

THE 10 COMMANDMENTS: A LIFE OF FREEDOM AND FLOURISHING

Week 1: Commandments 1–4 — Loving God

The Key Point

The Ten Commandments aren't primarily about restriction — they're about relationship. Scripture calls them the "Ten Words" (Hebrew: aseret haddevarim). They come after God rescues Israel from slavery, not before — they're instructions for living in freedom, not conditions for earning it.

Exodus 20:2 (NLT)

"I am the Lord your God, who rescued you from the land of Egypt, the place of your slavery."

The first four commandments shape our love for God. Get this right, and everything else — including how we treat others — starts to make sense.

Garden Roots

Before Sinai, there was a garden. God's first words to humanity were a blessing, not a command.

Genesis 1:28 (NLT)


"Then God blessed them and said, 'Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and govern it. Reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, and all the animals that scurry along the ground.'"

The one instruction God gave was framed by an invitation to eat freely from the tree of life — wisdom comes from listening to God, not from a shortcut that bypasses trust.

Genesis 2:16–17 (NLT)

"You may freely eat the fruit of every tree in the garden — except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If you eat its fruit, you are sure to die."

Humanity took the fruit, fracturing relationship with God, each other, and the earth. The Ten Words point us back toward the tree of life.



The First Four Commandments

1. No Other Gods

Exodus 20:3 (NIV)

“You shall have no other gods before me.”

Key idea: *Everyone worships something — the question is what.*

- “Before me” (al panay) means “in my presence” — no other god has equal standing with Yahweh.
- Ancient Egypt had a god for everything; Israel’s God claims sole, total devotion.
- Idols today look like money, career, relationships, reputation — good things that can’t carry the weight of being our centre.
- Martin Luther: “Whatever your heart clings to and relies upon, that is your god.”

2. No Idols

Exodus 20:4–6 (NLT)

“You must not make for yourself an idol of any kind or an image of anything in the heavens or on the earth or in the sea. You must not bow down to them or worship them, for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God who will not tolerate your affection for any other gods. I lay the sins of the parents upon their children; the entire family is affected — even children in the third and fourth generations of those who reject me. But I lavish unfailing love for a thousand generations on those who love me and obey my commands.”

Key idea: *God refuses to be shrunk down to something manageable.*

- Making an image of a god was standard ancient practice — it made the god “manageable.”
- God says no: a God we can fully picture or control isn’t the real God, just a projection of what we want.
- “Jealous” (qanna) means fierce, protective love — not insecurity.
- God’s discipline reaches 3–4 generations; God’s unfailing love reaches a thousand.

3. Don’t Misuse God’s Name

Exodus 20:7 (NLT)

“You must not misuse the name of the Lord your God. The Lord will not let you go unpunished if you misuse his name.”

Key idea: *Carrying God’s name means representing God truthfully.*

- “Misuse” (nasa) means “to carry” — more than swearing, it’s claiming God’s backing for things God hasn’t endorsed.
- Includes saying “God told me” wrongly or using God’s name to justify mistreating others.
- The serpent in Eden misquoted God slightly — a subtle distortion that is itself a form of taking God’s name in vain.

Ask: does how I speak about God match who God actually is?

4. Remember the Sabbath

Exodus 20:8–11 (NLT)

“Remember to observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. You have six days each week for your ordinary work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath day of rest dedicated to the Lord your God. On that day no one in your household may do any work — this includes you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, your livestock, and any foreigners living among you. For in six days the Lord made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and everything in them; but on the seventh day he rested. That is why the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and set it apart as holy.”

Key idea: *Rest is not a reward for productivity — it's a gift built into creation.*

- In Egypt, Israel’s worth was measured by output; Sabbath frees everyone — family, workers, even animals and foreigners.
- Grounded in creation: God rested, so rhythm and rest are built into life itself, not earned by performance.
- Walter Brueggemann called Sabbath “an act of resistance” against a culture of hustle and constant availability.
- Practical call: take one full stop each week — stop producing, stop consuming, and receive.

Bringing It Together

Each commandment answers the same question first asked in the garden: will we trust God, or reach for life on our own terms?

Commandment 1 — let God be the centre. Commandment 2 — let God be God. Commandment 3 — let God’s name carry its weight. Commandment 4 — let God be your rest.

Mark 12:30–31 (NLT)

“You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength. The second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’”

The commandments aren’t the destination — they’re signposts. Revelation pictures the tree of life restored at the end of the story, not as a reward for rule-keeping, but as the gift of God’s grace.

Reflect & Apply

1. Name your actual gods. What would devastate you if you lost it tomorrow? That may point to a functional god to hand over.
2. Notice where you’ve made God smaller. Is there an area where you’ve quietly shaped God to fit your preferences?
3. Pay attention to how you talk about God. When you say “God wants...” or “God said...,” is it true?
4. Try a Sabbath experiment. Start with even three hours this week — phone off, simply resting and receiving.