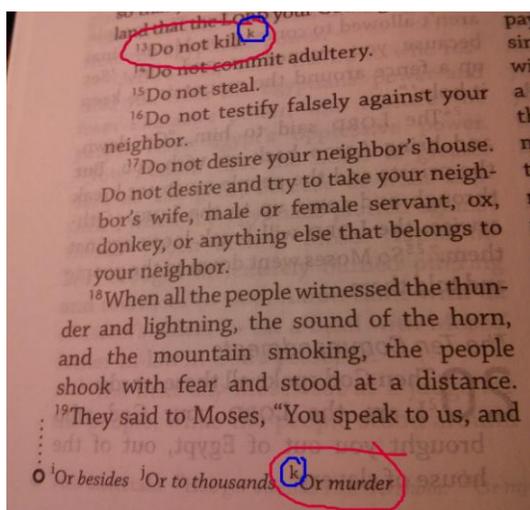
"You shall not murder."

I can remember one of my favorite seminary professors. He had this perfect combination of dry humor, concern for his students, and guidance through teaching. He was chatting after class about our writing styles. To one student he said, "You need to learn to edit. If you want to write in journals you need to learn how to say everything you need to say with fewer words." I cut in, "What about me?" He gave a half smirk and responded, "You are the exact opposite. I think you know what you want to say and understand it perfectly in your head, but you need to write more." He wasn't the only professor to point this discrepancy out to me. It's been years since that conversation, and I still have the same problem. My solution has been to write everything out, leave it alone for a day or two and go back and fill in the gaps. In some cases, I write enough where I can begin to edit words out again. Other times, I have to leave it alone again and return after a day or two. No matter how you cut it, I get brevity. I struggle beyond the condensed message.

The sixth through eighth commandments are condensed. Each is only two words long in Hebrew. I mean, Moses was up on that mountain for a long time. Why give a paragraph to the fourth commandment, but only two words to the sixth? It was not like he was lacking time with the divine to flesh out this commandment. This might be the time you might be thinking, "Why do you want to add more to it? I get this! You shall not murder. It sounds pretty simple to me."

In some cases brevity is great. When it comes to signs, simple is often better. "Stop." "Wet Paint." "No Loitering." Very rarely are these signs misunderstood. This commandment, "Don't murder," is different. There are a few pieces to the story we must understand.

You may not know this, but biblical scholars have struggled with the Hebrew word for 'murder' in this scripture. There is always an issue when dealing with secondary languages and old languages. Language changes over time. Translation is an art. When it comes to bible translation, a team is put together to discuss which words to use, and which words to put in the foot notes. Here is an actual picture of Exodus 20 from the CEB bible:



The translation team is always comprised of very intelligent and educated translators. When they get together they decide what the correct word to use for a translation. If there is disagreement, where more than one word could be used, the team votes on what they believe are the most correct word. The majority opinion is put in the scripture. The minority is put in the footnotes. You see in this CEB translation, this specific team felt “kill” was the better translation, but “murder” could also be a possible choice. That is why it is included at the bottom of the page. I have been using the NRSV in this study. The NRSV team chose “murder” instead of “kill.” If you looked at a NRSV bible, you would find “Or *kill*” at the bottom of the page. There is not a consensus on this issue, and it goes deeper than “kill” verses “murder.”

Is it “kill” or “murder”? There is a difference between killing and murdering. If there wasn't, it wouldn't be a big deal whether the translators chose to use one over the other. To kill is to end the life of something or someone. We kill things all the time. The easiest example is food. We kill plants and animals so we have something to eat every day. It is impossible to live without killing something. That's just how it is.

Murder is wrongfully killing someone or something. This is a much more subjective than you might think. There are those who believe any termination of life is considered murder. Americans can have family splitting debates over abortion, the death penalty, just war, any war, and the list goes on. At the heart of all these issues is what murder is and what it is not? Kinda makes you wish this commandment was a little longer than two Hebrew words, doesn't it? I personally believe murder is a better word than kill. While we might argue over what that means, there is more at stake than how we define it in our modern context.

Is it the old definition or the new one? We can all make our own lists of words that changed meanings as we grew older. My favorite example comes from *Back to the Future*. Marty, from 1985, is sent to year 1955 in Doc's time machine. Marty keeps using the word “heavy” as a statement of the seriousness of the situation. Doc doesn't understand his use of the word. He wonders if the gravitational pull on the Earth is greater in the future. [Literally, everything is heavier](#). Same word; two definitions.

While we have been discussing the newer meaning of the Hebrew word, there is an older meaning too. The older meaning of the Hebrew word we define as murder or kill used to be connected with a specific type of killing. In this case it had to do with blood feuds. This would specifically deal with revenge killing between families or tribes. This older definition would be in proper context considering the commandments were initially written for 12 tribes which each had their own family dynamics.

No matter how we define the Hebrew word, there is a greater meaning to this commandment: Life is sacred because God created it. We should honor and love all life because it is a gift of God.

The Seventh Commandment:

"You shall not commit adultery."

Bones is a television series about a heart felt FBI agent, Seeley Booth, and a head centered bone analyst, Temperance Brennan. Every episode, bones are discovered, and with the help of a team, Brennan and Booth discover what happened to the person. Always when this is happening, a personal story line is also going on. The bug and slime guy is in love with the the gal who digitally puts a face on the victim. The boss tries to balance controlling the team and giving them freedom to discover. Brennan and Booth work through the purpose of relationship. In season 4 episode 3, they have a brief discussion on infidelity:

(Discussing their victim: A man who made money exposing infidelity on while on camera)

Brennan: He shouldn't have been rewarded. He was perpetuating a primitive and prurient morality by parading victims for the purpose of entertainment.

Booth: Well, you know what, you cheat on your spouse you get what's coming to you.

Brennan: Anthropologically, 83% of societies are polygamist.

Booth: Now you sound French. Look, being faithful is what separates us from, you know, chimps.

Brennan: Actually it's a gene called HAR1F

Booth: We are talking about the Ten Commandments here, Bones. Thou shalt not commit adultery. One down from your personal favorite: Thou shalt not kill.

Booth, in a mere sentence, sums up this commandment to faithfulness in the form of monogamy. I would say Booth correctly identified how we define the commandment today. At the same time, he incorrectly defined it for how it was understood when it was written.

While this commandment is also only two words long in Hebrew, its meaning is well defined in other laws in the bible. Adultery is when a man, married or not, has sex with a woman who was married. This offense is punishable by death. This commandment is meant to protect the man's property. In this case, the property in question is his wife. This means, the seventh commandment has little to do with the sanctity of marriage, and more to do with protecting property rights.

In my mind, that makes this the most uncomfortable commandment of them all. The bible has places like that. They are places where the culture is just too strong. Women were property of their father or their husband. Marriage wasn't the joining of two people who loved one another. Marriage was a father selling his daughter to man.

If you have stuck around this far, it means you are willing, at least a little bit, to put some trust in me. Push a little more trust my way. When I was ordained I saw a chasm between those who were educated in the seminary, and the congregant in the church. It startled me to realize most seminary education stays in the seminary. I believe, a minister is called to a church and fear begins to brew. Job security is a powerful motivator. Telling the truth could be at the risk of being fired. It has led many a pastor to withhold certain statements from Sunday sermons. What I'm about to share is one of those statements.

Sometimes what God means and what we do can get a little jumbled. The bible is not perfect. Everything that God plans is perfect. It's the building of the plans that get messed up, because God

always hands the plans to us. This is part of freewill. When I read from the bible, I attempt to look for the fingerprints. First and foremost, I try to find God's fingerprints. Where is the perfect plan in the scripture? Second, I keep in mind there could be places where imperfect fingerprints get in the way. This isn't to say we are incapable of doing what God wants. We are just incapable of doing it perfectly. Finally, I realize in trying to find fingerprints, I'm not perfect either.

Bringing this back around, I'm held accountable to the God given purpose of the scripture, not the human driven explanation. What is the purpose of "Do not commit adultery?"

Like "honor your mother and father," it protects the family, and ultimately the story. The story cannot continue without the family. I realize this statement might appear scandalous for this day in age. We have all different ways we define family. This was a people always in turmoil. From the Exodus on, the Israelites had to continually protect themselves from attack from the neighboring countries. The story of YHWH was precarious already without adding broken families to the mix. (By the way, I'm writing this as a child of multiple parental divorces.) It simply becomes more difficult to honor mother and father if mother and father are not devoted to one another.

Adultery takes God's name in vain. In a modern Western context I am a partner in my marriage. My husband and I give 100% to one another to make sure our marriage stays healthy. Also, the two of us, used God's name in marriage and made a covenant to remain faithful and true to one another. If either of us were to commit adultery, that's taking God's name in vain.

This is about relationship. Jesus sums up the commandments into two groups: Love the Lord, your God, and love your neighbor as yourself. (Matt 22:36-38) This one falls into the later category. We can't change what we have done. Our past actions have helped or done their damage. We can change what we will be. Adultery is always a choice. We choose the relationships we engage in and we choose whether we are going to break those relationships with infidelity.

Questions:

1. Cain killed Able in Genesis. Was it murder? If it was a murder, was it wrong? It happened before there was a commandment saying it was wrong. If it's not wrong, why? If it is wrong, what about Moses killing the Egyptian?
2. What is your definition of murder?
3. Adultery can have variable meanings from actual sex to lusting after another. Where is the line for you? What do you believe is adultery?

Week 4:
Commandments 8-10

The Eighth Commandment:

"You shall not steal."

Israel, also known as Jacob, had twelve sons. Israel's most beloved and precious son was Joseph, because he was born in Israel's old age. As a gift for his son, Israel gave Joseph a very beautiful and expensive coat. This did not sit well with Israel's other eleven sons. They were jealous. Joseph probably added fuel to the fire when he shared dreams where it clearly showed the brother's worshipping their younger brother. Eventually, the brothers had enough. They threw him in a pit, stole his coat and covered the robe with blood. The brothers convinced their father Joseph was dead. Then, they sold their younger brother into slavery. Not to share too many spoils, but everything eventually works out for Joseph and his family. I wonder if the Israelites, following this commandment, remembered the story of Joseph.

To the modern American reader you might not get the connection. After all, how does stealing fit into this story? Theologians believe the early understanding of this commandment had less to do with petty theft and more to do with the taking of people. If a person was taken from someone's land and sold into slavery, like Joseph was, that was the type of stealing understood by many biblical Israelites.

We can take this ancient understanding a few ways:

- 1. We can extend this commandment as a condemnation against slavery and human trafficking.** Albeit, this is only a loose argument. The biblical Israelites still had slaves, and as I explained earlier, they believed they owned their wives. I also explained how sometimes what God means and what we do can get a little jumbled. If this commandment was initially a statement of kidnapping humans, we have biblical ground to condemn the underground sex trade. Young children, mostly girls, are stolen from their homes and forced into prostitution. You might think there is nothing to be done; that it's a world away from us. You would be wrong. Sex trafficking happens all over the world, and is most definitely happening in your city. [Right now](#), as children are crossing into the United States without their parents, there are people who are kidnapping these children. They become sex slaves. It happens. Even in the United States of America, it happens.
- 2. We can understand that which is stolen as more than just physical items.** There is much in this world that is stolen and only a portion of it has cash value. Mental, physical and spiritual attributes, like virtue, innocence and health, are all things that can be stolen from someone. Any time a person gains something by taking something from someone else without their explicit permission, that's stealing. Under this definition rape is stealing.
- 3. Like any other commandment, we must accept how we fail so we can extend grace to others.** We should always be more willing to point the fingers firmly at ourselves before we start pointing out others who fail. Stealing, especially with the extended definition, is the easiest to start with. We are not perfect. "Let the person who is without sin cast the first stone." (Matt 7:1) Part of being a healthy person is realizing God doles out judgment, not us. We cannot force change on anyone. We can force change on ourselves. We can realize we fall short and try to make better changes for the future.

The Ninth Commandment:

"You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor."

I love crime shows. I can't get enough CSI, Bones, and even Psyche. I guess part of the reason is I love watching the good guys or gals win. I also love mystery, and crime shows are full of them. The good guys and gals find a body. Then they begin to find clues. Fingerprints. Hairs. Microscopic pieces of something that begins to point to a specific culprit. Usually a witness is lying about something, and the evidence forces them to tell the truth by the end of the hour. The bad guy or gal is caught and everything is neatly wrapped up.

That is not how real life works. Detectives are usually working multiple cases at the same time. The evidence at the scene is not always there. Cold cases still exist. Still, what we have now and what the biblical Israelites had is light years ahead. The only tool the biblical Israelites had been witnesses. When someone was wronged in some way, the issues were brought before the elders. Based on witness testimony, the elders would decide if the accused party was guilty.

1. **This commandment is about lying.** I heard on of the best pieces of advice about 5-10 years ago. It was in a church, and a congregant came up to the minister and just listed grievance upon grievance right in front of me. I had no idea what to do, so I just stood there awkwardly as they spilled their frustrations. Calmly, the minister stood his ground and listened. Calmly, he pointed who could help with some of the issues and promised to prayerfully consider others. When the congregant had left the room I blurted, "I hope I don't end up in an angry church." He chuckled. "Melissa, every church has angry people. You don't want to end up in a quiet church."

I asked what he meant. He told me the minister should feel worried when all they hear are the good things. A healthy church brings their issues directly to the pastor. He concluded, "I would rather be in an outspoken church than a church that keeps their angers and fears bottled up.

This advice brings up this commandment. Here is how I define lying as breaking the ninth commandment: When the lie is not for the betterment of the person or the group, lying is wrong.

2. **This commandment is not about lying, it's about justice.** In a court of law, in the United States, you are asked to put your hand on the bible and answer the question, "Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?" If the person answering the question were to lie, that person would be taking the name of God in vain and bearing false witness against their neighbor.
3. **This commandment is about community.** For a community to prosper and grow, the legal system has to be fair and right. In light of the older definition of this commandment, it could also be understood as "have a fair and honest justice system." That makes this not an easy commandment to follow because there is a divide on what people consider fair and honest judgment.

A perfect example of this commandment in action is the biblical story of [Solomon and the two prostitutes](#). (1 Kings 3:16-28) In this story are two women, each with a baby. As was customary for the

time, the babies would sleep with their mother at night. Sadly, one mother accidentally smothers her child while asleep. When she awakes, she sees what has happened, and decided to switch out her baby with the other woman. When the other woman awakes she discovers the deception. They take the case before Solomon where his solution is to cut the baby in half. (This way, both women would have ½ a baby. The real mother would rather see her child in the arms of another, rather than dead. Solomon discovers who the real mother is.

The mother of the dead child was bearing false witness against her neighbor. Yes, this involved lying. Breaking this commandment also involved the woman attempting to twist the justice system in her favor. Finally, this woman, in breaking this commandment has no concern for the other in her community. It was only Solomon, in his wisdom, who was able to pull the lies from the truth.

The Tenth Commandment:

"You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor."

I was a high schooler at the height of the Pop Christian craze. Youth groups would go to places like Toccoa Fest, where the big names would come and play a few songs on their new album. There were so many in my town who had a fish on the back of their car. No, I'm not talking about the Ichthus, the sign of Christ. As a side note, I do notice less Ichthus fish on the back of now. This was bumper stickers for 104.7 the Fish, the local Christian music station. I was a big fan. I loved Audio Adrenaline's *Big House*. I couldn't get enough Amy Grant and Rich Mullins. I memorized the words to Big Tent Revival's [Two Sets of Jones'](#). Eventually, the creativity seemed to wane. As I began to hear more songs that just replayed the message, "I love you, Lord," I found my music needs reaching out beyond Christian Pop. I didn't want to be brainwashed into faith, and that's what Christian pop felt like. There was no substance, only cool sounding music saying the same thing over and over.

That's why I appreciate the older songs. They used to tell stories. They used to engage the imagination. I remember I had my own theology formed through the listening of *Two Sets of Jones'*. The song is referencing Matthew 7:24-27.

"Everybody who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise builder who built a house on bedrock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the wind blew and beat against that house. It didn't fall because it was firmly set on bedrock. But everybody who hears these words of mine and doesn't put them into practice will be like a fool who built a house on sand. The rain fell, the floods came, and the wind blew and beat against that house. It fell and was completely destroyed." (CEB)

Yet, it's not just Matthew in the song. It's also the tenth commandment. Have you ever heard the phrase, "keeping up with the Jones?" This phrase is neck deep in the tenth commandment, and the second Big Tent Revival chose to use that specific name, so was the song. This interests me because this commandment has strong connection to the eighth. While the eighth is all about the action of taking something that belongs to someone else, the tenth is about the desire to take. By desire, I'm not talking about vague desire. This is about seeing something specific someone has and wanting it. In many ways, this commandment is about focus.

Big Tent Revival put the tenth commandment in focus with the scripture in Matthew. It wasn't until I was working through this study, did I realize the impact it had on my understanding. At the conclusion of the song they sing, "Is your faith built on the rock of Christ Jesus, or a sandy foundation you've managed to lay?" My high school brain had connected this song to the commandment. I believed we would always have desire for something. Our choice is in what we desire. Do we desire what others around us have, or do we desire what God has? Desiring God is built on rock and desiring what others have is built on sand.

It can be difficult to see the difference between desiring what others have and desiring what God has. I have a very easy litmus test. Anger, lust and envy are fruits of desiring what others have.

Love and sadness is the fruit of desiring what God has. Why sadness? God is the ultimate love. In John Jesus says,

“As the Father loved me, I too have loved you. Remain in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I kept my Father’s commandments and remain in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy will be in you and your joy will be complete. This is my commandment: love each other just as I have loved you. No one has greater love than to give up one’s life for one’s friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you.” (John 15:9-14 CEB)

When we desire our neighbor’s things we grow angry when it appears they are being selfish or unloving. Anger is never born out of love. When we act out of God’s desire of love we grow saddened by seeing the same selfish or unloving behavior. The change in attitude happens because we stop envying and start mourning. God’s love means we start wanting redemption for not only our friends, but also our enemies. It’s scandalous love, and can also be painful. See, if we love God, we will follow the commandments. If we follow the commandments, one of the things we won’t do is seek what other’s have.

Questions:

1. The internet has been compared to the Wild West. There is incredible freedom to create because of the newness of it. Many go to the internet to find free resources and tools. Some of those free resources are actually property of others, and to use them without proper payment is stealing from them. How do we keep from stealing on the internet? How do we give these thinkers and artists the proper payment they deserve? (By the way, I may not be referring to actually paying with cash. Just as one could steal more than physical possessions, we can reimburse with more than just money.)
2. How would you define fair and honest judgment?
3. If you could take only one thing away from this study, what would it be?

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