

THE TEN(DER) COMMANDMENTS

Reflections on the Father's Love



RON MEHL

THE TEN(DER) COMMANDMENTS

Reflections on the Father's Love

-Condensed Version-

RON MEHL



Foursquare Missions Press

Excerpted from the TEN(DER) COMMANDMENTS,

© 1998

By Ron Mehl

Used by permission of Multnomah Publishers, Inc.

**For personal use only,
not to be copied for any other purposes.**

Foursquare Missions Press would like to gratefully acknowledge Multnomah Publishers and Ron Mehl for their generosity in allowing this publication. (The original book can be purchased at most Christian bookstores.)

This booklet is never to be sold and is published with the intention of being distributed among family of the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel.

ON EAGLES' WINGS

Have you ever heard the Ten Commandments described as a love letter, a tender, heartfelt message from the very hand of God? Perhaps not. Yet I've become convinced it is one of the most powerful expressions of God's love in all of Scripture. And you don't need to read between the lines! It's all there. He doesn't leave anything out. These ten statements are all-encompassing, touching virtually every part of our lives. They are the parameters to live by—the truths He knows are going to provide blessing and strength, a future and a hope.

Some people, of course, imagine it to be the exact opposite. They don't hear love in these statements at all. What do they hear? They hear the clank of chains and the rattle of padlocks.

Is it possible we've misunderstood the first few pages of God's love letter, the very words that set the Ten Commandments in context?

Did you know that there was prior conversation between the Lord and Moses before He gave him those tablets of stone? Did you know that God gave Moses specific instructions about what to say to the people BEFORE presenting the Ten Commandments?

It was God Himself who set the context. It's all right here in the book of Exodus.

And Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain, saying, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel: 'You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel" (Exodus 19:3-6).

The Lord was saying, "Moses, before you give the people these commands, before anything else, will you please remind them that I bore them on eagles' wings?"

A mother eagle, when the time is right, will take her baby eaglet high into the sky...and drop him! As the little fella plummets to earth, contemplating his comfortable but suprisingly brief life, Mama eagle watches. And what does she do? She swoops down just before her eaglet hits the ground, flies underneath, and picks him up. And of course the poor little bird has gone into cardiac arrest. But there's a happy ending here for the baby eagle, right? Mom is climbing back into the heavens. Oh boy, the nasty

trauma is over. Back to the beloved nest...and isn't it just about lunchtime? But what does she do when she regains her original altitude? She drops him again! And again! And each time she swoops down to save him and bears him up...on eagle's wings. We, too, were headed south one day. There was nothing between us and an eternal abyss but empty space and a long, long way to fall. As Paul put it, we were "without hope and without God in the world" (Ephesians 2:12, NIV).

But what happened? In Christ, the Lord swooped down and picked us up and gave us everything that we have. And now He sustains us and keeps us every day of our lives.

He has a plan for you, too. Never doubt it! You might be puzzled by the circumstances and timing in your life, and you may feel that you're going nowhere fast. Yet like that mother eagle, God's eye is upon you. He will catch you up on His wing and take you where you could never go in your own strength.

And He gave you the Ten Commandments to keep you from destruction so that you could enter into all He desires for you. It was such an important letter that He literally wrote it with His own hand... the very finger of God (Exodus 31:18). He wanted to make sure that in those times when we long for counsel about which way to turn, we'd know just what to do.

Love doesn't always look the way you'd expect it to look. It isn't always dressed for dinner. It isn't always pretty or frilly or soft. It might even be written in stone.

It might even show up as Ten Commandments.

It's a lot easier now for me to look at these Ten Commandments and to remind myself, "Lord, why would I ever doubt Your love for me? You have proven it over and over again. You even wrote it down."

It was a valentine written in stone. Later, it would be written in blood. Who could question such love as that?

CHAPTER 1
THE FIRST COMMANDMENT

*And God spoke all these words,
saying: "I am the Lord your God,
who brought you out of the land of Egypt,
out of the house of bondage.
You shall have no other gods before me."
Exodus 20:1-3*

NO OTHER GODS

Our number-one task as believers is to make sure that nothing — no “god,” person, object, task, duty, or pleasure — comes before Him in our priorities, in our plans, and in our affection.

Hard work and good teaching and a willingness to stand in the gap for the Lord aren't enough. This is a *relationship*, and the Lord is very, very concerned with the condition of our hearts toward Him.

King Solomon would have known the first command from boyhood. And I would guess it was very much on his mind when he wrote these words: “Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways

acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight” (Proverbs 3:5-6, NIV).

“All of our ways” means all of our opportunities and undertakings. The word “acknowledge” doesn’t mean just to “know” Him by studying about Him, but rather through a personal relationship with Him. *The Living Bible* paraphrases it like this: “In everything you do, put God first, and he will direct you and crown your efforts with success.”

That’s pretty much the bottom line, isn’t it? In *everything* you do, put God first, so He can direct your path. So what does that mean? He not only gives you direction, but He commits Himself to removing any hindrances or obstacles that stand in the way of His destined purpose for you. He will make the path straight before you.

Why in the world does He make such a point of having no other gods before him? What does this first command have to do with life in today’s world?

The reason is very simple: He wants to be your God.

He wants to care for you, and He knows that no one or nothing can care for you better than He. He is a faithful God, committed to us even when we fail, even when we make mistakes. He loves us, and He will never say, “I’m done with you. I’m going to turn to someone else that I care about more than you.”

And now He is saying, “Would it be asking too much — knowing that I love you with a sacrificial, serving love — would you consider making Me the most important thing in your life? Would you consider Me as first in your life, just as you are first in

Mine?”

What happens, then, when I do make sure that He is first in my life?

It changes destructive worry and anxiety patterns in my mind. Where I once became locked up with fear, I now have confidence.

It will make an impact on the people around me. You cannot put God first in your life and avoid notice. People can't help but sense something different about you, because of the way you operate under stress and pressure and the way you view material things. The world will wonder how and why you respond the way you do. (What's with this guy? Is he in a daze? What's the story with this lady? Can she be for real?)

Peter foresaw a day when you will be questioned about that mysterious, calming, invisible component in your life.

But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect. (1 Peter 3:15, NIV)

Set apart Christ as Lord in your heart. That's another way of saying, *Keep Him first*. And really, when you stop to think about it, why should we NOT want to put Him first?

Why should I ever want to put anyone or anything in front of Him? Why should I tolerate other gods in my life? Why should I look for other sav-

iors? Why should I serve lesser lords?

*And so today, Lord, give me the grace to
love You every day as You have loved me. In
Jesus' name, amen.*

C H A P T E R 2
THE SECOND COMMANDMENT

*“You shall not make for yourself a carved image—
any likeness of anything that is in heaven above,
or that is in the earth beneath,
or that is in the water under the earth;
you shall not bow down to them nor serve them.
For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God.”*
Exodus 20:4-5

PURSUING EMPTY
IMAGES

W H O S E P I C T U R E I S I N
M Y W A L L E T ?

Have I mentioned that I love my wife Joyce very, very much? I really do. We’ve been married for over thirty years now, and I’m as delighted with her today as I was when I was a Bible college preacher boy with stars in my eyes.

But tell me...how do you think she would like it if she saw my billfold lying open on our dresser some morning and noticed a picture of another attractive woman alongside her picture? Do you think she

would shrug her shoulders and say, “Well, this is interesting, but after all, Ron has a right to his privacy”? Or do you think it more likely she might walk into the bathroom where I’m shaving and say, “Ron, who is *this*?”

And how do you think she would like it if she learned that this other woman and I had a bit of an ongoing relationship — that I turned to her when I felt especially in need of support, affection, and encouragement? Do you think that might bother Joyce at all? Do you think she would continue to believe me when I whisper in her ear that I love her with all of my heart?

I believe this to be the very spirit of the second commandment. Here’s my sense of what the Lord is saying: “I am your God. I am your Redeemer. I have saved you and bought you for Myself at a terrible price. Please...don’t ever put anything in the place that belongs to Me. I love you with all My heart, and I’ve always wanted to care for you, protect you, provide for you, and bless you. Now — because I love you more than any other — let Me ask something very important to Me. I’m asking that you have no other gods in your life...that I would be the only One.”

What do you think? Does this strike you as a little too restrictive? Too legalistic? Too much for the Lord to expect or require? Of course not. *He is our God*. After all, what’s the difference between a “carved image” or “graven image” and a photograph? Isn’t He saying something like this to you and me? “Listen, do you have any idea how much I love you,

and how much you mean to Me? Please...don't put any other pictures in your billfold alongside Mine. Don't carry any other images in your heart."

Might not God be saying to us something like this? "I'm committed to you and you alone. I would never leave you and run to another. Would you please do one thing? Don't put anything between you and Me. Don't carry other images close to your heart. Don't surrender My place to another."

What then are those "images" in our world today that would rise up to challenge our love relationship with the Son of God? What are the snapshots we might be tempted to frame on our desk, alongside the picture of Him? What are those "pictures in our wallet" that could gradually steal us away from a wholehearted walk with Christ?

Material things, maybe? Jesus said to His disciples, "You cannot serve both God and Money" (Matthew 6:24, NIV). He was speaking in that instance of a spirit of materialism that grips the soul and demands our energies and devotion. Paul says in Colossians 3:5 that even greediness is idolatry. But Scripture might have also listed any of the other gods of this world — false images such as Power, or Pleasure, or Fame, or Status.

In the book of Acts, Paul was bewildered by the "many gods" that filled the city of Athens. From his perspective, there must have been an idol of some kind on every block — as regular as downtown fire hydrants. But what is that in comparison with today? Today, these gods of materialism, sexual indulgence, and personal power fill the very airwaves!

The images and their deceptive offers go across the world by satellite, cable, Internet, and slick four-color printing. We are *surrounded* by more images than we have ever been in the history of the world. They leer at us from billboards and magazine covers. They call to us in powerful visual impressions on television. And as every good advertising or network executive knows, the whole object is to absolutely “capture” as many people as possible.

Capture what? Our attention. Our interest. Our money. Our time. Our commitment. Is there anything wrong with wanting a new car? Is there anything wrong with wanting to wear attractive, fashionable clothing? Is there anything wrong with wanting to succeed in business? Is there anything wrong with being a loyal sports fan? No. But any of these things — or a hundred others — may become an idol to us as it begins to control our thoughts and desires.

Idols and false images rob the days of our lives from us and leave us with nothing. No peace. No satisfaction. No legacy for the ones we love. And what are idols, once again? *Idols are anything that take our focus off of God.*

Our Father knows that the “images” offered by the world are bankrupt. He knows that if we pursue them, in the end we will find ourselves disappointed, devastated, and worthless because of what we’ve experienced. The false gods will only take, take, take.

Satan, the deceiver, has been in the image business for six thousand years, give or take.

But the Lord is in the image business, too. And He is in business for the opposite reason. The desire of His heart is to raise men and women to a level of intimate fellowship with Himself.

At creation, God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness” (Genesis 1:26). And through all the ups and downs, highs and lows, heartbreaks and delights of life on this earth, His one desire is to mold us — hour by hour, day by day — into the image of His son, Jesus Christ. Scripture says, “For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son” (Romans 8:29).

And so today, Lord, let me never take You for granted or treat the holy things of God lightly. In Jesus' name, amen.

C H A P T E R 3
THE THIRD COMMANDMENT

“You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.”

Exodus 20:7

TAKE CARE
WITH THE NAME

We live in a day where the air is blue with profanity. You can hardly watch a movie, pick up a novel, or even listen to the radio without hearing God’s name taken in vain. One of the definitions for the word *profane* speaks of “debasement or defiling that which is holy or worthy of reverence.” It’s an attack against something holy. It’s an attempt to take something exalted or revered and jerk it down from its pedestal. When I profane something, I try to yank it down to my level, so I can reduce it to being nothing more than I am.

What does it mean, then, to profane the Lord God? It is nothing less than a denial of His holiness and majesty and power. It is an attempt to somehow

pull God down to a common level and make him equal with me.

Perhaps you say, “Well, I don’t do that. I don’t talk that way. I don’t swear. I’m a Christian, and I would never talk that way.”

But there are other ways to use His name in vain — socially acceptable ways to profane Him. I have been guilty of them in my life, and perhaps you have, too. And one of those ways is to be very, very casual or careless in our prayers. The Lord cautions us against “vain repetitions.” *Vain* means empty. It means saying things over and over, without conviction.

Why would God say, “Don’t take My name in vain”? Because He loves you and me so much. The problem with most people is that they think they can get by with it because they say anything they want to and “nothing has happened.” Yet when you read the Scriptures you discover something about sowing and reaping, and it is this: You never, never reap in the same season you sow. But God’s Word is true. *And using His name in vain will affect your life.*

There is power in the name of our God. There is power in the name of Jesus Christ. Do you believe that? Do you believe that demons screamed and writhed and tore themselves from their hosts at the mention of His name? Do you believe that in the authority of His voice, and the authority of His name, that the eyes of the blind were opened, that withered legs were made strong, and that dead bodies came up out of the grave?

So why wouldn’t we believe there are conse-

quences to the way we use His name? Good consequences for using it rightly, evil consequences for using it casually or with evil intent. There are consequences to the name of God whenever it's used.

Think of this: There is eternal salvation in the name. His name means life. In John 20:31, Scripture says: "But these (things) are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name."

Acts 4:12 reinforces that:

"Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

There is no other name. Salvation from eternal hell is found in no other name. And that is the name we would casually misuse or deliberately drag through the mud?

We try to say that what comes out of our mouths is really no indication of what we have in our hearts. *Yet Scripture always links what comes out of our mouths with our hearts.*

Jesus Himself said this again and again. It was important enough to *Him* to repeat.

"You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks"
(Matthew 12:34, NIV).

“But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man unclean” (Matthew 15:18, NIV).

The bitter, hurtful, or profane words that come out of my mouth are a sign to me that something is terribly wrong in my heart.

Is God concerned with what you say? Yes. Because He knows that there is something greater than what's wrong with your mouth. It's your heart. He knows that it is out of the overflow of the heart that the mouth speaks.

And so today, Lord, open my eyes to the fire and beauty of Your awesome holiness. Touch my lips and I will be clean. In Jesus' name, amen.

C H A P T E R 4 :
THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT

“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God. In it you shall do no work...for in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.”

Exodus 20:8-11

A TIME TO REFLECT

Why does the Lord say a Sabbath rest is so important to us as His people?

If you consistently dishonor the Sabbath principle in your life, somewhere along the line the bills will come due. Things will begin to break down in your life. The breakdown may be physical, emotional, spiritual, financial, or marital. I can't tell you what form His discipline will take, but I know that God loves us too much to allow our self-destructive ten-

dencies to go unchallenged.

He wants time with me.
He wants to walk with me.
He wants to share His heart with me.
He wants a relationship.

Remember what David sang about the Lord:

The LORD is my shepherd;
I shall not want.
He makes me to lie down in green pastures;
He leads me beside the still water.
He restores my soul...
(Psalm 23:1-3).

He *makes* me lie down! If you don't lie down and rest, if you don't seek out those quiet pastures and still waters with your Shepherd, it's not beyond Him to make you.

I wonder if the Sabbath isn't the day when you and I get to stop and remind ourselves...

of who God is,
of the terrible price He paid to buy us back from
Satan's kingdom,
of what He has promised to do in us and through
us,
of what He wants to accomplish in our hearts
and lives, and of the place He is preparing for
us, when all our frantic scurrying across the

face of this tiny planet will only be the dimmest of memories...and we will be caught up in Him alone.

David wrote, “O Lord, you have examined my heart and know everything about me. You know when I sit or stand.... You chart the path ahead of me, and tell me where to stop and rest” (Psalm 139:1-3, TLB).

Isn't that tender? He shows me where to stop and rest! But what if I brush right on by Him and refuse to stop? What if I think I know better, and that I really don't need to rest at all? That would be pretty foolish, wouldn't it? After all, if *God* took a day of rest, and all creation needs to rest then maybe you and I do, too.

Scripture says so often to us, “Won't you just wait on the Lord?” Don't try to go faster than He intends. Find His pace and keep up with Him — neither running ahead nor lagging behind. When you do, you'll enjoy His close fellowship every step of the way.

Please don't miss my point here. Since we live in the New Testament era, I'm not pushing some kind of uptight, legalistic, sunrise-to-sunset “day of rest.” Frankly, *every* day is a Sabbath day of rest for the believer in Jesus Christ. He is our Sabbath rest. And yet...even the principle of “one day for God,” honored by our nation since colonial days, has been completely trampled in the dust of today's pleasure-mad, material-obsessed culture.

We have so little time left for God. Our lives are

so very full, and yet so very empty. We have no room for Him in our thoughts, in our schedules, or in the fabric of our lives. The question is then, “What in the world do I do about it? Do I keep going along with the flow of the world and let them continually erode away my personal times of relationship with the Lord?”

In His love, I believe the Lord is saying this: “You work night and day. When you’re not working, you’re playing so hard you exhaust yourself. You’re busy, busy, busy, with no time for God, no time to evaluate your heart and life. You think that by running at that pace, you’ll get ahead. You think that if you don’t cram every excess hour with work or entertainment, that you will somehow miss out on life and be the loser.” But the Sabbath principle is the exact opposite! The fact is, time set aside for the Lord is never lost time.

Does God have a chance to look into your heart? *When?* Do you give Him time to do so? If not on a Sunday, then *when?* He knows we desperately need such times. It’s as though our spirits were equipped with a rechargeable battery, and we simply run down after a while.

This, I believe, is the spirit of the fourth command. Yes, life can become incredibly hectic and complicated. We always have too much to do and not enough time to do it. But let’s make sure that there is at least one day a week when we have extended time with Him. Because if we don’t resolve it in our minds and write it on our calendars, the world will quickly swallow that time. Before we know it,

the alarm clock will be ringing on Monday morning,
and the opportunity will be lost.

“Be still,” He whispers, “and know that I am
God” (Psalm 46:10).

*And so today, Lord, I will listen for Your
call and submit to Your tender command. In
Jesus' name, amen.*

CHAPTER 5 :
THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT

*“Honor your father and your mother,
that your days may be long upon the land
which the LORD your God is giving you.”*

Exodus 20:12

A COMMAND WITH A PROMISE

If you had a list of the Ten Commandments evenly spaced on a sheet of binder paper and folded that sheet in half, top to bottom, the fifth commandment would be right at the fold.

This is a matter so important to the Lord that Scripture puts it squarely in the center of these commands. I don't think that was an accident. I believe these words are central to the Ten Commandments — and to life itself — because they affect *everything* about your life and mine. Just as the fifth commandment would appear at the fold of the piece of paper, so it also appears at the fold of our lives. In many ways, our destiny hinges on how we respond to

this command. It affects our futures, it affects how we process the past, and it affects our right now — what God can and will do in our lives today.

Notice that this command is the only one of the Ten Commandments with a promise attached:

“Honor your father and your mother, *that your days may be long upon the land which the LORD your God is giving you*” (Exodus 20:12).

Here again, so very clearly, we can see that the motive — the operative principle — behind the Ten Commandments is God’s abiding love for us. They truly are the *tender* commandments.

Why should we honor father and mother? So that we might live. So that we might not be weighed down or taken captive by bitterness. So that we might not come to destruction. So that we might enjoy God’s good gifts to us through the days of our lives. The Lord is saying, “Would you do this? Would you honor the father and mother that I gave you? And if you do, things will be well with you. If you are careful to do this, I will honor your life, I will bless your life, and I will extend your life. Because I love you, however, I must also warn you: if you violate this command, it will affect the whole fabric of your life.”

Some might respond by saying, “How should I honor my parents?” Others have to get by the “why” before we can get to the “how.” *Why* should I do this?

God wants to protect us from destructive

thoughts and attitudes right now. And right now, if I settle this matter of honoring my parents, I can be a different person. A son or daughter who forgives from the heart can be a different kind of parent to his or her own children. An honorable parent. A parent free from bitterness. A parent — and a child — that the heavenly Father can bless and use in unimaginable ways.

No, God doesn't close His eyes or ignore the pain parents sometimes inflict on their own children. He places great value on the home and holds mothers and fathers accountable for their parenting. In Matthew 18:6 (NASB), the Lord Jesus said very sternly, "But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it is better for him that a heavy millstone be hung around his neck, and that he be drowned in the depth of the sea."

The Lord understands the hurt and the pain many children endure, and it does not escape His notice. He takes it very, very seriously. He knows that when a person is abused or neglected at home, it affects him or her greatly, down to the very core.

His Word still teaches us: "Honor your father and mother...that it may go well with you."

So how, then do I do that? How do I honor my mother and father?

By Loving Them

Love, someone said, is best spelled T-I-M-E. You love someone when you spend time with that person.

Maybe you'd love to spend more time with your older parents, but they live far away. It's not always

easy to break away from work or responsibilities to spend a whole day — or three or four days — with them. Yet it's been said that you only really love someone when you sacrifice for them. The Lord proved His love by laying down His life. One of the best ways to show our love for our parents is to endure some of that inconvenience and sacrifice for their sakes.

The truth is, you really can't say you love someone without being willing to give up something for them. Time and energy are two of our most precious commodities...but then, sometimes we're rewarded for that sacrifice in ways we never expected.

All of us know that when it comes to really loving someone, it isn't because everything they've ever done is "worthy" of love and affection. They're not perfect.

But I can tell you this: there are no more potent words in the world to a parent's ears than the three little words "I love you." Nothing else even comes close.

When those words "I love you" and the accompanying physical affection are denied to a parent, it creates a desolation within the soul that sometimes can't be described.

But there is one additional way to keep the fifth commandment in relationship with your parents.

By Forgiving Them

There may have been instances in your life when your parents certainly did not have your best interest in mind. You may have been hurt or abused or neg-

lected because of their selfishness. How do you honor such a parent? How do you walk in obedience to the fifth command? By forgiving him. By forgiving her. Forgiving means, “to let go,” or “to send away.”

Jesus knew what it meant to be ill-treated, abused, and falsely accused. He knew what it meant to have loving words thrown right back in His face. He knew how it felt to be betrayed and abandoned by someone close to Him. He knew what it was to be so misunderstood by His own family that at one point they tried to have Him committed. Yet He forgave. He loved. He laid down His life.

When it comes to true forgiveness, never forget this: *The innocent party almost always pays.* The one who forgives, the one who has been offended, is usually the one who must pay the price. But it is a price worth paying. You can't believe how much it pays to forgive. It is light out of darkness. It is life out of death.

In the end, even though the price may be steep, the one who forgives will know and experience the mighty blessings of God Almighty on his or her life. And how much is that worth? How do you calculate the value of that?

While Jesus taught us that forgiveness should be a daily way of life for all of us, the fact is, you couldn't honor your parents more than to forgive them. They may be guilt-ridden and full of remorse and regret, or they may be oblivious to your pain and hard as nails. They may recognize that they have miserably failed, or they may shrug it off. Nevertheless, *forgive-*

ness is powerful. It will change their lives...and it will change yours.

And just to make sure we understand how profoundly this command applies to us, He made sure it was repeated in the New Testament:

“Honor your father and mother,” which is the first commandment with promise: “that it may be well with you and that you may live long on the earth” (Ephesians 6:2-3).

And so today, Lord, I humbly receive the guidance You have offered from the parents You've given me. In Jesus' name, amen.

CHAPTER 6
THE SIXTH COMMANDMENT

“You shall not murder.”

Exodus 20:13

REMOVING THE
SEEDS OF MURDER

SATAN SEEKS A
FOOTHOLD

God knows very well how far humanity has fallen.

He knows (who better?) what kind of world this has become because of man's rebellion. You and I react with shock to the stories of murder and mayhem on the morning news. But none of it is “news” to Him. He knew the morning news last night. He knew it ten thousand years ago. He knows what the headlines will be tomorrow. He has always known.

He knew every act of violence that would be perpetuated on this old earth in the moment when He looked at Adam in the garden and said, “What have you done?” And He knew even then what the only

possible remedy would be...and what that remedy would cost Him.

He has seen it all before. There was a time when the earth became so filled with violence and bloodshed that he plucked one godly family out of the mess and sent a worldwide flood to wipe the planet clean and begin again.

The sad fact is, when the evil in man's heart is unchecked, God knows that men and women will simply destroy themselves. He understands all too clearly the roots of murder that grow in the human heart. And were it not for His intervening grace and restraining hand, man could very well have eliminated himself from the world and ended his own history — probably a long time ago.

Yet God, in His love, has not allowed that to happen. And that is why, when He met with Moses on the mountain before the eyes of the watching nation, He included these four weighty words among His ten commands: "*You shall not murder.*"

Now, you might be saying, "I've never murdered anyone. And for that matter, I've never committed adultery, so why am I wasting my time with this stuff?" But before you check out on me, look at the Lord's words in Matthew 5 for a moment. It seems that many in His day had read these commandments and were inclined to check out, too. But Jesus caught them (and us) up short when He said these words:

"You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder,' and whoever

murders will be in danger of the judgment. But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, 'Raca!' shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire" (Matthew 5:21-22).

That is murder in the heart. And that is where it all starts.

So how does this sixth commandment reflect the love of God? In what way is "You shall not murder" one of His *tender* commandments? Why would God give us this warning? Because He knows that when I love Him above all else and put Him first in my life, I will not injure anyone. It will not be in my heart to offend, slander, hurt, humiliate, destroy, or write anyone off. Instead, I will have His heart toward men, women, and children.

But what about the blind, empty-headed fools of the world? What about those who have made themselves my enemies?

I will love them. Just as He loved me and went to the cross for me when I was a fool and blind and an enemy of God.

What, then, is the real source of this commandment? What causes people to murder? Matthew 5:21-22 tells us the source very plainly.

According to Jesus, murder begins with *anger*.

People become very angry, so angry that they kill. Yes, to our sorrow, some literally do kill people. But in the Sermon on the Mount, we learn that killing

really begins with what we say. (“Fool!” “Empty-head!”) Murder begins with seeds of hatred and anger that we allow to take root in our hearts.

As in all the issues of our lives, Jesus deals with the root of this commandment, not just the fruit. He is not content to trim off the nettles and poison oak in our lives close to the ground. He wants to uproot the whole poisonous weed. And He tells us that the root of murder is anger...hateful, people-dishonoring anger.

We, like the Pharisees, would rather deal with externals. “Well, I’ve never shot or stabbed anyone. I’ve never put cyanide in anyone’s Tylenol or clubbed anyone from behind with a brass candlestick like they do in the old movies.” But the Lord wants to talk about *internal things*. He wants to talk about what’s really happening in my heart. And He knows that long before I would club anyone over the head in an effort to end his life, I may begin the process with my thoughts and then take it even further with my words. Don’t entertain any false notions here. Words do hurt. Words *can* kill.

Hateful words and unresolved anger in the heart can not only destroy others, it can destroy the one who harbors it. It is murderous whether directed at someone else or directed at yourself.

In the place of these damaging tendencies of our flesh, God wants to cultivate a much different garden in our hearts and lives. That’s why, from my perspective, Galatians 5:22 answers so much of this. God wants us to develop within us — by His Spirit — those healing qualities of love, joy, peace,

patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control. Because when you are filled with the love of God, God's love is the very thing that comes forth from your life.

The Lord said that if I am angry and hateful to someone, I am a murderer in my heart. So how do I deal with that? What are the causes of anger and what do I do with them? Why do we become angry?

Because We Get Hurt

The Lord said to the disciples, "I don't want you to just forgive someone seven times, but seventy times seven!" At first blush, the disciples must have thought, "There's no way. It isn't going to happen. We're not going to buy into this seventy-times-seven deal." But what did they say? "Lord, if You're serious about this, then You'd better increase our faith and change our hearts...because the way we're feeling right now, there's no way we can do anything less than retaliate and let them know how angry and upset we really are." (See Matthew 18:21-22; Luke 17:3-5.)

Because We Get In A Hurry And Become Impatient

Thomas Jefferson affirmed that when he was angry, he would force himself to count to ten. And when he was *really* angry, he'd count to a hundred. There are times when I just count and count until I run out of numbers, because I know that if I stopped counting, I would end up being very sorry.

James said it very simply: “Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath” (James 1:19).

Scripture has this counsel: Ephesians 4:26-27 (NIV) says, “In your anger do not sin’: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold.”

*And so today, Lord, I will value and protect
life...because You do. In Jesus' name, amen.*

C H A P T E R 7
THE SEVENTH COMMANDMENT

“You shall not commit adultery.”

Exodus 20:14

GOD’S FENCE
AROUND
YOUR MARRIAGE

In our fallen human nature, we like to avoid “commands,” don’t we? We didn’t like commands as children, and the truth is, we don’t much like them as adults, either. Words like *can’t*, *shouldn’t* or *must* sound harsh in our ears.

People will say, “Well, I can do what I want to do. It’s my life. I can live the way I want to live and go where I want to go. If there’s a sign that says, ‘Don’t do this,’ I’ll do it anyway, if I can get away with it. If God says, ‘Don’t commit adultery,’ it’s really none of His business.” Yet it is His world, His creation, and it is His business whether or not people obey His commands. He loves people like you and me so much that He has made a list of restrictions to

protect us from that which would be so extremely destructive to our lives and the lives of those we love.

Adultery is one of those things.

Why should God be so concerned about adultery in particular? Why should purity and faithfulness in a marriage be so very important to Him? Because He knows that the home and the church are the two institutions ordained of God on earth to visibly model the love of God. It is in Satan's interest to mar and disfigure both of those models. In particular, Satan seeks the destruction of married love and the family. How quickly we forget that "our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Ephesians 6:12, NIV).

I heard about a counselor who asked the question, "What effect will my actions have if I go through a door called Desire?" He decided to write them down. He said, If I go through that door...

I will grieve the One who redeemed me.

I will drag His sacred name through the mud.

I will have to look Jesus in the eye one day and
give an account of my actions.

I will inflict untold hurt on my wife, who is my
best friend and who has been faithful to me.

I will lose my wife's respect, love, and trust.

I will hurt my beloved daughters.

I will destroy my example and credibility.

I might lose my wife and children forever.

I will shame my family.

I will lose my own self-respect. (Though God could forgive me, could I forgive myself?)
I could form memories and flashbacks that plague future intimacy with my spouse.
I could reap the consequences of diseases.
I could cause a pregnancy that would be a life-long reminder of my sin.
I could invoke lifelong shame and embarrassment on myself.

W H E R E A D U L T E R Y B E G I N S

Some will say, “I’ve never committed adultery and never would. This is a waste of time. This isn’t applicable at all to my life.”

Really? Can you still say that after remembering Jesus’ words in Matthew 5:27-28?

“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”

Who among us hasn’t failed the Lord in this area of mental adultery? And where else does adultery begin, if not in the mind? The truth is, there is no such thing as a one-night stand. An affair begins to play itself out on the stage of imagination long before it occurs in real life.

How does adultery begin to suggest itself to an unguarded heart? Let me show you some sources

that have come up in my counseling with couples through the years.

Immaturity And Conflicts

Immaturity always says, I want what I want when I want it.

I believe the greatest contributor to divorce is not “incompatibility,” but irresponsibility and immaturity. I’ve discovered over the years that virtually every couple goes through the same basic challenges in a marriage. But the difference between the couple that gets divorced and the one that doesn’t is wrapped up in one word: commitment.

Why is commitment such a rare commodity in our world today? Because we enter into marriage looking for someone to serve us, rather than someone to serve. In a word, we are selfish.

Some say that love is based on *passion*. “I’m empty without you, but if I can have you, I’ll be fulfilled and satisfied.” That may be the definition some use for love, but I can promise you it’s not the kind of love that will hold together and last.

Some say that love is based on *need*. “I need you and I’ll never make it if I don’t have you.”

Biblical love is a love that is based on *commitment*. The whole purpose of that kind of love is to serve, satisfy, and fulfill the person to whom you’ve committed your life.

Expectations

We have expectations of people we love, but they often go unmet. We put pressure on these people to

believe that somehow they are the ones who are going to satisfy us, fulfill us, and meet every need we have. God knows that you and I can invest in one another, love one another, and be a blessing to one another, but He is the One who is the satisfier. He is the One who fulfills in every regard.

Lack Of Nurture

Don't deprive your mate of the love and affection — both emotional and physical — that you promised when you stood together before the altar. Don't deprive one another, because if you do, you will become very vulnerable.

A person who commits adultery usually talks about “needing someone to love me.” But what we really need in a relationship isn't to find someone who can love and fulfill us, but someone we can serve. Our greatest need in life is to serve people, and you'll never be a servant to anyone else until first you're a servant to your spouse and family.

Maintaining a healthy love relationship does take a bit of work, but oh, friend, it is worth it a thousand times over. The Scriptures say to submit to one another. When you love and care for someone, you build in that person the capacity to do the same! He or she gets to love you, think of you, pamper you, and put you first, too.

The Lord has made a commitment to you and me as well. He has chosen us and purchased us, and it wasn't with cows. It was a payment beyond price or comprehension.

W h a t I f I ' v e
A l r e a d y F a i l e d ?

I think I could safely say that we have *all* failed in this command. Is there anyone who has never allowed an impure, adulterous thought to linger on the screen of the mind? And the Lord tells us that if we have committed adultery in our mind, it is the same in heaven's eyes as if we'd already followed through on the act.

So what can we do?

*Make a decision to repent and confess your sin to the Lord
Accept His forgiveness
End the relationship now
Thank God*

Praise God for His mercy!

And Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. When Jesus had raised Himself up and saw no one but the woman, He said to her, "Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?" She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said to her, "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more" (John 8:9-11).

And so, today, Lord, help me to be faithful to my life partner — this wonderful person You have given me to love — in every word, every thought, every deed. In Jesus' name, amen.

CHAPTER 8
THE EIGHTH COMMANDMENT

“You Shall Not Steal.”

Exodus 20:15

LETTING GOD
MEET YOUR NEEDS

How do people end up stealing? Some do it knowingly. They borrow money from someone knowing very well they'll never pay it back. Some people steal in even more subtle ways — perhaps robbing from their employers by habitually taking long lunch breaks.

But why would the Lord make “Do not steal” one of the Ten? Why is this so important to His heart that He would include it with restrictions against murder, adultery, and worshiping false gods?

As I pondered that question, I actually went to the Lord to ask Him about it. “Lord,” I prayed, “I believe every one of these commands pertains to Your love for me. They are *tender* commandments. But how does this one fit? How does this eighth command demonstrate Your love?”

The answer, when it hit me, seemed all too obvious.

What God must be saying is this: “I don’t want you stealing because I am your Provider. I want you to understand and believe that I am the One who will supply all your needs. I don’t want you to have to scheme, manipulate, and deceive to obtain things. For then what would you become? A schemer, a manipulator, and a deceiver. I don’t want you to feel responsible for securing your own future.”

The truth is, every time we steal something — whether large or small — we are saying, “I will be my own provider in this instance. If I don’t take it now, I will be the loser.”

But the Lord wants us to understand that when we place our trust fully in Him, we are *never* the loser. Through this commandment, the Lord wanted to say to the people of Israel — and to us as well — Let me provide for you. I want you to trust Me, rest in Me, and be contented with Me.”

The Lord has given us, as Peter says, great and precious promises. He has pledged himself to satisfy and supply our every need.

Why do people steal? Scripture gives us several insights.

Because They Want Instant Happiness

God understands this motivation, as He understands all of Satan’s traps. The Deceiver convinces me that taking something now will give me an immediate lift. It will fill a void in my life and ease that empty discontentment I feel (which can only be

filled by the Lord Himself).

In His tenderness, God wants to spare us from the humiliation and damage stealing can do to our family and to the people we love. In His mercy, He wants to shield us from the curse this activity brings upon our lives.

Proverbs 15:16 says, “Better is a little with the fear of the LORD, than great treasure with trouble.”

Because They Want Security

People sometimes think, *if I can just take this and grab that, it will give me the sense of security I'm longing for.* They think security in riches and “things” will make them happy. Here is what Solomon said about that: “Do not wear yourself out to get rich; have the wisdom to show restraint. Cast but a glance at riches, and they are gone, for they will surely sprout wings and fly off to the sky like an eagle” (Proverbs 23:4-5, NIV).

Because They Want To Attract Friends

Some people actually believe that if you flash around a bunch of money you will get a lot of dates or attract a lot of friends. Ah, but what sort of dates? What kind of “friends”?

Because We've Forgotten About God's Promise Of Care

“Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?”

“Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?”

“Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature?”

“So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

“Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?”

“Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’”

“For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.

“But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you” (Matthew 6:25-33).

The reason people steal is because they've forgotten about God. The reason people deceive, manipulate, and cut ethical corners is because they believe their future lies in their own hands. When people forget who God is, they end up being very possessive and greedy. Rather than trusting God with the blessings they have, they begin to hoard and protect and

guard those things.

But when you know that God is your Provider, it changes everything. It changes your heart. It changes the way you live. And it certainly changes the way you view your possessions.

The reason people steal is because they've forgotten about God. He isn't even part of the equation in their lives. Whatever they believe or say they believe, they are practical atheists, living as though He did not exist.

Trust In God And Be Satisfied

The only way you can keep this commandment is to make a decision to be satisfied. The book of Hebrews says this very pointedly:

Let your character be free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, "I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you," so that we confidently say, "The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid. What shall man do to me?" (Hebrews 13:5-6, NASB)

And so today, Lord, because You have given me everything I need for life and godliness, I will not take anything unless it is from Your hand. In Jesus' name, amen.

C H A P T E R 9
THE NINTH COMMANDMENT

*“You shall not bear false witness
against your neighbor.”*
Exodus 20:16

WORDS THAT WOUND, WORDS THAT HEAL

Why would God include this command, “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor,” as one of the Ten? What does this command have to do with God’s love for us? It amazes me to realize that out of ten commandments, three concern the use of our tongue: taking His name in vain, killing by the words we speak, and now by bearing false witness.

For the Lord to say, “Be very, very careful what you say about people,” illustrates how well our God knows us. He knows the danger and potential for harm in an undisciplined tongue. He knows the unspeakable damage it can do. As Solomon noted, “Death and life are in the power of the tongue” (Proverbs 18:21).

Words That Shape Lives

We damage and destroy people when we speak untrue words about them. Jesus Himself felt the sting and injustice of such treatment. In Matthew 26:59-63, the religious leaders of the day looked for false evidence to use against Him. They searched for something — anything — that could undercut His reputation. Why? Because He had the esteem and attention of the public — something they fiercely coveted. So they looked to destroy Him any way they could, knowing that words were every bit as destructive as sharp stones.

But I believe “bearing false witness” goes well beyond bringing faulty evidence into a judicial setting. As with the other commands, the Lord intended this to apply to a wide spectrum of everyday life settings.

Sometimes I want to shout it out loud on a rooftop: *Life and death are in the power of the tongue!* What you say (and what you do not say) and how you say something (and how you neglect to say something) will either build an individual up or — board by board, nail by nail — tear that individual down into a pile of rubble.

“Is that bearing false witness?” you ask. It certainly is. When we are not walking in the power of God’s Spirit, false, damaging, crippling words will flow right out of our old fleshly nature — words that we cannot call back, no matter how we long to do so. Whenever you say something to an individual or about an individual that is less than what God would say to that individual, you are bearing false witness.

And God takes such matters very, very seriously.

What *does* He want us to say to others? He is very specific about that.

Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body.... Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God (Ephesians 4:25, 29-30, NIV).

What kind of words ought we to speak? Building words. Benefiting words. Helpful words. Uplifting words. But when we utter false, demeaning, bitter words to one another, it grieves the Holy Spirit. Think of it! Our reckless words actually bring a pang of pain to the heart of God. Why? Because our Creator knows how vulnerable we are. He knows how frightfully we damage one another with our careless use of the tongue.

If you don't believe it, read James 3:8, NIV.

No man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

What does poison do? Poison sickens and kills. And it doesn't take very much! Nor does it take much poison from the tongue to sicken a relation-

ship, alienate a loved one, or destroy a friendship of many years.

When your mouth is filled with gratitude and thanksgiving, there simply isn't going to be room for false, bitter, or cynical words. When your heart is overflowing with praise, you can climb to the top of a water tower, spread your praise to the winds, and never, never find yourself wishing you could call those words back.

I go back to praise.

Praise is the last thing I want to remember when I get up from my knees and walk away. I want to remember whom I've been conversing with. I've been talking to the One who can do anything. I've given it all to Him, so now I can walk away saying, "God, thank You for letting me be with You for these few moments. I praise You and bless You."

In fact, His praise endures forever.

And so today, Lord, may people around me feel they're in a "safe place" because I speak only the truth. In the name of the One who is Truth, amen.

C H A P T E R 10
THE TENTH COMMANDMENT

“You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor’s.” Exodus 20:17

TRUE CONTENTMENT

Once you start coveting, you’re never satisfied. Contentment slips out the back door of your life like an unloved child.

And contentment, I believe, is the bottom line of this final commandment.

God knows very well what happens to people when they are caught up in unbridled envy. What God really intends for us is that we would be contented...contented with who we are...contented with what we have...contented with Him.

A covetous person is someone with a severe craving for the possessions or life circumstances of others. It’s not just a casual “wouldn’t it be nice if...”; it is strong. *“I want what you have, because I feel that is what will satisfy me and make me happy.”*

A covetous individual tends to see the world only in terms of how it benefits his own immediate needs. Short-term satisfaction elbows out long-term goals and deeply held values. After reflecting on this tenth commandment, I've come to a conclusion: I am extremely thankful God doesn't give me everything I ask for. He sees the big picture, while I see only a tiny slice of it. And so much of what I see in that tiny slice of reality is colored with "me."

The fact is, God knows exactly what you and I need. He knows when we need what we need. He knows how much we need of what we need. And He has a way of seeing to it that I receive what I need at just the right time...not my time, perhaps, but the right time.

Psalms 23 tells us that He is our shepherd, that He will lead us, and that we will have no lack. Hebrews 13:5 (NIV) says, "Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, 'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.'"

Why would the Lord say these things?

Because He knows what coveting and greed will do to a human life. He understands the devastation it will bring, and in His love He would spare us from that.

Why would the Lord say, "You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor's"? Why would He make that the last item of His Ten Commandments? Because God

knows a few things about coveting.

He Knows That What We Covet Will Not Last

The very things people long to possess and hold in their hands will eventually slip between their fingers.

2 Corinthians 4:18 (NIV) says:

So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

The Lord is saying, “Life on earth is uncertain and fragile enough as it is; I want you to concentrate on those things that will last.” Clothes aren’t going to last. Cars and houses and toys aren’t going to last. Those things are temporal. Two seconds after you die, they won’t mean a thing to you — they’ll be left behind to plague the lives of your children.

He Knows That What We Covet Will Be A Burden To Us

If you don’t believe that, read Psalm 51. David had coveted his neighbor’s wife. And because he was in a position to take whatever he wanted, he took her. Psalm 51 was written in the aftermath. They are the words of a broken man...a man who longed with all his heart to turn back the clock but knew he could not. He wrote:

I admit my shameful deed — it haunts me

day and night. It is against you and you alone I sinned and did this terrible thing. You saw it all... (Psalm 51:3-4, TLB).

For the rest of his days David endured the wrenching emotions of a man who watched his family sink into heartbreak and ruin. Rape, murder, incest, disgrace, betrayal, rebellion...it never stopped.

David had thought, "There's an empty place inside me, and if I could just possess Uriah's wife, I think I would be satisfied and fulfilled." But David discovered something worse than an empty place in his heart. It was a heart shattered into ten thousand pieces.

God knows how burdensome the things we covet can become in our lives. The weight of them can distract us, press down on us, and squeeze all of the simple joys out of life.

He Knows That Covetousness Is Destructive

No one said it more clearly than Paul to his young friend, Timothy:

But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. *People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for*

money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

(1 Timothy 6:6-10, NIV)

He Knows That Covetousness Is Deceptive

In Luke 12:15 (NIV), Jesus says: “Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.”

Our value does not lie in what we possess.

Is that a revolutionary thought?

Our value doesn’t spring from what we wear, what we drive, or where we live. Our value is wrapped up in the amazing fact that Jesus Christ, the mighty Son of God and Creator of the world, loved us enough to die for us. He is the One who gives worth and value to our lives. He paid the price and purchased our salvation. But when it comes to those material things of our lives, there will always be something better, something nicer, something newer (or in the case of computers, something *faster*). Coveting such things is a dead-end street, and it is extremely deceptive.

Don’t play the comparison game. Don’t compare yourself with others. Don’t toy with those thoughts in the back of your mind. Don’t look at the guy in the next office or the couple in the house next door. Don’t measure yourself by the things others have. Don’t compare yourself with what someone else has accomplished or attained. Don’t go around with a measuring tape seeing how much they have or how far they’ve gone compared to how much you have

and how far you've gone. If you have more, it'll just make you proud. If you have less, you'll become envious and begin to covet.

He Knows That Contentment Is A Process

Scripture is very clear about that. In Philippians 4:11 (NIV), Paul writes: "I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances." He *learned* contentment from the Lord. It didn't happen overnight. J.B. Phillips paraphrased Paul's words like this:

I know now how to live when things are difficult and I know how to live when things are prosperous. In general and in particular I have learned the secret of facing either plenty or poverty. I am ready for anything through the strength of the one who lives within me (Philippians 4:12-13, Phillips).

God Knows That True Contentment Brings Peace

People lust after possessions and success and all those things yet pay a tremendous price for it in their family and their home. They want more and more but are never satisfied.

It is wrong to want success in your life? Is that a problem, you ask? No, I hope you are as successful as you can be. But if that's the aim and goal of your life, I will tell you that when you get there (wherever "there" may be), it won't be enough.

When I say that contentment brings peace, what do I mean? I mean that it is in those personal times with God — even in the midst of difficult, heart-

breaking circumstances — that you and I learn true contentment.

And so today, Lord, I will covet only those things that You know will satisfy me and fulfill me. In Jesus' name, amen.

C O N C L U S I O N

God knows everything about us, and as Proverbs 2:8 (NIV) tells us, “He guards the course of the just and protects the way of his faithful ones.”

How does He guard your path in life? Many ways. And one of those ways is through His Ten Commandments. Oh, how they reveal His heart! All the way through the Scriptures, you see it...the Lord’s care for us. He always seems to be there.

The psalmist said in Psalm 119:97, “Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day.”

He was saying, “Lord, I just love Your Word. Your law means everything to me. I think about it over and over again as the days of my life speed by.”

The Ten Commandments are, more than anything else, a full-hearted love letter from God to His people. A fence? Yes, that too. But listen for a moment to the excitement — the *passion* — in the psalmist’s voice as he describes his experience with the commands of God’s Word:

I meditate on you precepts and consider your ways. I delight in your decrees; I will not neglect your word.... My soul is consumed with longing for your laws at all times....

Your statutes are my delight; they are my counselors....

I run in the path of your commands, for you

have set my heart free....
Direct me in the path of your commands, for
there I find delight....
The law from your mouth is more precious
to me than thousands of pieces of silver
and gold
(Psalm 119:15-16, 20, 24, 32, 35, 72, NIV).

Why should I love His commands? Why should
I love those things with all my heart?

Because His Word Will Keep Me From Disaster
Proverbs 13:13 says:

He who despises the word will be destroyed,
but he who fears the commandment will
be rewarded.”

A person who resists, scorns, and rejects God’s
Word will meet with destruction. I wish I could say
it in a nicer way, but I know it to be true and no
overstatement. As a pastor I see it all the time. It’s
one of those things that turns a pastor’s hair prema-
turely gray. People say, “I don’t need God, and I
don’t need His Word. I don’t care about His com-
mands and requirements. I don’t care to hear His
warnings. I’ll do what I want to do.” That person’s
life will come to disaster in one way or another —
and God’s Word is not shy about saying so.

Because His Word Brings Deep Satisfaction
Psalm 119:92-93 (TLB) says: “I would have

despaired and perished unless Your laws had been my deepest delight. I will never lay aside your laws, for you have used them to restore my joy and health.”

Because His Word Provides A Foundation For My Life

God’s original intention was that His Word would be the foundation of my life, to stabilize me through life’s many storms. Obedience to these commands of God isn’t like insanity, where you continually do the same thing and never get any results. Faithful obedience to God is the very pathway to the richest life you can possibly live. Psalm 19 reaffirms this over and over again.

In verse 7, the text says God’s Word will make you wise.

The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple.

The word *simple* means undiscerning. It means I really can’t distinguish between good and bad, right and wrong. How appropriate this concern is for today, as all the lines of morality and righteousness are being deliberately warped and blurred. The Lord’s commands will help you when you find yourself saying, “Should I or shouldn’t I? Is this right or wrong? Is this a good idea or a bad one? Will this help me or destroy me? I really don’t know.” The Lord says, “If you will walk in obedience to My commands, you will become an extremely wise person, where you once were naive or undiscerning.”

Verse 8 (NIV) of Psalms 19 says that God's commands will bring joy to your heart and life.

The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart.

You and I hear people say, "I'm not happy." Or "I just want to be happy." So people will counsel, "Go on a cruise. Buy a car. Use your credit cards and have a good time." But the psalmist says, "What brings joy to my heart, Lord, are Your Word and promises."

Joy to the heart? This description of the Lord's commands runs directly counter to Satan's arguments. Isn't the Lord a killjoy? Aren't people who follow God's commands grim, colorless, and uptight, with no sense of fun, no sense of humor? Isn't that how Hollywood and the entertainment industry have portrayed Christians for generations?

We shouldn't be surprised; it's just one more element of Satan's ongoing smear campaign.

Verse 8 (NIV) also says God's commands will enlighten your eyes.

The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes.

Listen, *the Bible will turn the light on for you!* If you can't see, are confused, and aren't sure what you're looking at or what you've got, the Lord says to you, "I'll turn the lights on. I'll enlighten your eyes."

I'll help you to see more keenly than you ever thought you could see."

Eagle's Wings

"I bore them on eagles' wings," the Lord reminded Moses.

He still does. He's still doing that today. He's still swooping down and helping. He's still plucking us out of free fall and soaring into the heavens while we hang on for the ride. Do you know why?

Because we can't live by these commands in our own strength. We can't fulfill them. We can't do it. As many have correctly said, the Christian life isn't difficult, it's *impossible*. Only He can enable me to live this way, and I am deceived to think otherwise.

Jesus said, "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill" (Matthew 5:17). How true. He is the One who fulfills all things for me. Hallelujah! God's own Son came down from heaven so that I could trust in Him and depend on Him to help me do what I could never do.

For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit (Romans 8:34).

Rediscover the Ten Commandments as a tender message of love from a protective and affectionate Father God

Once you've read Ron Mehl's exuberant reinterpretation of the Ten Commandments, you'll have a new understanding of the Biblical context that defines these simple guidelines for living—not as harsh, restrictive rules, but as a tender love letter from a wise, all-knowing Father.

Devoting a chapter to each commandment, Ron shows how God uses them to remove the confusion about right and wrong in today's relativistic culture, protect us from the consequences of our own moral weakness, and guide our thinking and actions in every situation.

As Ron explains: "The Ten Commandments will keep us from destruction. Carefully heeding these ten warning signs in the power of the Holy Spirit will change the whole course of our lives. It will allow us to discover our very destiny as a child of God."