

LEADER GUIDE

DEUTERONOMY

A CHALLENGE TO A NEW GENERATION

GOD'S CHARACTER REFLECTED

BIG IDEA: The character of God is reflected in the Ten Commandments He gave us to obey.

DATE: Sunday, June 14, 2026

SCRIPTURE: Deuteronomy 5:6-21

OPENING QUESTION

Get a few volunteers to be part of a contest. Have them stand at the white board and ask them to see who can create the best illustration of Mount Rushmore in less than three minutes. After three minutes, review their work and have people vote for the best rendition. Ask: *How many of you have ever been to Mount Rushmore?* Can you describe it for us? Does a picture do it justice?

Ask: Do these quick, three-minute drawings capture the grandeur or majestic beauty of Mount Rushmore? Why or why not? If you have never been to Mount Rushmore, would any of these images be enough to satisfy you? Why or why not?

No television screen, poster, or even wide screen movie can capture the majesty and beauty of that massive sculpture. The four faces of George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, and Theodore Roosevelt have been chiseled into the side of Mount Rushmore. Each face is almost 100 feet tall. Any image (or picture) of Mount Rushmore only reduces it. Seeing it in person is the only way to experience its wonder and majesty.

The same is true with God. He is so holy that we cannot even look upon Him. We cannot even picture what God may look like. But we can come to learn His character. Today we will see how His character is reflected in the Ten Commandments and that in obeying them, we too can reflect His character.

SETTING THE STAGE

The Israelites were already familiar with the Ten Commandments, for they had received them from God at Mount Sinai 40 years earlier (Ex. 20:1-17). He had delivered them to the Israelites face to face from the fire on the mountain, though the people had been afraid of the fire. All the adults who had survived the 40 years in the desert would have remembered that fiery event. But the mere fact that Israel had received the law was not enough to transform and stabilize their society; for the nation to be strong, each and every Israelite would have to know the law and obey it. Moses understood this, and so he summoned all Israel to himself in a solemn assembly and proclaimed the Ten Commandments to them, ordering every citizen to learn and follow them carefully.

SCRIPTURE READING

Deuteronomy 5:6-21 (CSB)

⁶I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the place of slavery.

⁷Do not have other gods besides me.

⁸ Do not make an idol for yourself in the shape of anything in the heavens above or on the earth below or in the waters under the earth. ⁹ Do not bow in worship to them, and do not serve them, because I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, bringing the consequences of the fathers' iniquity on the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate me, ¹⁰ but showing faithful love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commands.

¹¹ Do not misuse the name of the LORD your God, because the LORD will not leave anyone unpunished who misuses his name.

¹² Be careful to remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy as the LORD your God has commanded you. ¹³ You are to labor six days and do all your work, ¹⁴ but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. Do not do any work—you, your son or daughter, your male or female slave, your ox or donkey, any of your livestock, or the resident alien who lives within your city gates, so that your male and female slaves may rest as you do. ¹⁵ Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out of there with a strong hand and an outstretched arm. That is why the LORD your God has commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.

¹⁶ Honor your father and your mother, as the LORD your God has commanded you, so that you may live long and so that you may prosper in the land the LORD your God is giving you.

¹⁷ Do not murder.

¹⁸ Do not commit adultery.

¹⁹ Do not steal.

²⁰ Do not give dishonest testimony against your neighbor.

²¹ Do not covet your neighbor's wife or desire your neighbor's house, his field, his male or female slave, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

DISCUSSION

READ Deuteronomy 5:1-5 (only found here in the Leader Guide)

Moses summoned all Israel and said to them, "Israel, listen to the statutes and ordinances I am proclaiming as you hear them today. Learn and follow them carefully. ² The LORD our God made a covenant with us at Horeb. ³ He did not make this covenant with our ancestors, but with all of us who are alive here today. ⁴ The LORD spoke to you face to face from the fire on the mountain. ⁵ At that time I was standing between the LORD and you to report the word of the LORD to you, because you were afraid of the fire and did not go up the mountain. And he said:

Explain how the Ten Commandments are structured using the chart found in the commentary section below.

RESPECT FOR GOD

READ Deuteronomy 5:6-15

What do these verses tell you about God? What do you learn about God's nature?

Discuss what these verses state regarding the worship of idols.

Ask: Why are idols so appealing?

Why does God describe Himself as "jealous" in verse 9? What does that mean?

Can an idol capture the wonder, majesty, and eternal nature of God? Why or why not?

Discuss that while most of us do not have statues in our homes that we worship, we *do* have problems with idolizing things above God.

Share the difference between a symbol and an idol: *A symbol reminds us of God, but an idol or an image may be used to represent God. When we cross over the line to something that represents God, instead of just reminding of us of God, we've entered into the sin of idolatry.*

Discuss, using this definition, examples of contemporary "idols" that many people give their time, attention and resources to.

Why is our culture so casual about the name of God? What can you do to avoid using God's name in an empty, meaningless way? How does respecting God's name reflect His character?

How do you observe the Sabbath or guard time to refresh your soul? How does God's command of Sabbath reflect His character?

READ Deuteronomy 5:19-21

Divide your group into three teams or assign each table a team number. **Pass out the handouts found in your packet. A copy of the handout is found in your Leader Guide here.**

Allow about five minutes for teams to work and then call for reports. Pay special attention to the last question for each team regarding how their commandment, and our obedience to it, reflects the character of God.

DEUTERONOMY 5:19-21 TEAM ASSIGNMENTS (found on the handout)

TEAM ONE: *Read Deuteronomy 5:19 and "Respect the Property of Others." Answer the questions and discuss why stealing does not reflect trust in God's provision for us.*

Respect the Property of Others

People often steal out of greed and selfishness. They want more—money, property, or anything else they can take. Sinful human nature says, "I will take what I do not have. It is not fair for someone else to have so much, so I will even the balance." There are only two legitimate ways to receive money or possessions: earn them through work or receive them as a gift. Any other way falls outside God's will. When people think of theft, they may imagine a bank or store robbery, but taking small items from work or a friend's home also breaks this commandment. The size of the theft does not matter; the act itself makes it wrong. Stealing violates the right to private property, which is closely tied to basic human dignity. Proverbs 11:1 says, "Dishonest scales are detestable to the Lord, but an accurate weight is His delight." In biblical times, some merchants cheated customers with false scales. Today, fraud is often more sophisticated and can include internet fraud, credit card fraud, telemarketing fraud, money laundering, tax evasion, mail fraud, and insider trading. Whether it involves cheating in school or business, falsifying an expense report, or overcharging customers, it is still fraud and a violation of the eighth commandment.

Where do you see this commandment being abused in our culture today? What can we do to protect ourselves from the temptation to acquire possessions outside the will of God? What does this commandment teach us about God's character?

TEAM TWO: *Read Deuteronomy 5:20 and "Honesty Is the Only Policy." Answer the questions and explain how lying fails to reflect God's truthfulness.*

Honesty is the Only Policy

God hates deceptive words. Proverbs says, "The Lord hates six things; in fact, seven are detestable to Him," including "a lying tongue" and "a lying witness who gives false testimony" (Prov. 6:16-19). Two of the seven

offenses listed relate directly to the ninth commandment. Because God's character is truth, every lie and every form of deception dishonors Him. At some point, all of us have lied, deceived, exaggerated, or embellished. But even one lie makes a person a liar, and every lie offends God because it violates His truthfulness. In the story of Pinocchio, his nose grew each time he lied. Embarrassing as that was, it made the lie obvious. We may wish for that kind of warning, but believers already have one: the indwelling Holy Spirit, whom Jesus called "the Spirit of truth" (John 15:26). When you speak falsely or live deceptively, the Holy Spirit convicts you. If you are a Christian, every lie requires resisting or suppressing the Spirit of truth.

What are some harmful consequences of lying to others? How can we guard against the temptation to exaggerate, embellish, or lie to others? How does speaking the truth reflect God's character?

TEAM THREE: Read Deuteronomy 5:21 and "Learn to Live with Contentment." Answer the questions and discuss how covetousness fails to reflect contentment in God, and how it shows dissatisfaction with what He provides.

Learn to Live with Contentment

The word "covet" is the Hebrew word *chamad*, which means to "have an intense desire" for something. There's nothing wrong with coveting—if you covet the proper thing. I might say to you, "I covet your prayers." There's certainly nothing wrong with that. It is the object of our covetousness that makes certain desires a sin. It seems as if we're all trying to "keep up with the Joneses." When we see our neighbor with more "stuff" than we have, it makes us want to have at least as much as they have. If they get a new car, we feel we need a new car, too. If we see a new big-screen television being delivered to their house, we start scheming how we can get one. Covetousness (greed) makes a person a victim of a vicious cycle of dissatisfaction. If your goal in life is to get more things and to accumulate possessions, you will never be satisfied. You buy a new home and think it is so wonderful, but you'll soon start noticing that there is always another house that is bigger and better than yours. If "having the best" becomes the primary source of satisfaction in your life, you are cursed because you never will be satisfied. The cure for covetousness is contentment in Christ. Contentment means being satisfied with what you have. The Bible says, "Your life should be free from the love of money. Be satisfied with what you have, for He Himself has said, 'I will never leave you or forsake you'" (Heb. 13:5).

What is your definition of personal "contentment"? What does it mean to be content in Christ? How does our contentment reflect God's character?

Give time for each group to share.

SUMMARIZE: Every choice we make will either reflect God's character or not.

READ THE RESPONSE and CLOSE IN PRAYER

RESPONSE

Moses concluded this oration by saying, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength" (Deut. 6:5). In Matthew 22 an expert in the Law asked Jesus to identify the greatest commandment. Jesus answered by quoting Deuteronomy 6:5. He added that the second commandment was to "love your neighbor as yourself," which is found in Leviticus 19:18. When you truly love God, you won't violate the first four commandments. Likewise, when you sincerely love your neighbor, you won't have to worry about keeping the last six commandments. *Will you ask God to give you the strength to love Him more dearly and to give you a deeper love for your neighbor?*

COMMENTARY

5:1-5. The Israelites were already familiar with Ten Commandments, for they had received them from God at Mount Sinai 40 years earlier (Ex. 20:1-17). He had delivered them to the Israelites **face to face from the fire on the mountain** (5:4), though the people had been **afraid of the fire** (5:5). All the adults who had survived the 40 years in the desert would have remembered that fiery event.

But the mere fact that Israel had received the law was not enough to transform and stabilize their society; for the nation to be strong, each and every Israelite would have to know the law and obey it. Moses understood this, and so he **summoned all Israel** to himself in a solemn assembly and proclaimed the Ten Commandments to them, ordering every citizen to **learn and follow them carefully** (5:1).

The presentation of these timeless commands is virtually identical to the one found in Exodus 20:1-17, with both lists presenting the same laws and in the same order. Included in both lists are ones that deal with seven different areas of concern. The table below outlines these areas.

General Topic	Commandment Number	Specific Topic	Location
Respect for God	1	God's reality and priority	(5:6-7)
	2	God's right to exclusive worship	(5:8-10)
	3	God's reputation	(5:11)
	4	God's Sabbath and His salvation	(5:12-15)
Respect for Human Authority	5		(5:16)
Respect for Human Life	6		(5:17)
Respect for the Institution of Marriage	7		(5:18)
Respect for Property Rights and Personal	8		(5:19)

Freedom			
Respect for the Justice System and Honesty	9		(5:20)
Control of One's Desires	10		(5:21)

5:6-7. *The First Commandment—respect for God's reality and priority.* Intriguingly, the Bible teaches that the foundation on which Israelite—and every other culture's—society must be built is the recognition that God exists. No society, no government, and no politician is so great that God is not greater still.

Interestingly, the Jewish set of Ten Commandments counts verse 6 as the first commandment: **I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the place of slavery.** This verse emphasizes two great truths: (1) that the Lord must be acknowledged as their God, and (2) that the nation of Israel existed because God acted to make it so.

The Protestant version of the Ten Commandments, on the other hand, uses verse 7 as the first command: **Do not have other gods besides Me.** The emphasis here lies beyond the basic truth that God exists; it directs all people to make the one true God the highest priority in life—higher than money, power, or pleasure in any form.

5:8-10. *The Second Commandment—respect for God's demand for exclusive worship.* God is the Creator of all things, and His power and genius are evident all around us. God's handiwork in every corner of the universe is so beautiful, complete, and complex that it fascinates all who study it. In fact, nature's wonders are so compelling that people have often worshiped them as gods. But they are not gods, and to treat them as such is to make a huge mistake.

The second commandment prohibited the Israelites from making an idol (5:8). Welded to that command were ones that ordered God's people **not to bow down or worship** any idol (5:9).

God is by nature a **jealous God**, and when His people turn their devotion away from Him, their actions are saying they **hate** Him. Violating the exclusive love relationship between God and His people results in the Lord **punishing** the unfaithful **to the third and fourth generations**. On the other hand, faithfully loving and serving the Lord alone brings Him pleasure and results in Him **showing faithful love to a thousand generations of those who love Him** (5:10).

5:11. *The Third Commandment—respect for God's reputation.* Because God is the most important being in the universe—our Creator, Protector, and the giver of every good gift, He deserves our total respect. The Third Commandment, **Do not misuse the name of the LORD your God**, forbids God's people from saying or doing anything that would show disrespect or trivialize Him in any way.

We should not be surprised when non-Christians in our society show disrespect for God. But remember, this command was spoken to members of the Lord's covenant community. God demanded that those who are called by His name use their words and their ways to testify to the greatness and goodness of God and His truth. Calling ourselves Christians while we live like the Devil causes us to break this vital command.

Like the Second Commandment, breaking this commandment has consequences attached to it. And the consequences apply to everyone: **the LORD will not leave anyone unpunished who**

misuses His name. What might those consequences be? The Bible doesn't say; however, respect for people begins with respect for the God who made them. A society that makes light of God and the sacred truths, practices, and objects associated with Him will also be cynical and disrespectful toward human authority and people in general. This in turn can lead to a dysfunctional society.

5:12-15. *The Fourth Commandment—respect for God's Sabbath and His salvation.* This commandment emphasizes the truth that God is the great giver of salvation, freedom, and rest. It does so by establishing a weekly memorial event known as the Sabbath. Those who had experienced His salvation were to dedicate every **seventh day** as a **Sabbath to the LORD** (5:14). On this day God's people were **not to do any work**; instead they were to **rest**.

Israel was to celebrate the Sabbath because God **brought** the Israelites out of bondage **in the land of Egypt ... with a strong hand and an outstretched arm** (5:15). God wanted His people to remember Him always as the true source of freedom, so He **commanded** them to **keep the Sabbath day** (5:15), as a weekly reminder of His amazing work of salvation. Each Sabbath the Israelites were to **remember** two things: that they had once been held captive in slavery, and that God had set them free. The Lord was and is the ultimate source of freedom.

More than that, the Lord wanted the Israelites to use the Sabbath as a day to give freedom to others. Therefore, He ordered the Israelites to give every person and work animal in their circle of life the gift of Sabbath rest. The liberated were to become liberators.

How should Christians celebrate the Sabbath? A study of the New Testament suggests we should do it in a way that points people to Jesus Christ and the freedom we find in Him (Gal. 5:13; Heb. 2:15; 1 Pet. 2:16). Jesus used the Sabbath as a day to do God's work by doing good and bringing freedom to others (Luke 13:10-16). First-century Christians changed the Sabbath celebration from Saturday to Sunday (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2) in honor of Jesus' resurrection. They called it "the Lord's day" (Rev. 1:10) and met together for worship (Acts 20:7). The church in Corinth was told to use the Christian Sabbath as a day to collect money to be used for the benefit of needy Christians (1 Cor. 16:2). Based on the New Testament, it seems Christians should use Sundays to meet together with other Christians to worship God gratefully for the gifts of life, forgiveness, and freedom He has given us through Jesus Christ, and that we use that day for rest and for doing good with the resources God has given us.

5:16. *The Fifth Commandment—respect for human authority.* This commandment directed the Israelites—and the rest of us—to **honor our father and ... mother**. Without this respect societies descend into chaos, and law and order are impossible. With it, a stable society becomes possible.

The apostle Paul correctly noted (Eph. 6:2) that this commandment is the first one that contains a promise; it states that by obeying this command an Israelite might **live long and ... prosper in the land** the LORD their God was **giving** them. This promise would be fulfilled in a couple of possible ways: First, those who honored and obeyed their parents would not be killed for being rebellious (see Deut. 21:18-21). Second, respecting and obeying duly constituted civil authorities opened the way for the rule of law in society, a necessary precondition for national prosperity.

5:17. *The Sixth Commandment—respect for human life.* The shortest of the Ten Commandments (6 Hebrew letters) is also one of the most critical for the survival of the human race: **Do not murder**. English versions have translated the command's Hebrew verb, *ratsach* [rahts AHK], with two vastly different English words; older versions brought it into English as "kill" (see KJV, RSV), while more recent versions such as the HCSB have opted for "murder." The truth is, Old Testament writers used this verb in different ways. Outside of the Ten Commandments it is used 46 times; 22 times it means "murder," 20 times it means "manslaughter," twice it refers to justifiable killing, with one occurrence each for usages associated with wartime killing and an animal killing a person.

The common thread connecting all but one of these different usages of the Hebrew verb is the fact that they involve one human being taking the life of another human being. This observation is critical to understanding the intent of this command, for the Old Testament contains laws and commands that required the Israelites to kill individuals and even entire people groups (Ex. 19:12; Deut. 7:16).

Though Old Testament divine justice required that certain types of behavior be punished with death, the act of killing a guilty person or nation was intended to be carried out by an authorized *group*, not one individual acting alone. Thus, it seems the Sixth Commandment is making three key points. First, human life is precious to God (see also Gen. 9:5); second, no individual should act on his own, acting independently to kill someone he believes to be worthy of death. Third, we should make serious efforts to prevent accidental deaths.

5:18. *The Seventh Commandment—respect for the institution of marriage.* The seventh commandment established for all time the principle of exclusivity within the husband-wife relationship. This command serves as a wall around the marriage commitment, warning both husbands and wives not to have sexual relations with anyone married to another person.

The Hebrew verb in this commandment has a narrow field of meaning; in its 31 usages in the Old Testament it refers only to having sexual relations with someone else's marriage partner. So does that mean God has no problem with a married person being intimate with someone who isn't married, or with two unmarried people being intimate with each other? Of course not! There are plenty of other passages in the Bible that establish broader guidelines for proper sexual conduct (for example, Lev. 18:6-18; 20:10-21; Deut. 22:22-30; 1 Cor. 6:9-10). However, with the seventh commandment God provided the foundational rule associated with the maintenance of stable marriages.

5:19. *The Eighth Commandment—respect for property rights and personal freedom.* This command nails down two fundamental principles of a just society: the right to personal ownership of objects and animals and the impermissibility of denying a person their freedom through kidnaping. The Hebrew verb found in this commandment is used over 30 times in the Old Testament to refer to stealing; objects (Gen. 31:19), livestock (Ex. 22:1), people (Gen. 40:15), and even intellectual property (words; Jer. 23:30) can be stolen. Stealing and kidnaping are wrong in God's eyes, and penalties were associated with these crimes in the Israelite legal system. The most severe penalty, execution, was reserved for kidnaping (Ex. 21:16; Deut. 24:7), though taking others' livestock or property required full restitution plus the payment of a penalty to the victim (Ex. 22:1,7).

5:20. *The Ninth Commandment—respect for the justice system and honesty.* This commandment highlights peoples' obligation to speak the truth, a bedrock feature of a just legal system. Ancient Israel's justice system depended almost entirely upon accurate reports of witnesses. The testimony of as few as two witnesses was enough to convict a person of a capital crime (Deut. 17:6; 19:15; see 1 Kings 21:13; Matt. 26:60). Thus, the entire justice system depended on truth-telling.

The Lord speaks the truth (Isa. 45:19; Rom. 3:4) and expects people, who are made in His image, to tell the truth as well (Jer. 9:5; Zech. 8:16; Eph. 4:25).

5:21. *The Tenth Commandment—control of one's desires.* This final commandment, like the first one, finds its fulfillment more in the heart than in the hand.

The Hebrew verb translated here as **covet** occurs 20 times in the Bible: 10 times it refers in a non-negative sense to something that is desired or desirable, and 10 times it refers in a negative sense to improperly desiring something that belongs to someone else. In the broadest sense, this commandment prohibits harboring any desire that, if acted upon, would result in improper

conduct. Specific examples of wrongful desires included ones in the area of sexuality (coveting a neighbor's wife) as well as wealth and social status (coveting a neighbor's house, field, animals, or possessions).

How can we tell the difference between right and wrong desires? We do like Jesus did (Matt. 4:3-10); we compare them to the teachings in God's Word and reject any that don't measure up to the biblical ideals.

5:22-33. The Lord delivered the Ten Commandments to Israel in the most authoritative way—in a loud voice ... from the fire, cloud, and thick darkness on Mount Sinai. Then He engraved them on two stone tablets (5:22)—not on leather, papyrus, soft clay, or broken pieces of pottery as was more common in that day. God's desire was for these commandments to outlast any generation, and for each succeeding generation to have a heart to fear God and keep all His commands ... so that they and their children would prosper forever (5:29).

Israel was to follow the whole instruction the LORD their God had commanded them (5:33), and not to turn aside to the right or to the left (5:32), that is, not to apply them too strictly or too loosely. As they did this, they would live, prosper, and have a long life in the land God was giving them to possess (5:33).