



July 2022

Words of Life Ten Commandments 1

**Readings,
Reflections,
Prayers**

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Monday, July 4: Deuteronomy 4:1-14

This summer we'll reflect on the Ten Commandments. Through His commands, God gives us His "Owner's Manual" for full and godly lives, healthy neighbourhoods, and a safe, sustainable world. God, the Creator of all things (including us) surely knows best how everything works. Why wouldn't we listen to His wisdom?

These are basic principles by which God created the universe, the Earth, human society, and each of us. If we want to live full and satisfying lives, in good relationships with God, His creation, and our neighbours, we will live by these commands. They simply work. We don't keep God's commands to earn our salvation or to be good enough for God. However, obeying God's commands is a key way we express our love for God. We follow His wisdom to honour Him, glorify Him, and demonstrate His love to our world.

"Deuteronomy" literally means "Second Law." It is a retelling and expansion of many of the things we read about in Exodus, including the Ten Commandments (which are also recorded in Exodus 20). When we think of God's commands – like the Ten Commandments, for example – we can have the attitude: "*Following God takes all the fun out of life. I don't want to listen to anyone. I can make my own decisions.*" In fact, God's commands are intended to give life. "*Follow my commands so you may live ...*" God says (4:1).

God's commands

- are NOT tests to see if we can achieve a standard of perfection.
- are NOT kill-joys intended to take all the fun out of life.
- are NOT unnecessary restrictions to make life miserable.

God's commands

- ARE boundaries that help us keep ourselves, other people, and our community safe for all.
- ARE directions for how to live life fully, joyfully, peacefully, completely, lovingly, and well.
- ARE wisdom: God knows how we work best, how creation works best, and how community works best. If we follow His wisdom, life goes well for us, our family, neighbourhood, and world.

Through His commands, God is giving us the "Owner's Manual" for life. Why wouldn't we listen to the wisdom of the One who designed and created us and the universe? After all, the Maker knows best.

Which of God's commands do I find hard to follow? Why? Will I pray about that? Am I open to change?

*God, my good and loving Lord,
I acknowledge all the sins which I have committed every day in my life,
whether in thought, word or deed.
I ask for forgiveness from the depths of my heart for offending You and others
and repent of my old ways.
I have also omitted to do what Your holy law requires of me.
Help me by Your grace to change,
to sin no more and to walk in the way of righteousness
and to praise and glorify Your Name,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
Amen.*

Tuesday, July 5: Deuteronomy 6

The "Statement of Faith" of Israel is this: "*Listen, O Israel. The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. And you must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength*" (6:4-5). Notice this is a **statement of theology, belief, and conviction**: there only is one true God, the God who reveals Himself to us through Scripture. It is also a **statement of action**: I personally need to respond to God by how I live. Intellectual agreement is not enough. I am called into a loving relationship with God, in action.

God is showing us the importance of hearing, knowing, and living His commands. It is one thing to **hear** God's word. It is another thing to **know** God's Word intellectually. It is one step further to discipline yourself to **live** out God's Word. "I may 'know' something," writes Linda Cannell, "but what is more important is that I have 'learned' something." "Learning" means that I actually live it out in practice.

Cannell asks, "Is biblical literacy knowing facts about the Bible? Is it enough just to know the major themes and concepts of Scripture? Is it adequate to know in general story form, the most popular stories in Scripture? What will help persons fashion a suitable frame of reference for biblical understanding and practice of the Christian faith?" The answer is found in Deuteronomy 6: there's a fourth step, beyond hearing, knowing, and living God's commands. It is one (fourth) step further to pass on the faith, to **teach** God's Word so others know Him, love Him, and follow Him, in action, as well.

Francis of Assisi is credited with saying, "Preach the gospel at all times. If necessary, use words." As we seek to share Jesus' love with our family, friends, colleagues and neighbours, this is wise counsel.

Our behaviour – how we live – is at least as influential as what we teach – what we (say we) believe. Our actions speak at least as loudly as our words. Our challenge is to put our faith into practice in such a way that people see our convictions in our conversations. People see our doctrine in our daily actions. God calls us to live out His word consistently. In what ways do I fall short? Why do I find that so difficult?

I can – I need – to pray for God's help. I also need to discipline myself to live faithfully. How will I cultivate self-control and discipline to do what is right? How can I pass on the faith, in deed and word?

*You are great and wonderful, my Lord and my God.
And yet I am only a dull peasant
if I imagine I can even begin to understand and appreciate who you are.
I am ignorant of so much within myself.
How can I imagine I know you?
I am less than nothing compared to you.
You are so great.
What you have done is so amazing.
Your works are so beyond comprehension.
What little I know of you is so incredible.
How great is your goodness, O Lord.
May all created things praise you, God.
You love us so much you welcome us into a relationship with yourself.
Here on earth it is as if we are in exile –
how incredible that you come to us.
However good we may be, we can never be good enough for you ...
And yet in your love, grace, and generosity you welcome us into your arms.
Your love is infinite.
You are so great and wonderful, my Lord and my God.
Amen*

adapted from Teresa of Avila (1515-1582)

Wednesday, July 6: Deuteronomy 5:1-7 (Command #1 – No other Gods)

Why should we listen to God? Why should we take His wisdom seriously? Because He is the One who created the universe and everything in it. He is the One who saved His people from slavery in Egypt. He is the One who has saved us from sin and death through Jesus. He is the One who loves us unconditionally.

God gives us His commands because **He loves us**. Not to make us miserable.

Because He loves us and set us free from the bondage of sin, He wants us to stay free. He doesn't want us to regress back into behaviours that enslave us, cause us guilt, and haunt our memories. The truth is we

can become enslaved by work (it becomes our central purpose for living), leisure (we're obsessed with getting the golf ball in the hole or the latest video game, to the point this is all we care about), addictions, and a variety of distractions. We need to look at our lives critically.

- What guides my heart, mind, and soul? (Where does God fit in?)
- What gives me joy? What is my purpose for living? (Where does Jesus fit in?)
- What shapes the important decisions of my life? (Where does the Spirit fit in?)
- Am I enslaved by something? (What, other than God, Jesus, and the Spirit controls me?)

How do I feel about the answers I'm hearing?

Life is only full and satisfying when God – and God alone – is first and foremost. Think about His amazing grace and amazing love. Why would allow anything or anyone else be first in our lives?

What do I need to do about it?

*God, like Paul, we can sometimes feel life has dealt us an unfair deal.
We wonder how we will cope with bereavement and loss,
painful endings and uncertain futures,
wounds, inflicted by self or others,
burdens we bear and heavy loads we carry.
How do we face the dark night of the soul
the harsh reality of another day,
the darkness of the sun going down on a relationship, a job, a life?*

*God, your Son and servants in the past have been anxious too,
have lived with danger, doubt and darkness.
Their example reminds us courage does not mean an absence of fear,
rather the ability to live with it.*

*Help us, God, to utilize the resources around us and within us
to get us through.
To lean on friends and family when we need to,
to accept help and company,
to tell how it is, to them, to you.
To realize that to share life with others and with you is not to fail.
For in our weakness, you are our strength.
Amen*

Church of Scotland

Thursday, July 7: Mark 12:28-34 (Command #1 – No other Gods)

The first of these commands, "*You shall have no other gods before (or besides) me,*" emphasizes there is only one true God. In ancient Israel, surrounding cultures believed in multiple deities who controlled the weather, crops, having children, success in war, etc. They prayed, sacrificed, and devoted themselves to one or all of these many gods, depending on the need of the moment.

We do not pray to a god of the harvest, god of war, god of rain, god of fertility, and so forth. But whatever our heart is obsessed with – whatever we build our lives upon – whatever controls our decision-making – that is our God. It might be God/Jesus/the Spirit. Or it might be something else ...

Philip Yancey muses, "*What modern idols (or gods) make God seem ... trivial? What tends to reduce the surprise, the passion, the vitality of my relationship with God? Most days I am not so conscious of choosing between a god and God; the alternatives do not present themselves so clearly. Rather, I find God edged out by a series of small distractions. A car that needs repair, last minute plans for an upcoming trip, a leaky*

*gutter, a friend's wedding – these distractions, mere trivialities, may lead to a form of **forgetfulness** that resembles idolatry (worshipping other gods) in its most dangerous form. The busyness of life, including all its religious busyness, can crowd out God. I confess that some days I meet people, work, make decisions, talk on the phone, all without giving God a single thought."*

When Jesus is asked which command is most important, He goes right back to the creed of Deuteronomy 6:4-5: *"The most important commandment is this: 'Listen, O Israel. The LORD our God is the one and only LORD. And you must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength'"* (Mark 12:29-30).

God's command calls for a life focused on Him. We are invited into a loving relationship, in which we make God, His word, will, and kingdom, the joyful obsession of our hearts. In practice, what does that look like?

*When the storms of life are raging,
God, I ask, 'Where will I find justice and truth?'
When every conversation is loaded with anxiety and tension,
when all my beliefs are thrown into question,
and my bearings are lost in battering winds of change,
God, I ask, 'Who has integrity?
Who can understand? Whom can I trust?'*

*When the everyday walk of life is a push against the grain,
when no one is clear,
when no one says what they mean and situations get cloudy,
when I am tired of trying, battle-weary and bruised by life's blows,
God, I ask, 'Where can I shelter from the wind?
Where can I hide from the storm?'*

*When I hear nothing but the sound of the storm –
not even my own voice,
God, will you please hear:
my weak whisper in the wind,
my plea for peace,
my prayer for calm.
Stand by me while I draw strength,
shelter me that I may know how to stand up again.
Amen*

Church of Scotland

Friday, July 8: John 14:1-14 (Command #1 – No other Gods)

Who is this God who desires to be Lord of my life? He is the God who delivers the Israelites out of Egypt. He is the God who shows His love to us, supremely in Jesus. He is the God who is with us, always.

Our God is not an abstract philosophical idea. He is the One who has done things in the past. God became a human being in Jesus, so each of us can know Him in a personal way. Jesus died on the cross for us, to save us from our sin, so a perfect personal relationship between God and ourselves is possible. He is the one who rose from the dead. He is the God who lives in our lives in the present, now and always.

Sometimes in a multi-cultural, religiously pluralistic culture, we accept the line that *"All religions are true; it doesn't matter what you believe."* None of the great world religions teaches that. Islam doesn't. Hinduism doesn't. Certainly Judaism doesn't. Neither does Christianity. *"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one come to the Father except through me"* (John 14:6). This does not mean we are intolerant people. We are not narrow-minded. We do have conviction. We do know there is only ONE true God – this God who saved the Israelites, revealed Himself to us in Jesus, died on the cross, and rose from the dead. He is

unique. We put our trust in Him alone. We invite others to trust in Him alone. We respect others' beliefs and choices, but we know that Jesus is the one true way, truth, and source of life.

Another issue in this commandment is one of practical loyalty. Philip Yancey writes, "A friend of mine was stopped dead in her tracks by a skeptic. After listening to her explain her faith, he said this: 'But you don't **ACT** like you believe God is alive.'" We can SAY we believe in Jesus. But do we ACT like God is alive?

Does the fact that you believe God is real and Jesus is the one true God make a practical difference in your life? "This commandment," writes John Maxwell, "calls for a life dominated by a relationship with God ... God must control every area of our lives. He must dominate our checkbook and fill our calendar."

Is your life dominated by your relationship with God? What controls and influences the decisions you make in your life? Do you ACT like you believe God is alive?

In practice, is God your God? Or something else? The "other things" may be very good: concern about a secure retirement, our family, career, or health ... But we can be so concerned about "good" things we forget the "best" thing of all, a personal relationship with the God who loves us. How about you?

*Jesus is the Light. Therefore, he is the Sun of our souls.
Jesus is the Life. Therefore, we live in him.
Jesus is Holiness. Therefore, he is the slayer of sin.
Jesus is Salvation.
Therefore, it is he who has purchased the whole world with his blood.
Jesus is the Resurrection.
Therefore, he has set free those who are in the tomb
and has made them new a second time by his blood.
Jesus is the Way. Therefore, he is the guide to his Father.
Jesus is the Door. Therefore, he is the guide into paradise.
Jesus is the Shepherd. Therefore, he is the seeker after the sheep which is lost.
Jesus is the Lamb. Therefore, he is the cleanser of the world from its impurity.
Jesus is my God. Therefore, I will ascribe glory to him,
for to him belong glory and power for all ages and ages.
Amen.*

Anonymous (4th Century)

Saturday, July 9: John 14:15-29 (Command #1 – No other Gods)

"If you **love** me," says Jesus, "you will _____" (John 14:15). Fill in the blank: _____

"You will **obey my commands**." To make sure we get the point, Jesus says, again, "Those who accept my commandments and **obey them** are the ones who **love me**" (14:21). And again, "All who love me will do what I say ... Anyone who **doesn't love me will not obey me**" (14:23-24). Do we get the point???

In the Bible, **love** is not an emotion. **Love** is a choice. **Love** is action. Reread [1 Corinthians 13:4-7](#); it's all about action. Although I may "love" someone emotionally, I choose to follow through with actions that honour my love, by how I live. I behave in loving ways. I do loving things. As I do so, my love becomes a lifestyle through which I honour, please, and bless the person I love. For instance, I (emotionally) love my wife and kids very much. I also choose to try to show my love practically every day. I choose to express love through my words, choices, and actions. (To say, "I love my wife" but never show that in practice – or (even worse) say or do unloving or hurtful things – means my talk about love doesn't mean much)

If I love God, I don't rely on an emotional feeling either. If I say "I love God" but never show that in practice – if I'm too busy to give Him a thought or any time, or (even worse) blame Him for my problems or use His name in vain – my talk about love doesn't mean much. Like love for a person, love for God is lived out through my words, choices, and actions. My love for God must be a lifestyle in which I seek to honour,

please, and bless God. Love for God is a choice I make to act upon, every situation in every day.

The good news is Jesus promises His personal presence, the Spirit, to be my "wonderful counsellor." Jesus tells us **three** times: "*If you love me, obey what I command*"(above). He says **four** times:

- "*I will ask the Father, and **he will give you** another Comforter/Encourager/Counselor/Advocate, **who will never leave you**. He is the Holy Spirit, who leads into all truth.*"(14:16-17)
- "*When I am raised to life again, you will know that I am in my Father, and **you are in me**, and **I am in you**.*"(14:20)
- "*All who love me will do what I say. My Father will love them, and **we will come and make our home with each of them**.*"(14:23)
- "*When the Father sends the Comforter/Encourager/Counselor/Advocate as my representative – that is, the Holy Spirit – **He will teach you everything and will remind you of everything I have told you**. I am leaving you with a gift – peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don't be troubled or afraid.*"(14:26-27)

The Spirit guides me as I read Scripture, pray, talk with wise Christian friends, and seeks His guidance. Lord, help me make wise choices that honour you, today ...

*Christ has no body now but mine,
No hands, no feet on earth but mine,
Mine are the eyes with which he looks with compassion on this world,
Mine are the feet with which he walks to do good,
Mine are the hands with which he blesses all the world.
Mine are the hands, mine are the feet,
Mine are the eyes – I am his body.
Let nothing disturb me, and let nothing frighten me.
All things are passing away:
God never changes.
Patience obtains all things.
Whoever has God lacks nothing; God alone suffices.
Amen*

Teresa of Avila (1515–1582)

Sunday, July 10: Psalm 1 (Command #1 – No other Gods)

One of the teachers of religious law is listening to Jesus. He is impressed by Jesus' words, so he asks, "*Of all the commandments, which is the most important?*"

Jesus replies, "*The most important commandment is this: 'Listen, O Israel! The Lord our God is the one and only Lord. And 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 neighbor as yourself.' No other commandment is greater than these.*"

The teacher of religious law replies, "*Well said, Teacher. You have spoken the truth by saying that there is only one God and no other. And I know it is important to love him with all my heart and all my understanding and all my strength, and to love my neighbor as myself. This is more important than to offer all of the burnt offerings and sacrifices required in the law.*"

Realizing how much the man understands, Jesus says to him, "*You are not far from the Kingdom of God.*" (Mark 12:28-34).

As we think about what it means to love God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength, Psalm 1 helps us think through what it means to love God and honour Him through our words and our actions. What is God saying to you?

*We pray to the God, Creator of all things,
to Jesus Christ, our Saviour,
and to the Spirit, our Comforter,
who have called us from darkness into light.*

You made visible the everlasting structure of the Universe and set the Earth on its foundations.

*You open our eyes so we can recognise you,
most high among the highest, holy and surrounded by holiness.*

You create all that has breath and watch over it.

*For all generations, you have been faithful, just, and wonderful.
Wisely you have created, and wisely you have kept things in being.*

To all who trust in you, you are faithful, kind, and merciful.

You give help to those in peril and rescue to those without hope.

You invite all people to love you through Jesus, your beloved Son.

Please, Lord, be our help and our support.

Free us from our troubles.

Raise up those who have fallen.

*Give help to the poor, health to the sick, and bring home those who have wandered away.
Feed the hungry, ransom captives, give strength to the weak, and courage to the faint-hearted.*

*Let all people come to know that you alone are God, that Jesus is Your son,
and that we are your people and the sheep of your flock.*

Forgive us our wickednesses and injustices, our sins and transgressions.

Do not weigh us down with the burden of our sins.

Purify us and direct the paths we take so we go forward in purity.

May your strength preserve us from all wrongdoing.

May all we do be good and acceptable to you.

Lord, let your face shine upon us so we may peacefully enjoy all good things.

May your powerful hand be a roof over our heads.

Give peace and harmony to us and to all the inhabitants of the Earth.

You alone can give us these gifts and confer these favours on us.

*We put our trust in you through Jesus Christ,
our high priest, the guardian of our souls.*

*Through him be glory and majesty to you now
and through all generations until the end of time.*

Amen

Clement of Rome (died 99 AD)

Monday, July 11: Deuteronomy 5:1-10 and 1 John 1 (Command #2 – No idols)

"I am a jealous God," says the Lord. Does that sound odd to you?

Think of it like this ... In a wedding, I ask the couple questions like: *"Will you have this woman/man to be your wedded wife/husband, to live together according to God's ordinance in the holy estate of marriage? Will you love her/him, comfort her/him, honour and keep her/him, in sickness and in health; and, forsaking all others, keep only unto her/him, so long as you both shall live?"* The answer is, *"I will."*

The couple give their vows: *"I take you to be my wedded wife/husband, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better or for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death do us part, according to God's holy ordinance; and thereto I give you my troth (or solemn promise)."*

People go into marriage with the promise and assumption of permanence and loyalty to their spouse. And they expect permanence and loyalty in return. In the context of the covenant of marriage, it is a perfectly proper to be concerned about unfaithfulness or concern about being replaced by a rival: a bride says to her partner, *"Place me like a seal over your heart, or like a seal on your arm. For love is as strong as death, and*

its jealousy is as enduring as the grave. Love flashes like fire, the brightest kind of flame. Many waters cannot quench my love; neither can rivers drown it" (Song of Songs 8:6-7).

Being "jealous" in this context is not envy, it is "a passionate concern for loyalty and faithfulness." What would we think of a wife who was not concerned about whether her husband is faithful to her or not? What would we think of a husband who is not jealous of his wife's love and who would not burn with jealousy if she sought the love of another man? What would think if God did not care about our faithfulness? What would think of a God who didn't care if we wandered off after other gods?

God says, "*I am a jealous God.*" That is a good thing. This means God takes His promise of love for us so seriously, He doesn't want us wandering off after other anyone or anything less than Himself. In the first command, He says, "*Have no other gods before me.*" In the second commandment, He says, "*Ok, you have no other Gods. Know this: I love you so much, and I want you to love only me. I will be jealous if you love anyone or anything but me.*" He knows nothing and no one else can satisfy us. He knows we will come to harm if we put someone or something else first in our lives.

At the end of this passage, God says, "*I lavish unfailing love for a thousand generations on those who love me and obey my commands*" (Deuteronomy 5:10). God loves us so much. This is good news.

The truth is God has given His love to us completely. He loves us so much He gave us His one and only Son. Do I love Him, faithfully, in return? As I make choices and live out my life, do I ask myself, first, "Is my life lived in loyalty to God?" "Do my decisions honour the Lord?" As I move through my day, do I pray to Him constantly, bringing all the issues of my life under His direction?

1 John 1 reminds me that I always fall short. I fail. I need to be honest about that. But God delights to forgive. Confess your struggles to God and know the joy of His forgiveness ... Come with confidence, knowing that your life – your past, present and future – is safe in His hands.

*O Lord, give me purity of lips,
a clean and innocent heart,
and rightness of action.*

*Give me love, joy, peace,
patience, kindness, goodness,
faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.*

*Give me the Spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and strength,
the Spirit of knowledge and godliness.*

*Always lead me to seek your face
with all my heart, all my soul, all my mind.
Let me have a contrite and humble heart in your presence—
to prefer nothing to your love.*

*Most high, eternal, and indescribable Wisdom,
drive away from me the darkness of blindness and ignorance.
Most high and eternal Strength, rescue me.
Most high and eternal Courage, help me.
Most high and incomprehensible Light, illuminate me,
Most high and infinite Mercy, have mercy on me.
Amen.*

Gallican Sacramentary (8th Century)

Tuesday, July 12: Deuteronomy 5:8-10 and 1 John 2:1-17 (Command #2 – No idols)

God says, "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 ..." On the surface, this looks like God saying, "Don't make a statue of a bird, or cow, or fish and worship it." Many cultures used to make such images as idols as a focus for worship. The Israelites made just such a golden calf during their desert wanderings (Exodus 32). That ended badly.

At some points in history, people have used this command to prohibit any religious art. They felt ANY religious art was an idol. Some Christians destroyed statues, paintings, and stained-glass windows in churches and cathedrals, in "obedience" to this command. It is true, people can venerate statues of saints, medallions, or other talismans as "good luck charms." The relic/charm can seem more important than God.

But this commandment is NOT about critiquing art – statues, paintings, or anything else. God is a creative, artistic genius Himself. Look at the world around us. God's art gallery (creation) can help us worship Him. In the Old Testament, God commands His people to make beautiful art for worship (Exodus 24-31).

This IS a command about **our hearts**. Idolatry is about an exchange we can make in our hearts. It happens when we exchange something – anything – that isn't God to replace God Himself. It happens when we allow God to be pushed out of the centre of our lives and allow something else to be the most important factor in shaping our lives. We can put all sorts of things in God's place ...

- Our career can dominate every choice we make.
- Money or our portfolio can shape every decision.
- What others think of us – our dress, haircut, fitness, accessories – may be most important.
- Hockey, golf, bridge, curling, vacationing, video games can be number one ...

This command speaks about the condition of our heart before God. Is He first in my heart? Or have I allowed something else to be number one? What is influencing the big decisions of life I am making today?

John writes, "Do not love this world nor the things it offers you, for when you love the world, you do not have the love of the Father in you. For the world offers only a craving for physical pleasure, a craving for everything we see, and pride in our achievements and possessions. These are not from the Father, but are from this world. And this world is fading away, along with everything that people crave. But anyone who does what pleases God will live forever" (1 John 2:15-17). Lord, help me get my priorities straight.

*Every creature, every plant,
every rock and grain of sand
proclaims the glory of its Creator,
worships through colour, shape, scent and form.
A multi-sensory song of praise.
Creator God, may we join with the whole of your creation,
in praising you, our Creator,
through the fragrance and melody of our lives.
May we worship you,
along with every other part of your creation.*

*This world, Your creation,
rolled into a sphere,
packaged in sunshine,
gift-wrapped in love,
given to us,
Thank you, Lord.
Help us to care and tend for it as your stewards.
Amen*

Church of Scotland

Wednesday, July 13: 1 John 2:28-3:24 (Command #2 – No idols)

Consider this scenario. *A man works in an office tower downtown. Once in a while he sees a woman getting on or off the elevator. Sometimes he sees her in the coffee shop around the corner. Week after week, month after month, he notices her. He may have caught her name. But he never speaks to her. He never spends time with her. He imagines all sorts of things about who she is. In his heart he begins to think he loves her. Certainly he'd be jealous if he saw her with another man. If anyone were to say anything bad about her, he would be indignant. He creates an "image" of who he thinks she is. But it is only an image. It's not really her. If he were to actually speak with her, what might happen? He may discover she is far less glamorous than he supposes. Or, he may discover she is far more amazing than he could have dreamed. How his life could change, if he'd only made the effort to know her ...*

Some people treat God just like this. We have a "picture in our minds" of who we think God is. It's probably not a statue carved out of wood or metal. That's not the point. The point is we have an "image" of God in our minds. And we settle for that. We watch Him from a safe distance. We say we believe ...

But do we really know Him? Do we spend time getting to know God Himself, personally? Do we spend time praying with Him? Do we spend time reading His word? Do we hunger and thirst to learn more about Him? Do we want to live in a way that pleases Him? Do we get annoyed at small distractions that crowd out God?

Philip Yancey writes, *"I confess that some days I meet people, work, make decisions, talk on the phone, all without giving God a single thought."* Does it upset me when I cannot find time to spend with the one I love? It should. If it doesn't, we may have fallen into the most insidious form of idolatry – believing in a God who is out there somewhere – who doesn't seem to care if we love Him or not – who is "safe" – but who is also powerless. Possibly we see inklings of Him on Sunday mornings at church – that makes us feel good. We're pleased when we hear other people talking about the difference God makes in their lives. We're offended when we hear a televangelist's pleas for money or moral failure, or when someone misuses God's name. But that's it. God is distant. He is a belief, but not an experience. He is an idol.

John reminds us of Jesus' amazing love for us – He gave us His Son; He calls us His dear children. We are called to a personal relationship with our loving Father. The vision God gives us in the very beginning of Scripture – His perfect vision for what our lives should be like – is of Him walking in the Garden of Eden in a personal, perfect relationship with Adam and Eve. God's vision for us as His people is to walk, day-by-day, moment-by-moment with Him. It's about building a personal relationship with us that is exciting, real, dynamic, life-changing ... For instance, it changes how we treat other people.

Do you know Jesus in a personal way? Is He a real part of your life, right now? Pray that He would be your constant companion, your ever-present guide, and your teacher in every circumstance of life.

*Your footsteps are not easy to follow,
for they lead not only to green pastures
where we find nourishment and rest,
but also desert and wilderness places
where we are vulnerable and alone,
and crowded and uncomfortable spaces
where we feel threatened and distressed.
Your footsteps are not easy to follow,
but you have walked this way before
and are never far from any one of us,
your Spirit guiding and instructing,
your arm supporting, your love supplying,
on this necessary path we tread.*

Amen

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Thursday, July 14: 1 John 4:7-21 (Command #2 – No idols)

Do you remember when you fell in love for the first time (even if it was only a crush)? What did you do? He/she occupied your thoughts. You started hanging around where that person was. You suddenly developed an interest in the things he/she was interested in. You wanted to be around that person. You dreamed about him/her. You wanted to please her/him. You did all sorts of crazy things. You changed.

"God showed how much he loved us by sending his one and only Son into the world ..." How does God show His love to us? He came to be with us. He experienced what we experience. He spent time with us. Ultimately, He demonstrated the greatest act of love of all; He died for us.

In response, why wouldn't I want to really get to know God? Why wouldn't I want to spend time with Him? Why wouldn't I want to develop an interest in the things that God is interested in? Why wouldn't I want to please Him and do the sorts of things that honour Him?

When we accept Jesus as our Saviour, by faith, God's Spirit, the Holy Spirit, becomes alive in us. *"God has given us his Spirit as proof that we live in him and he in us"* (1 John 4:13). That's God's promise. Imagine what kind of a change the love of God – the dynamic, Spirit-filled, Spirit-empowered love of God – could make in your life.

- **Pray** – ask God for a real, personal experience of His love. That may mean confessing sin in your life that is preventing that from happening. It will probably mean reordering your priorities.
- **Spend time** – read the Bible, eager to know more. Pray constantly, without ceasing.
- **Get excited** – listen to music. Read books. Spend time with God's people. Think about all that God has done and is doing for you and in the world. Go for a walk in His creation. Talk about God and His amazing grace and love with other people – Christians and non-Christians.

God is a jealous God. He eagerly desires your love. Don't settle for anything less than really knowing God. Do what you need to do to get to know Him. To follow Him. To love Him.

*You are holy, Lord, the only God, and Your deeds are wonderful.
You are strong. You are great.
You are the Most High. You are Almighty.
You, Holy Father are King of heaven and earth.
You are Three and One, Lord God, all Good.
You are Good, all Good, supreme Good, Lord God, living and true.
You are love. You are wisdom.
You are humility. You are endurance.
You are rest. You are peace.
You are joy and gladness.
You are justice and moderation.
You are all our riches, and You suffice for us.
You are beauty. You are gentleness.
You are our protector. You are our guardian and defender.
You are our courage. You are our haven and our hope.
You are our faith, our great consolation.
You are our eternal life,
Great and Wonderful Lord, God Almighty, Merciful Saviour.
Amen.*

Francis of Assisi (1181-1226)

Friday, July 15: 1 John 5 (Command #2 – No idols)

We are God's beloved children. That is a mystery that deserves some deep pondering ... spend some time reflecting on that truth.

"Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has become a child of God. And everyone who loves the Father loves his children, too. We know we love God's children if we love God and obey his commandments. Loving God means keeping his commandments, and his commandments are not burdensome ..." (5:1-3).

Reflect also on this: *"Now we live in fellowship with the true God because we live in fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ. He is the only true God, and he is eternal life"* (5:20). We are invited into a personal relationship with God.

Wise children listen to their parents – when Mom says, *"Don't touch the red element on the stove,"* she is not giving her beloved child a heavy burden, she is saving them from pain. The commandments God gives us are not unnecessary burdens created to make our lives difficult; they are blessings to keep us from pain.

God's commands are there to give us wise principles to live by. They are keys to a full life. True life – eternal life – life as it was meant to be lived – can be a reality **now** as we live by God's guidelines in our relationships. His commandments lead us into good relationships with people and the world around us.

"Dear children, keep away from anything that might take God's place in your hearts" (5:21). That's wise counsel as we reflect on the second commandment.

What do I need to learn from this passage?

*By faith
I gaze up to the heavens and know
within its vastness
that this is your creation,
planned and effected within eternity.
By faith
I pluck an ear of corn, and know
within its symmetry
lies the chemistry of life,
the potential of creation within my hand.
By faith
I listen for your voice, and know
the whisper that I hear
breathed a world into existence,
yet listens to the prayer within my soul.
By faith
I strive to do your will, and know
the door that I approach
may lead me to shadows,
where my role is to become your light.
By faith
I cling to your word, and know
the strength that I receive
has its source within the Love of my great God,
who is at the centre of all things.
Amen.*

Saturday, July 16: Ezekiel 5:1-13 (Command #2 – No idols)

Does God take faithfulness seriously? We don't need to understand much of the context of Ezekiel to see that really does take our love, loyalty, and obedience very seriously indeed.

Of course, we will never be perfect (this side of eternity.). That is why we so desperately need the good news we have been reading about in 1 John. Last week we read these words from 1 John 1:8-9: *"If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth. But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness."*

Is there anything you need to talk with God about? Spend some time

- thanking and praising Him for His blessings.
- confessing anything you need to admit to Him.
- bringing your hopes, aspirations, and dreams to Him.
- praying for other people.

Our prayer today comes from Joe Bayly. Among other challenges, Bayly endured the deaths of three sons. He wrote several books including *Heaven* and *Psalms of My Life*. *"Christians won't escape the pain and hardship of being human,"* he writes, *"the difference comes in the way they appropriate God's strength and live His will even in times of tears and loneliness."*

*Lord of reality, make me real,
not plastic, synthetic, pretend, phony, an actor playing out his part – a hypocrite.
I don't want to keep a prayer list – but to pray.
I don't want to agonize to find Your will – but to obey what I already know.
I don't want to argue theories of inspiration – but to submit to Your Word.
I don't want to explain the difference between 'eros' and 'philos' and 'agape' – but to love.
(those are 3 different Greek words for "love")
I don't want to sing as if I mean it – I want to mean it.
I don't want to tell it like it is – but to be like You want me to be.
I don't want to think another needs me – but I need him, else I'm not complete.
I don't want to tell others how to do it – but to do it.
I don't want to have to be always right – but to admit it when I'm wrong.
I don't want to be a census taker – but an obstetrician.
I don't want to be an involved person, a professional – but a friend.
I don't want to be insensitive – but to hurt where other people hurt.
I don't want to say "I know how you feel" – but to say, "God knows,"
and "I'll try, if you'll be patient with me,"
and meanwhile I'll be quiet.
I don't want to scorn the clichés of others – but to mean everything I say.
Including this prayer to you, Lord.
Amen*

Joe Bayly (1920-1986)

Sunday, July 17: Psalm 34

Wisdom. In the Bible, wisdom is not just a matter of "knowing the right stuff." In Scripture, knowing **about** God, ethics, and truth is referred to as **knowledge**. Knowledge is good. But people can be very knowledgeable about God, the Bible, theology, and ethics, but if they don't **ACT** on it, they are not wise. If you think about it, the devil has amazing knowledge about God, the Bible, theology, and ethics (he knows more correct theology and biblical knowledge than I do), but he doesn't choose to act on it ... The Bible calls people who know the truth, but don't live it out, "fools."

In Scripture, **wisdom** is knowing the truth **AND** living it out in appropriate ways. One key to biblical wisdom is the "fear of the Lord." In Proverbs, for instance, Solomon writes, *"Fear of the Lord teaches wisdom ..."* (Proverbs 15:33). This phrase bothers some people. After all, God is love and He loves us, why should we fear Him? Is He a terrifying monster?

"Fear of the Lord" in Scripture is an English translation of a Hebrew phrase that means something like *"awe,"*

"reverence," "deep respect," or "profound wonder" more than terror or dread. When we come into God's presence, we are with the Creator of billions of stars in billions of galaxies. That should instill awe, wonder, and reverence – not terror. This God is the One who loves His creation so much He did humble Himself, become human, and die on the cross to bring us back into relationship with Himself (Philippians 2:1-11). Reverence, awe, wonder – and love and worship – are all caught up in that phrase "fear of the Lord."

Because God is God, we take His instruction and guidance seriously. We choose to obey it. We are wise.

Out of awe, respect, reverence – and love – for God, we acknowledge He knows best (after all He created us, this world, and everything in it). Therefore, out of a healthy, humble, reverent "fear of the Lord" we choose to live wisely, following His way.

In general, things go well for us when we choose to live with godly wisdom.

As you read through Psalm 34, what phrases speak to you? What is God saying to you, today?

Morning Prayer:

*O God, our Father, you make the light to shone out of the darkness.
We thank you for waking us to see the light of this new day.
Help us to waste one of its hours; to soil none of its moments;
To neglect none of its opportunities; to fail none of its duties.
Bring us to the evening undefeated by any temptation, at peace with ourselves,
At peace with our fellow-travellers, and at peace with you.*

Evening Prayer:

*O God, our Father, we thank you for this day that is passing from us now ...
For any glimpse of beauty we have seen;
For any echo of your truth we have heard;
For any kindness we have received;
For any good we have been enabled to do;
And for any temptation which you gave us grace to overcome ...
We thank you, Lord.
We ask forgiveness for anything which has spoiled or marred this day –
For any word which now we wish had never been spoken;
For any deed which now we wish had never been done;
For everything which makes us ashamed when we remember it ...
Forgive us, Lord.
Eternal God, who gives us the day for work and the night for rest,
grant us a good night's sleep,
and wake us tomorrow,
refreshed and better able to serve you and the people around us.
We ask this, through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.*

William Barclay (1907-1978), *A Book of Everyday Prayers*, 24-25

Monday, July 18: Deuteronomy 5:11 (Command #3 – Don't misuse God's name)

This sounds simple enough, doesn't it? Surely, it simply means that when we swear or curse, we should simply NOT use His name(s): "God," "Jesus," "Lord." Right?

Yes. It is good never to use our Lord's name(s) as a swear word. Of course, it is good not to use any swear word at all. Swearing is a symptom of deeper issues ...

- In a moment of crisis (like when I hit my thumb with a hammer) it's understandable if I say something I regret. However, my reaction may mean there is an unhealthy level of anger or

frustration already in my system. I am living on an emotional razor-edge. I need to create margin in my life. I need to find healthier ways to deal with crises.

- If every 4th or 5th word I utter or think is a swear word, or such words are just normal parts of my vocabulary, I need to examine what's going on deeper inside. Am I angry? Resentful? Afraid? How is my relationship with the Lord? With other people? (Do I need to reread 1 John???)

This command goes MUCH deeper than simply the words that happen to cross my lips. In Proverbs we read, *"My child, never forget the things I have taught you. Store my commands in your heart. If you do this, you will live many years, and your life will be satisfying. Never let loyalty and kindness leave you! Tie them around your neck as a reminder. Write them deep within your heart. Then you will find favor with both God and people, and you will earn a **good name**."* (Proverbs 3:1-4). Your "name" speaks to your character. It refers to your reputation. It is a reflection of who you are.

This command reminds me of who God is, of His character. His "name" refers to who He is – the holy, powerful, loving, gracious God who saves me.

If people know I name Jesus as my Lord, do I live like that? Are my actions consistent with my words? Do I speak of my Lord in my conversations? Does my life bring honour to the Lord's name?

*How can I know all the sins lurking in my heart?
Cleanse me from these hidden faults.
Keep your servant from deliberate sins.
Don't let them control me.
Then I will be free of guilt and innocent of great sin.
May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing to you,
O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.
Lord, help me pay attention and gain understanding.
Help me lay hold of my words with all my heart;
keep your commands I may become fully alive.
Lord, may I get wisdom and understanding
by not forgetting your words or swerving from them.
May I never forsake your wisdom.
Amen*

Psalm 19:12-14

Tuesday, July 19: Psalm 42 (Command #3 – Don't misuse God's name)

There are many names given to God in the Old Testament. For the next few days we'll reflect on some of these names for God and what they can teach us about who God, the God who loves us, really is.

We will be able to know Him and worship Him better as we learn more of His character.

In Genesis 1:1 we read that, *"In the beginning GOD created ..."* When you read the word "God" referring to our God in the Old Testament, the Hebrew word is *"elohim."* This word is used to refer to God almost 3000 times, including 9 times in Psalm 42. *"Elohim"* comes from the Hebrew word for "strength" or "power." Our God is the Strong and Powerful One. That's a great way to describe God isn't it?

(For those of you interested in biblical languages, *"Elohim"* is actually a Hebrew plural word. But when it is used to refer to God, it is always used with a singular verb. There are two explanations: First, it is a "plural of majesty/royal 'we'" [in the same way the Queen may say, "We think ..."]. There is a long tradition of monarchs speaking in the plural to emphasize they speak for the entire community. Second, from Genesis 1:2 on, God is described as a unity of one God in which there are three persons – Father, Son, and Spirit. The plural term *"elohim"* is one Old Testament inkling of the tri-unity of God as one-in-three, three-in-one.)

Often the name "God" is combined with other adjectives; these tell us more about Him and His character:

- God Creator of the earth (Isaiah 45:8)
- God of the Beginning: (Deuteronomy 33:27)
- God of all the earth (1 Kings 20:28)
- God of gods and Lord of lords (Deuteronomy 10:17)
- God Most High (Psalm 57:2)
- God, Judge of the earth (Psalm 58:11)
- God of eternity (Isaiah 40:28)
- Living God (Jeremiah 10:10)
- God of salvation (Psalm 18:46)
- The God who is near (Jeremiah 23:23)
- God of Forgiveness: (Nehemiah 9:17)
- Your God in whom you trust (2 Kings 19:10)
- God of my mercy (Psalm 59:17)
- God of my strength (Psalm 43:2)

What do I learn about my God, named "elohim"? This mighty Creator is my salvation, comfort, strength and many other things. Like the author of Psalm 42, I can put my hope in Him.

As you read Psalm 42, notice all the qualities about God. How do you know God better now?

*All glory to you, Holy Father of Glory,
ever-kind, ever-loving, ever-powerful,
because of all the abundance, favour, and deliverance that you have given us in our need.
Whatever blessings befall us as your children
– in our portion, in our lot, in our path –
We thank you for the rich gifts of your hand and the joyous blessings of your mouth.
We are guilty and polluted, O God, in spirit, in heart, and in flesh,
in thought, in word, and in act.
We pray for the power of your love to cleanse us.
Leap over the mountains of our transgressions,
and wash us in the true blood of your forgiveness,
that we may be like the fresh snow on the mountain, like the lily of the lake.
In the steep path of our calling – be it easy or uneasy to walk,
be it bright or dark for us to follow – guide us with your strong hand.
Be our shield against the wiles of the deceiver.
protect us from his arrows of temptation.
Be our helmet and our shield so that every secret thought of our minds is holy,
every word of our mouths is pure,
and every step we take honours your name.
Be the valiant Shepherd of glory near us:
though dogs and thieves would try to take us from your fold, protect us.
Whatever matter, cause, or propensity would bring us grief, pains, or wounds,
hide it from our eyes, and drive it forever from our hearts.
Now to the Father, who created each creature,
Now to the Son, who paid ransom for His people,
Now to the Holy Spirit, Comforter of might –
shield and save us from all harm.
Be at the beginning and end of our race.
Be giving us songs to sing in glory, in peace, in rest, in reconciliation.
Be bringing us safely where no tear shall be shed,
where death comes no more.
Amen*

Gaelic prayer based on 'Athair Naomha na Gloir,' *Carmina Gadelica*

Wednesday, July 20: Psalm 80 (Command #3 – Don't misuse God's name)

"El" is another Hebrew name used for God (about 200 times in the Old Testament). "El" is the basic root word of "Elohim." "El," in fact, is the singular form of "Elohim." "El" is used less than one-tenth as often as the plural form. Like "elohim," "el" conveys a sense of strength and power. It is often combined with other words to emphasize other qualities of God's nature. For example:

- *El HaNe'eman* – our Faithful God (Deuteronomy 7:9);
- *El HaGadol* – our Great God (Deuteronomy 10:17);
- *El HaKadosh* – our Holy God (Isaiah 5:16);
- *El De'ot* – our God of Knowledge (1 Samuel 2:3);
- *El Emet* – our God Of Truth (Psalm 31:6);
- *El Yeshuati* – the God Of My Salvation (Isaiah 12:2);
- *El Elyon* – our Most High God (Psalm 7:10);
- *El 'Olam* – our Everlasting God (Psalm 41:13);
- *El Shaddai* – God Almighty (Genesis 17:1-2 and 47 other places, including 4 times in Psalm 80)

In addition, "El" is a key word in names such as Gabri~~el~~ ("Strength of God"), Micha~~el~~ ("Who is like God?"), Dani~~el~~ ("God's Judgment"), Isra~~el~~ ("One who has struggled with God"), Ishma~~el~~ ("God Hears"/"God Listens"), and Immanu~~el~~ ("God is with us" Isaiah 7:14).

Psalm 80 is a wonderful prayer. Occasionally we feel like God has abandoned us. We feel our prayers go nowhere. In Psalm 80, Asaph prays that God – God Almighty (*El Shaddai*) – would be near us, comfort us, protect us, and help us grow as strong, fruitful vines (you may wish to read [John 15:1-8](#) and think about how this complements Psalm 80).

Bring your life, struggles, hopes, fears, joys, dreams, disappointments, celebrations, past, future – and this very moment – to God Almighty, Everlasting, Most High, All-knowing, All-Holy ... your Salvation. Immanuel – God is with us. Always.

"Please listen, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph's descendants like a flock. O God, enthroned above the cherubim, display your radiant glory to Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasseh. Show us your mighty power. Come to rescue us. Turn us again to yourself, O God. Make your face shine down upon us. Only then will we be saved ..."

*Thank you, Lord, for making all things beautiful in their time,
and for putting eternity into our hearts.
O most high, almighty, good Lord God, creator of the universe,
watch over us and keep us in the light of your presence.
May our praise continually blend with that of all creation,
until we come together to the eternal joys which you promise in your love,
through Jesus Christ, our Lord.
O God, our Father, we would thank you for all the bright things of life.
Help us to see them, and to count them, and to remember them,
that our lives may flow in ceaseless praise,
for the sake of Jesus Christ, our Lord.
Amen.*

J.H. Jowett (1841-1923)

Thursday, July 21: Daniel 9:1-9 (Command #3 – Don't misuse God's name)

In most English translations of the Old Testament, God is referred to as either "Lord" (capital "L" then lowercase) or "LORD" (all capitals). Have you ever noticed the difference? If not, now you will ... These refer to two different Hebrew names for God. Confused? We'll try to sort it out.

Today we will consider "**Lord**" (capital and lowercase) – Hebrew "*Adonai*." Tomorrow we look at "**LORD**" (all capitals) – Hebrew "*Yahweh*."

"*Adon*" is the Hebrew word for a lord or master. It is the common word for the person who had absolute power over your life, to whom you owed ultimate allegiance, and whom you served. In the ancient world, your lord owned everything. You were his property (in Genesis 40:1, Pharaoh is the Hebrew slaves' "*adon*" in Egypt). Of course, human lords can be good ... or terrible.

Scripture uses this word, "*Adonai*," to describe God. The Lord is the One to whom I owe ultimate allegiance, whom I serve, and who – whether I like to admit it or not – has absolute power over my life. Thankfully, our Lord is a loving Master. I know He will do what is best for me, always. ("*Adonai*" is the plural of "*adon*." Like the plural term "*elohim*," "*adonai*" is always used with a singular verb. This is another plural-of-majesty/royal 'we' and Old Testament foreshadowing of the doctrine of the Trinity).

It is worth keeping in mind that all I am and all I have really does belong to my Lord. My talents, gifts, abilities, and resources are gifts/blessings from Him. They ultimately belong to Him. I am called to use them for His glory. All the material possessions I have – my investments, salary, possessions – are gifts from Him (He gives me the ability and opportunity to earn income). I am called to use them for His glory.

We are the Lord's stewards, caretakers of the His world and caretakers of what He has given us (Genesis 2:15). But this is **His** world. How can I use the gifts He has given me wisely and well, for His glory?

Daniel 9:1-9 uses the name "*adonai*" several times. It is a wonderful prayer of confession and repentance. As we come before our Lord – our Master – today, let us come humbly, acknowledging that we often fail, but also knowing that we are in the presence of a Lord who loves us, forgives us, and lifts us up renewed ...

*O God,
Chief of chiefs, Lord of lords,
in my deeds, in my words,
in my wishes, in my reason,
in the fulfilling of my desires,
in my sleep, in my dreams,
in my repose, in my thoughts,
in my heart and soul always,
may your Holy Spirit,
the promised Lord of Glory, dwell.*

*God with me lying down.
God with me rising up.
God with me in each ray of light.
There is no ray of joy without You, not one ray of joy without You.
Christ with me sleeping.
Christ with me waking.
Christ with me watching,
every day and night, each day and night.
God with me protecting.
The Lord with me directing.
The Spirit with me strengthening,
forever and for evermore, ever and evermore, Amen.
Chief of chiefs, Lord of lords
Amen.*

Gaelic prayer based on 'Uirnich' and 'Dia liom a laighe,' *Carmina Gadelica*

Friday, July 22: Exodus 3:1-15 (Command #3 – Don't misuse God's name)

In the Old Testament, you may notice the word "**LORD**" is often **ALL** capitalized. This is the Hebrew word "YHWH" or "Yahweh." This name for God is the most common, used approximately 7000 times.

"Yahweh" is the name God reveals to Moses at the burning bush. God says, "I am (YHWH) who I am (YHWH). This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM (YHWH) has sent me to you' ... This is my name forever, the name by which I am to be remembered from generation to generation." (Exodus 3:14-15).

"Yahweh" comes from the Hebrew verb "to be." The actual tense of the verb is impossible to tell – it could be past, present or future – or all three. The name declares God's absolute being, the source of everything, without beginning and without end. God is. God was. God will be. He WAS/IS/WILL BE everything.

Afraid of accidentally breaking the third commandment, Jews stopped pronouncing this name by about 200 BC. To this day, when Jewish people read Scripture publicly, instead of pronouncing the name "Yahweh," when they come to the word "YHWH" in the text, they will say aloud "Adonai" (remember this is the Hebrew word for "Lord"). To represent this substitution, our English translations commonly use the all-capitalized word "LORD" to represent the Hebrew word "Yahweh" – "I AM."

Language lesson #1: Ancient Hebrew was only written in consonants. Vowels were added to the written script by the Masoretes, Jewish scholars in the 5th-10th centuries AD. Therefore no one knows for sure how the word YHWH was pronounced. However, regular verbs in Hebrew are all four consonants, with a vowel between the first and second letters and between the third and fourth letters [making each verb two syllables]. The vowels "a" and "e" are the most common vowels used in Hebrew verbs. Therefore, most scholars believe this name for God should be pronounced "Yahweh."

Language Lesson #2: The Masoretes took those Hebrew letters [YHWH] and inserted the vowels from "Adonai," creating a made-up word, "Yahowah." This was transliterated in the Middle Ages as "Jehovah." "Jehovah" is an artificial word created by shuffling two words for God together. One of the first English Bible translators, William Tyndale, used that word. It has been repeated in versions like the King James Translation. Scholars agree it is NOT linguistically accurate. "Yahweh" is likely the actual Hebrew word.

Like other names for God, Yahweh is often combined with other descriptors:

- *Yahweh Yireh* (or Latinized – Jehovah-Jireh) – "The Lord will Provide"
- *Yahweh Rophe* – "The Lord who Heals" – this implies spiritual, emotional as well as physical healing; God heals body, soul and spirit;
- *Yahweh M'kaddesh* – "The Lord who Sanctifies" – by forgiving our sin;
- *Yahweh Shalom* – "The Lord our Peace". Shalom means the peace that results from being a whole person in right relationship to God and with one another;
- *Yahweh Rohi* – "The Lord our Shepherd"

God was in the past – He will be in the future – He is in the present. Right now He is with you. Praise Him. Celebrate His love. Rejoice in His presence.

*Glory to you, O God, Creator and Father,
for the universe in which we live,
and for men and women, girls and boys, all made in your image.
Glory to you, O Christ,
who took a human body and redeemed our fallen nature.
Glory to you, O Holy Spirit,
who made our bodies, the temple of your presence.
Glory to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
whose will it is that we should be made whole in body, mind, and spirit.
Glory to God, to all eternity. Amen.*

George Appleton (1902-1993)

Saturday, July 23: Acts 3:1-16 (Command #3 – Don't misuse God's name)

When I sign a contract, I am putting my name on a piece of paper, promising follow through on a pledge. My name, signed on the contract, is my bond. I am promising that I will do what I say/have enough money in the bank to cover the contract. My name on the contract is only as good as I am. My name represents me – my character, integrity, and finances.

The phrase "*in the name of Jesus*" is used repeatedly in the New Testament. People are healed in the name of Jesus, baptized in the name of Jesus, given power in the name of Jesus, forgiven in the name of Jesus ... The actual word "Jesus" is not some magic combination of five letters.

The "name of Jesus" is a metaphor for Jesus Himself – it is actually Jesus Himself who heals, gives power, and forgives. The phrase "*in the name of Jesus*" is like a signature on a contract – it represents the reality, Jesus Himself. It is His actual character, power, and resources – His Person – that is the real One at work.

Sometimes we are tempted to think the little phrase, "*in the name of Jesus,*" is a magic charm. As long as we remember to include those exact words in every prayer, God has to answer, right? No ... The phrase simply serves to remind us of the awesome, loving, self-sacrificing, saving God who holds our entire life and reality in His hands. It reminds us of the person, presence, and power of Jesus, with us always.

We always defer the ultimate best response to our prayers to His wisdom. Jesus knows best. Sometimes He will give us what we request. Other times He challenges us to be patient and wait. Still other times, in His wisdom, He knows that what is best is not to give us what we want or think we need.

"*In the name of Jesus*" reminds me to be humble. I accept ***His*** wisdom. I defer to ***His*** sovereignty. I give ***Him*** all thanks and glory. Anything that happens is done through ***His*** power and ***His*** will. And I worship ***Him*** for who ***He*** is – the great and loving God behind the name.

*God, the Father in heaven, have mercy on us.
God, the Son, Redeemer, have mercy on us.
God, the Holy Spirit, have mercy on us.
You are three, and yet one God, have mercy on us.
Be gracious, free us, Lord.
Be gracious, hear us, Lord.
Be gracious, spare us, Lord.*

*From every evil, from every evil inclination,
from every impurity of heart and body,
from a haughty spirit,
from the evil of sickness,
from the snares of the devil,
from destructive storms,
from famine and nakedness,
from thieves and robbers,
from wolves and all dangerous animals,
from floods of water,
from trials of death,
in the day of judgment, free us, Lord.*

*By your advent, by your birth,
by your baptism, by your passion,
by sending the counseling Spirit, free us, Lord.
We sinners pray: free us, Lord.
Amen*

Dunkeld Litany (9th Century)

Sunday, July 24: Psalm 18

I appreciate the brutal honesty of the psalms. While many are joyous celebrations of God's goodness, others are raw expressions of pain, struggle, and sorrow. Note the context of Psalm 18: "*David sang this song to the LORD on the day the LORD rescued him from all his enemies and from Saul.*" Throughout David's life, he was hounded and hunted by enemies trying to kill him: initially Saul, then foreign powers, then his own son, Absalom. As David looks back on his life, notice how he comes to terms with his difficulties ...

Paul sees this psalm as a prophetic look forward to the life of Jesus, too. Paul quotes Psalm 18:49 to show the good news of Jesus is for ALL people: "*Remember that Christ came as a servant to the Jews to show that God is true to the promises he made to their ancestors. He also came so that the Gentiles might give glory to God for his mercies to them. That is what the psalmist meant when he wrote: 'For this, I will praise you among the Gentiles; I will sing praises to your name'*" (Romans 15:8-9).

This great news of God's love, power, and protection that David – and Jesus – experienced is God's gift to ALL of us. As you read this psalm, ask God to help you understand how it applies to your life ... Is God speaking to you through this psalm? What word or phrase resonates in your heart?

Today's prayer was written by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a Lutheran pastor. Bonhoeffer was teaching comfortably in the United States in the 1930s. In 1939 he chose to return to his native Germany: "*I have come to the conclusion,*" he wrote, "*that I made a mistake in coming to America. I must live through this difficult period in our national history with the people of Germany. I will have no right to participate in the reconstruction of Christian life in Germany after the war if I do not share the trials of this time with my people ... Christians in Germany will have to face the terrible alternative of either willing the defeat of their nation in order that Christian civilization may survive or willing the victory of their nation and thereby destroying civilization. I know which of these alternatives I must choose but I cannot make that choice from security.*"

In 1943, Bonhoeffer was arrested for helping Jews escape Germany. He was executed at Flossenbürg Concentration Camp on April 9, 1945, just 23 days before Germany surrendered.

*O God, early in the morning I cry to you.
Help me to pray and to concentrate my thoughts on you. I cannot do this alone.
In me there is darkness, but with you there is light.
I am lonely, but you do not leave me.
I am feeble in heart, but with you there is help.
I am restless, but with you there is peace.
In me there is bitterness, but with you there is patience.
I do not understand your ways, but you know the way for me.
O heavenly Father, I praise and thank you for the peace of the night.
I praise and thank you for this new day.
I praise and thank you for all your goodness and faithfulness throughout my life.
You have granted me many blessings;
Now let me also accept what is hard from your hand.
You will lay on me no more than I can bear.
You make all things work together for good for your children.
Lord Jesus Christ, You were poor and in distress, a captive and forsaken as I am.
You know all man's troubles. You abide with me when all men fail me.
It is your will that I should know you and turn to you.
Lord, I hear your call and follow. Help me.
I remember in your presence all my loved ones,
my fellow-prisoners, and all who in this house perform their hard service.
Lord, whatever this day may bring, Your name be praised.
Lord have mercy. Amen.*

Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945)

Monday, July 25: Deuteronomy 5:1-11

The first four commandments all relate to our relationship with God. We are called to *"love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength ..."* (Deuteronomy 6:5). Think about how each of the first three commands fulfills this great command:

- *"You shall have no other gods before me"* – how does that reflect the command to *"love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength ..."*?
- *"You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them ..."* – how does that reflect the command to *"love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength ..."*?
- *"You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God ..."* – how does that reflect the command to *"love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength ..."*?

These commands in Deuteronomy 5 really help us think through how we can keep the great command to *"Love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength ..."* How do I love the Lord wholly and completely? By NOT having other gods, having a false image of God, abusing His name, etc.

How else can I show I love God?

- What else would I NOT do?
- What would I do?
- Is there anything I am doing regularly that I need to stop?
- Is there something I could do regularly that I am not doing, but I should begin today?

Today's prayer – a familiar old hymn – was written by Philip Spafford (1828-1888). He and his wife, Anna, suffered several traumatic events. Their only son died in 1871 at the age of four. The same year, the Great Chicago Fire ruined him financially. In 1873, he planned to travel to Europe with his family: he sent his family ahead while he finished up some fire-related business. While crossing the Atlantic, their ship collided with another vessel – all four daughters died. Anna, alone, survived. As Spafford traveled to meet his grieving wife, he wrote these words as his ship passed near where his daughters had drowned:

*When peace like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say,
It is well, it is well, with my soul.*

*Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come,
Let this blest assurance control,
That Christ has regarded my helpless estate,
And hath shed His own blood for my soul.*

*My sin, oh, the bliss of this glorious thought,
My sin, not in part but the whole,
Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more,
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul.*

*For me, be it Christ, be it Christ hence to live:
If Jordan above me shall roll,
No pang shall be mine, for in death as in life,
Thou wilt whisper Thy peace to my soul.*

*But Lord, 'tis for Thee, for Thy coming we wait,
The sky, not the grave, is our goal;
Oh, trump of the angel. Oh, voice of the Lord.
Blessed hope, blessed rest of my soul.*

*And Lord, haste the day when my faith shall be sight,
The clouds be rolled back as a scroll;
The trump shall resound, and the Lord shall descend,
Even so, it is well with my soul.*

Tuesday, July 26: Deuteronomy 5:12-15 (Command #4 – Keep the Sabbath)

This is the most wordy of the ten principles. I wonder if this command is so long because it is really important? Or because people just don't get it? Or because it needs a more thorough explanation? Or because it is so counter-intuitive? Or all of the above? What do you think?

Stuart Briscoe describes his childhood: *"We went to Sunday morning church, Sunday afternoon church, and Sunday evening church. In between those services, we played no games and could not play outside; instead we prayed or read or took part in quiet family conversations. Once my parents got a radio, they never switched it on, on the Lord's day. Neither would they dream of going to a restaurant on a Sunday; that would require someone else to work."* While Briscoe's childhood may take Sabbath-keeping to an extreme, many Christians hold to some form of this approach today. Sunday is special. We act differently. Farmers don't farm. Students don't study. Businesses remain closed. Organized sports are unplayed.

As Christians we may argue that, as people of the New Testament, we are under grace, not the law. We do not have to follow the old Sabbath-keeping principle. We are free to do whatever we like, any day of the week. To impose special regulations onto Sundays is to put ourselves under the bondage of a legalism God has delivered us from in Jesus. And you know what? We're right. We do not earn God's love by legalistically observing certain activities (or non-activities) for a specific 24-hour period. We do not earn our salvation by observing these laws.

The point of the guideline is NOT to legislate a kill-joy, unpleasant way to live one day of the week. The point of this principle is to give us life, life as God intended it to be lived.

Notice the explanation God gives for the Sabbath. The Israelites, as slaves in Egypt, had been responsible, day-in, day-out, year-in, year-out, without days-off, sick days, or vacation, for making bricks and building edifices for the Pharaohs of Egypt. They were slaves, 365 days a year. Slaves had to sacrifice everything – their family, time, health – their lives – to work for their earthly masters, to build earthly monuments.

When God brings the Israelites out of Egypt, He frees them from that slavery. For the first time in generations, they will have their own land, establish their own farms and businesses, earn their own money, and make their own living. And for the first time in generations, they won't have to work all-day, every-day, year-in, year-out. They are free at last. God doesn't want them slipping back into that kind of workaholism – now a self-imposed workaholism – in which you sacrifice your family, time, health – your life – to build earthly monuments. God wants people to truly live with time and space to be in community with one another, and with their loving God.

When we rest on the seventh day, we are reminded that it is God who has saved us. For the Israelites, the great saving act of God was His deliverance from slavery in Egypt. For us, the great saving act of God we know is Jesus' death on the cross and resurrection from the grave. In fact, one of the main reasons most Christians celebrate the Sabbath on Sunday (not the Jewish Sabbath day of Saturday) is because it was on a Sunday that Jesus rose from the dead. We keep the Sabbath to give thanks to God for delivering us.

Whom do we admire? The workaholics who work, work, work, work ...? We ought to admire people who have balance in their lives: people who know how to work hard, but also who know how to rest well. People who do their best, focused and conscientiously, but also take quality time with their family, friends, and Lord. Such people may not be the gold medal athletes at the Olympics, they may not be CEOs of major corporations, but they probably have a better quality of life – family, time, and health – than the super-achievers. These are the ones who really live life to its fullest.

What about you? Are you a slave to your work? The Sabbath principle is a call to balance – ensuring you make time for God, your family, and your health a top priority in your life.

*God was all-complete, all-blessed in Himself,
but He chose to create a world for His glory.
He is Almighty, and might have done all things Himself,
but it He chose to bring about His purposes by the beings He has created.
We are all created to His glory. We are created to do His will.
I am created to do something or to be something for which no one else is created.
I have a place in God's counsels,
in God's world, which no one else has.
Whether I be rich or poor, despised or esteemed by man,
God knows me and calls me by my name.
God has created me to do Him some definite service;
He has committed some work to me which He has not committed to another.
I have my mission.
I never may know it in this life, but I shall be told it in the next.
Somehow, I am necessary for His purposes, as necessary in my place as an Archangel in his.
I have a part in this great work.
I am a link in a chain, a bond of connection between persons.
He has not created me for nothing.
I shall do His work if I do but keep His commandments and serve Him in my calling,
I shall be an angel of peace, a preacher of truth in my own place, while not intending it.
Therefore, I will trust Him.
Whatever, wherever I am, I can never be thrown away.
If I am in sickness, my sickness may serve Him.
If I am in perplexity, my perplexity may serve Him.
If I am in sorrow, my sorrow may serve Him.
My sickness, or perplexity, or sorrow
may be necessary causes of some great end, which is quite beyond us.
He may prolong my life, He may shorten it;
He knows what He is about.
He may take my friends.
He may throw me among strangers.
He may make me feel desolate, make my spirits sink,
hide the future from me.
Still He knows what He is about.
O my God, I give myself to You.
I trust You wholly.
You are wiser than I –
more loving to me than I, myself.
Fulfill Your high purposes in me whatever they be.
Work in and through me.
I am born to serve You, to be Yours, to be Your instrument.
I ask not to see, I ask not to know – I ask simply to be used.
Amen.*

John Henry Newman (1801-1890)

Wednesday, July 27: Exodus 20:1-11 (Command #4 – Keep the Sabbath)

The Ten Commandments are originally recorded in Exodus 20. The word “Deuteronomy” literally means “The second law”; it is a retelling of the original commands. Deuteronomy is Moses’ farewell address to the Israelites shortly before his death. He takes this opportunity to retell the principles by which the people are to live. The Exodus passage tells the story of the first time the commands were given on Mt. Sinai. This is the only command that is significantly different in the two versions (Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5). Read this command carefully in Exodus 20:8-11. What is reason for the Sabbath in this version?

When we rest on the seventh day, we are reminded it is God who created the heavens and the earth. The Sabbath day pattern (one day of rest in seven) was established by God. God has set an example for us. It wasn't that **God** needed rest. He was establishing a pattern for us, because **we** need rest. Not just landowners, but **everyone** needs a day of rest (even foreigners, servants, and animals.). The implication is that we are created for a balance of work and rest. Our bodies, minds, souls, spirits, and relationships don't thrive in a constant state of work. We are fully human – fully the people God created us to be – when we work with the rhythm God built into our beings: a pattern of hard work and rest.

This commandment follows and reinforces the previous three. One of our human failings is we forget God. We get so busy, we end up, more by default than intention, nudging God from the central focus in our lives and replacing Him with something else. Very often what ends up taking centre stage in our lives is **work**.

"Human beings were created to live and work in the earth. Alienated from God as the source of our fulfillment and rest, we endow work and the whole economic enterprise with a significance beyond its God-given role. Work itself and the material product it generates can then become an idol to be served without the limitation of God's own higher claim on our lives. In fact, it can come to dominate the whole of life and to define our very being ('you are what you do'), thereby usurping the God in whose image we are made. This idolatrous potential is particularly evident in our 'workaholic' and 'economaniac' society. The command to rest from work on the sabbath day forces a pause in this compulsive process and reminds us that time, like the earth itself, belongs to God, as does everything by which we are able to create wealth (cf. Deut. 8:17f)" (Christopher Wright).

The Sabbath is designed to protect us from making **work** the central focus of our lives. We keep **God** at the centre. In the regular routine of our lives, at least once per week, we take time to remember there is only one God – it's not money. We choose to worship our God and Saviour. Only Him.

*Lord, take me from myself and give me to yourself.
In your nature – Father, Son, and Spirit – I shall come to know my nature.
And what is my nature, O God of boundless love?
My true nature is love, because you are love.
You have given us a share in this nature,
for by your love you created us.
O eternal Trinity, my sweet love,
Light of our lives, give me light.
Wisdom of all ages, give me wisdom.
Supreme Strength of all strength, strengthen me.
Love of all loves, give me love for you.
Love of all loves, give me love for others.
Today, eternal God, let the clouds covering my heart melt away
so I may perfectly know and follow your Truth in truth, with a free heart.
God, come to my assistance.
Lord, keep me centred on Your love.
Lord, keep me centred on Your grace.
Amen.*

Catherine of Siena (1347-1380)

Thursday, July 28: Mark 2:23-28 (Command #4 – Keep the Sabbath)

The central idea of Sabbath is to help people have life with others and with God. Not to be in bondage.

Jewish rabbis had developed literally thousands of petty rules and regulations. All work, classified in 39 different ways, was legalistically defined and forbidden. For instance, if a wall fell on someone, it was permissible to remove enough bricks to see if the person were dead or alive: if they were dead, you left them till the next day. If they were alive, you could help them only enough so they didn't get any worse, but you couldn't help them get better until tomorrow. That would be work. You could bandage a cut finger with a plain bandage on the Sabbath. But you could not put any ointment on the cut. That would be work.

In Christian history, things have often not been much better. Alice Morse Earle writes about Puritan New England: *"Lists of arrests and fines for walking and travelling unnecessarily on the Sabbath were given in great numbers, and it was specially ordered that none should 'ride violently to and from meeting.' Many a pious New Englander was fined for his supposedly ungodly pride, and his alleged desire to 'show off' his 'new colt' as he 'rode violently' up to the meeting-house green on Sabbath morn. One offender explained in excuse of his unnecessary driving on the Sabbath that he had been to visit a sick relative, but his excuse was not accepted. A Maine man who was rebuked and fined for 'unseemly walking' on the Lord's Day protested that he ran to save a man from drowning. ... William Blagden, who lived in New Haven in 1647, was 'brought up' for absence from meeting. He pleaded that he had fallen into the water late on Saturday, could light no fire on Sunday to dry his clothes, and so had lain in bed to keep warm while his only suit of garments was drying. In spite of this seemingly fair excuse, Blagden was found guilty of 'sloathfulness' and sentenced to be 'publicly whipped.'" (http://www.fullbooks.com/Sabbath-in-Puritan-New-England4.html)*

Religion, as legalism, is a horrible thing. Christianity is about a life-giving relationship with Jesus. Sabbath is intended to give us time to cultivate our relationship with God and with those dearest to us. It is intended to give us life. How can taking time, each week, for God be life-giving to me?

Morning Prayer:

*O God, our Father, bless us and keep us through today.
At our work, make us diligent, showing ourselves workmen with no need to be ashamed.
In our pleasure, help us find delight only in such things as bring no regrets to follow.
In our homes, make us kind and considerate, trying to make the work of others easier, not harder.
In our dealings with other people, make us courteous and kind.
In our dealings with ourselves, make us honest to face the truth.
And in every moment of this day, make us always remember that you, God, see us,
and that in you we live and move and have our being.
May we do nothing that brings shame to ourselves, grief to those who love us, or sorrow to you.
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Evening Prayer

*O God, our Father, you have asked us to pray for others:
we remember tonight those who specially need our prayers.
Bless those who are lonely, and who feel their loneliness worst of all at night time.
Bless those who are sad,
and who at night feel most the absence of someone whom they loved and lost.
Bless those who are ill and who will not sleep this night,
and those who will wake to care for those who suffer.
Bless those who have no home, and no family circle to call their own.
O God, who is present everywhere, bless this, our home.
Help us to remember that Jesus is always our unseen guest.
Help us never to do or say anything which would bring Him sadness.
Keep us this night in the dark hours, and grant us kindly sleep.
Make us feel around us and about us the clasp of your everlasting arms that will never let us go.
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

William Barclay (1907-1978), *A Book of Everyday Prayers*

Friday, July 29: Psalm 23 (Command #4 – Keep the Sabbath)

Think about each of these truths taught in Scripture:

- God reclaims you. He loves you. His Spirit has called out to you and brought you to himself.
- God redeems you. He loves you. Jesus died and rose again to save you from sin and death.
- God renews you. He loves you. He restores your personal relationship with Himself. He gives you hope, joy, peace, and love, even in hard times.
- He revitalizes you. He loves you. He gives you His spirit to teach, guide, encourage, mentor you.
- He repurposes you. He loves you. He gives you a purpose – to live in His love, to live out His love, and to share His love in your life, words, choices, and actions.

Do you see each of these themes in Psalm 23?

These are big truths. There have been volumes written on each one. If we really grasped them, how different our lives would be?

Why don't I "get it"? Perhaps I don't take **time** to think, reflect, meditate, and apply these themes to my life ...? **TIME** – it's such a scarce commodity these days. But I know time is so critical to a meaningful relationship – with friends, children, parents, spouse. And the Lord. Psalm 23 reminds me Sabbath is intended to give me time for rest, renewal, revitalization. And time, spent with the Lord. Sabbath is a gift through which I can spend time with God, His creation, and with the people with whom He has blessed me.

Be POSITIVE with your time. Taking time to reflect can lead to a downward spiral of self-criticism, self-doubt and depression. Or, taking time to reflect and pray can allow the encouragement of Psalm 23 to fill us. The Good Shepherd is not tearing us down. He is refreshing us and restoring our souls. If we feel ourselves "getting down"... STOP. Celebrate God's love. Remember you are His treasured child. The Good Shepherd is with you.

Lord, help me take time for you, today and everyday. May I know your blessing and love, every moment.

*God of the moon, God of the sun,
God of the globe, God of the stars,
God of the waters, the land, and the skies,
You are the King of promise, whom I praise.
The star of guidance went up early,
covering Mary fair, who came upon her knee before you.
It was the King of Life who lay upon her lap,
who destroyed darkness and tears,
and illumed the land, illumed the world,
illumed doldrum and current.
In Christ, grief was laid to rest and joy was raised.
I come this day to the Father,
I come this day to the Son,
I come to the Holy Spirit powerful;
I come this day with God,
I come this day with Christ,
I come with the Spirit of kindly care ...
God, and Spirit, and Jesus,
From the crown of my head to the soles of my feet;
I come with my heart and I come with my whole being
To praise you, Jesus. To praise you, Jesus.
Amen*

Gaelic prayer based on 'Dia na gile' and 'Thigheam an diugh,' *Carmina Gadelica*

Saturday, July 30: John 5:1-27 (Command #4 – Keep the Sabbath)

"Devote a specific day to acts of celebration so that eventually joy will infuse your entire life," writes John Ortberg. "One day a week eat foods you love to eat, listen to music that moves your soul, play a sport that stretches and challenges you, read books that refresh your spirit, wear clothes that make you happy, surround yourself with beauty – and as you do these things, **give thanks to God** for His wonderful goodness. Reflect on what a gracious God He is to have thought of these gifts. Take the time to experience and savor joy, then direct your heart toward God so that you come to **know** He is the giver of **'every good and perfect gift.'** Nothing is too small if it produces true joy in us and causes us to turn toward God in gratitude and delight."

Marva Dawn comments, "The Sabbath day is a day for festive enjoyment of God's gifts to us. In North America, few understand this. Because we don't know how to fast, to limit tightly what we spend for our own needs, to use the greater part of our resources for others, we don't know how to feast."

Most of us do work hard all week. We work long hours. We carry a lot of stress. The gift of Sabbath is the gift of **time**: time to radically change the pace of our lives and stop doing "the same old same old." We let go of the stress. We let go of the rush. We let go of the pressure. We escape the daily grind.

Some Jewish people have a "Sabbath Box." At the beginning of their Sabbath, they put their car keys, bills, wallets, newspapers, laptops, cell phones, pagers, i-things and other symbols of their regular, stressful, workaday world in the box. They close it. For a day they put those things aside. For one day a week, they let go and let God bless them with His presence as they worship Him and enjoy His good gifts – family, recreation, hobbies, etc. Sabbath gives time to thank God for His blessings. Try it.

Martin Luther, in a hymn on the Ten Commandments, writes, "You shall keep the seventh day / That rest you and your household may; / From your own work must you be free / That God may do His work in thee."

"God's work" is to help you know His joy, peace, hope, and love. God's work is to help you reflect His love to the people around you. How can Sabbath be a blessing in your life?

*O God, give your love of justice to those who rule our land.
Help them to rule with wisdom and compassion,
so that the poor and powerless may be treated fairly and with justice.
Open their ears – and our ears –
to the cries for help from those caught in cycles of hunger, poverty, or violence.
Give them – and us –
wisdom to know how best to respond,
and courage to do the right thing, even when it may not be popular.
Under their rule may all people flourish,
and may there lasting peace and plenty for all.
Amen.*

Christine Longhurst

Sunday, July 31: Psalm 92 (Command #4 – Keep the Sabbath)

The subtitle of this psalm says: "A psalm. A song for the **Sabbath** day."

For the past few days, we have been thinking about Sabbath. Consider these quotes. Do you agree? Why? Why not? What is God saying to you?

- "Most of the things we need to be most fully alive never come in busyness. They grow in rest." Mark Buchanan
- "Stop for one whole day every week, and you will remember what it means to be created in the image of God, who rested on the seventh day not from weariness but from complete freedom. The

clear promise is that those who rest like God find themselves free like God, no longer slaves to the thousand compulsions that send others rushing toward their graves.” Barbara Brown Taylor

- *"One day a week I seek to rest from earthly toil and sorrow. Revitalized, I find the strength to battle new tomorrows."* Richelle E. Goodrich
- *"Rest provides fine-tuning for hearing God's messages amidst the static of life ... Sabbath isn't about resting perfectly; it's about resting in the One who is perfect."* Shelly Miller
- *"A great benefit of Sabbath keeping is that we learn to let God take care of us – not by becoming passive and lazy, but in the freedom of giving up our feeble attempts to be God in our own lives."* Marva Dawn
- *"If you don't take a Sabbath, something is wrong. You're doing too much, you're being too much in charge. You've got to quit, one day a week, and just watch what God is doing when you're not doing anything."* Eugene Peterson

Read Psalm 92 a couple of times. What do you learn about God in this psalm? What do you learn about Sabbath?

Our prayer is an old Irish prayer of commitment to God, *Rop tú mo Baile*, attributed to Dallán Forgaill (530–598 AD). There are several English translations, the most popular being this one, by Eleanor Hull:

*Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart,
Be all else naught to me, save that thou art;
Thou my best thought in the day and the night,
Both waking and sleeping, thy presence my light.*

*Be thou my wisdom, be thou my true word,
Be thou ever with me, and I with thee Lord;
Be thou my great Father, and I thy true son;
Be thou in me dwelling, and I with thee one.*

*Be thou my breastplate, my sword for the fight;
Be thou my whole armour, be thou my true might;
Be thou my soul's shelter, be thou my strong tower:
O raise thou me heavenward, great Power of my power.*

*Riches I heed not, nor man's empty praise:
Be thou mine inheritance now and always;
Be thou and thou only the first in my heart;
O Sovereign of Heaven, my treasure thou art.*

*High King of Heaven, thou Heaven's bright sun,
O grant me its joys after victory is won.*

*Great heart of my own heart, whatever befall,
Still be my vision, O Ruler of all.
Amen.*

Monday, August 1 (Heritage Day): Deuteronomy 5:16-22

God established a **covenant** – a solemn, legally binding agreement – with Abraham. His descendants would be God's people, whom He would love, care for, and protect. The heart of the covenant is love: (1) God's love for His people. And (2) His commands: *"Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and strength"* (Deuteronomy 6:5) and *"Love your neighbour as yourself"* (Leviticus 19:18).

The Ten Commandments help us think through how we live out these commands. How can we love God with all our heart, mind, and strength? Commands 1-4 (which we have looked at) help us work through our relationship with God.

How can we love our neighbor as ourselves? Today we begin looking at commands 5-10, which challenge

us to think about our relationships with other people.

Think about these 6 commands as a group. If everyone in our society lived by these principles, things would be pretty good, wouldn't they? Society would be quite harmonious. They are all "common sense." Why do we find them so hard to accept? To live by?

In the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7), Jesus speaks to these commands, emphasizing God is referring to NOT JUST literally committing these sins, but to the thought processes that go behind these issues. I may not literally murder someone, but the anger I carry, or the character assassination I engage in, is a symptom of the same animosity a murderer may carry. I may not literally commit adultery, but looking at a woman lustfully is a sign my heart is not right with the Lord.

Do you struggle with any of these commands? You may not actually act on them, but do you struggle with the thought processes underlying them? Do you carry resentment toward your parents? Are you angry with people? Do you struggle with sexual temptation? Are you tempted to cheat on your taxes? Do you think about telling a white lie? Do you want what you don't have? Are you constantly restless?

Ask the Lord to help you deal with the struggles in your life. As you do so, you will find inner peace. And you will find your relationships with other people improve, too.

Gratitude is a great attitude. Being thankful can motivate us to action, too. John F. Kennedy said, "*As we express our gratitude, we must never forget that the highest appreciation is not to utter words, but to live by them.*" How can you live your thankfulness?

What are you thankful for? How can you live your thankfulness?

*Almighty God, Father of all mercies,
we, your unworthy servants, give you most humble and hearty thanks
for all your goodness and loving-kindness to us and to all people.
We bless you for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life;
but above all for your inestimable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ,
for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory.
And we beseech you, give us that due sense of all your mercies,
that our hearts may be genuinely thankful,
and that we show forth your praise,
not only with our lips, but in our lives;
by giving up ourselves to your service,
and by walking before you in holiness and righteousness all our days.
Through Jesus Christ our Lord,
to whom with you and the Holy Spirit be all honour and glory,
world without end.
Amen.*

Anglican Prayer of Thanksgiving

Tuesday, August 2: Romans 13:8-11 and Deuteronomy 5:16 (Command #5 – Honour your parents)

Commandments 5-10 are all aspects of what it means to "*love your neighbour as yourself.*" "*Love fulfills the requirements of God's law*" (Romans 13:10). Keep this in mind as we go through the commandments.

The first relationship God speaks about is the family. The family has always been the primary social unit. God created the family before the church. In ancient Israel, every Jew was a member of one of the 12 tribes or families (this defined who you were). In other cultures, from Scottish clans to First nations bands,

family is still important. Each of us has a family – whether it's a "traditional" one or not. We cannot choose our family members (an old saying notes, *"You can choose your friends, but you can't choose your relatives"*). We can choose how we relate to them.

"Honour" is one of those words that is "out of fashion" right now; more in jest than anything else, we speak of politicians as "The Honourable Member from ____." If anything, the word "honour" conjures up scenes from *The Three Musketeers*, when gentlemen would duel to defend a lady's honour ... when an insult to the family name meant a fight to the death ... when other out-of-date words like "duty," "integrity," and *"noblesse oblige"* were part of everyday vocabulary and were ideals people took seriously.

But today "honour" and "honouring others" is out of fashion. Can we recover a useful definition of "honour"? The Hebrew word for honour literally means to **"take heavy or weighty."** If you honour someone – like your parents – you **"take them heavy."** You respect them, value them, and make them important parts of your life. To honour someone means that you treat them with respect and take their counsel to heart.

There are people we respect and honour. I think of godly people I have known. I think of certain relatives. I think of specific teachers and pastors. I think of friends, acquaintances, and colleagues I've known whom I respect deeply. I think of particular authors whom I listen to. I take these people "heavy."

What is it about these people that leads me to honour them?

- They taught me things I needed to know.
- They lived what they taught (to use another old-fashioned word, they have "integrity").

We can think of someone who has a real depth of character. Who has a deep faith. Who lives their faith with transparency and integrity. Whom you know you can trust. Who is honourable. Honour does not come with a title or a position, it is earned by who we are and what we do.

In contrast, sometimes we talk about a person who seems "shallow." They have no depth. They are superficial. They talk the talk but don't walk the walk (like the Pharisees in Matthew 15).

Who do you honour? Why?

How can you be an "honourable" person?

Morning Prayer

*O God, our Father, who asks us to live in harmony with one another,
keep us today from everything which would make us difficult to live with.
Help us never to speak thoughtlessly or deliberately in such a way
that we would hurt another's feelings or wound another's heart.
Keep us from all impatience, from all irritability, and from a temper which is too quick.
Keep us from eyes which are focussed to find fault
and from a tongue which is tuned to criticize.
Keep us from being touchy and quick to take offence, and slow to forget it.
Help us not to be stubborn or obstinate.
Keep us from the selfishness which can see nothing but its own point of view,
and which wants nothing but its own way.
We pray that you would grant us this day
something of the grace and beauty which shone upon our blessed Lord.
Hear this prayer, for the sake of Your love and glory,
Amen.*

Evening Prayer

Eternal God, forgive us for those things we did not do today ...

*Forgive us any word of comfort, praise, or thanks that we might have spoken
and did not speak.*

Forgive us for any help we might have given someone in need, and did not give.

Forgive us if we made things more difficult for anyone today.

*Forgive us if we have set a bad example, by word or deed,
and made it easier for someone to go wrong.*

*Forgive us if we have been disloyal to any friend
or have hurt the hearts of those whom we ought to cherish.*

Grant us the gift of sleep tonight.

And grant us grace that we may walk closer to you tomorrow.

Through Jesus Christ, our Lord,

Amen.

William Barclay (1907-1978), *A Book of Everyday Prayers*

Wednesday, August 3: Matthew 15:1-9 (Command #5 – Honour your parents)

We may quote the command "*Honour your parents ...*" to kids, to get them to obey their parents, no matter what. But, in context, this command is directed at **adults**, not small children. While the principles are important for kids living at home, when God gives this command through Moses, they are primarily directed at grown-ups. As adults, then, we need to wrestle with this commandment ...

- When we live at home, God has placed us under parental authority. Parents function a bit like the government. They provide directions for us. The Bible says of authorities: obey them, except, when the authorities restrain you from living out your Christian faith, and then we must say, "*we must obey God rather than men.*" So ... this is not a *carte blanche* excusing parental abuse of power. If parents treat their children poorly, if they encourage their children to do unbiblical things, if they try to manipulate their children in unscriptural ways, children must obey God. Certainly abuse – emotional, physical, or otherwise – is NEVER condoned or approved. It is evil.
- Whether we are at home or not, we need to honour our parents because they care and provide for us or **have** cared and provided for us in the past. If we are honest, the debt most of us owe our parents is huge. They may not have been perfect. They may not always have been honourable. But we are called to honour them. That may mean wrestling with hurts from the past and forgiving them. As believers we are called to forgive. The blessing of forgiveness may be one of the greatest ways we can honour our parents. Again, this does not condone or excuse any form of abuse.
- We honour our parents because they have experience and wisdom (although we may not like to admit it.). In most cultures older people are respected for their wisdom and knowledge. Our modern/postmodern Western culture is the first society that has not done so. At our peril. We make our own mistakes, rather than learning from the mistakes of others. If anything is old (values, morals, ethics) we assume it is irrelevant and discard it, leaving ourselves in a frightening new moral vacuum. We do need to appreciate the wise counsel we can receive from others.
- We honour our parents when we listen and allow them to mentor us. We may actually learn something.
- We need to honour them because they need us. We are our parents' most precious possessions. They have invested so much love into us. The surest way to break our parents' hearts is to forget them. Or in their time of need to turn away. In biblical times, children were parents' old age security. These days, our parents still need us, for the practical, emotional, and spiritual support we can give them.

We never outgrow the responsibility to honour our parents. The nature of that "honouring" may change –

from obedience to compassionate care for their physical and emotional needs. But we are called to honour them, nonetheless. How does this speak to you?

*Teach me, my Lord, to be sweet and gentle in all the events of my life,
in disappointments,
in the thoughtlessness of others,
in the insincerity of those I trusted,
in the unfaithfulness of those on whom I relied.
Let me forget myself so that I may enjoy the happiness of others.
Take away my little pains and heartaches so that I may not burden others with them.
Teach me to profit by the suffering that comes across my path.
Let me so use it that it may mellow me, not harden or embitter me;
that it may make me patient, not irritable;
that it may make me broad in my forgiveness, not narrow or proud or overbearing.*

*May no one be less good for having come within my influence;
no one less pure, less true, less kind, less noble,
for having been a fellow traveler with me on our journey towards eternal life.
As I meet with one cross after another,
let me whisper a word of love to You.
May my life be lived in your Spirit,
full of power for good, and strong in its purpose of living for You.
Amen*

Anonymous

Thursday, August 4: Ephesians 5:21, 6:1-4 (Command #5 – Honour your parents)

Honour is always earned. Few of us really honour the "honourable" politician who lacks integrity. In the same way, in order to merit genuine honour from children, parents must be honourable people. When Paul speaks of family relationships, he writes to husbands, wives, children ... *"Submit to **one another** out of reverence for Christ ..."* (Ephesians 5:21). After speaking about how that works between husbands and wives, Paul writes about children and parents.

Reflect on various translations of Ephesians 6:4 (note: "Fathers" should include Moms, grandparents and other responsible adults, too.):

- *"Fathers, don't overcorrect your children or make it difficult for them to obey the commandment."* (J.B. Phillips)
- *"Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord."* (NIV)
- *"Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger by the way you treat them. Rather, bring them up with the discipline and instruction that comes from the Lord."* (New Living Translation)
- *"Fathers, don't exasperate your children by coming down hard on them. Take them by the hand and lead them in the way of the Master."* (The Message)

In other words, parents (and other adults in authority) ought to be "honourable" people: people with integrity, who are truthful, who are trustworthy, who respect their children, who are loving and tender. They are also to strive to model a consistent Christian lifestyle to children and teach them the truths of the faith. Whether we like it or not, we, as adults are modeling for our children how they ought to live. Our lives as adults/parents are the most meaningful sermons our children will ever hear. We need to strive to be godly adults/parents on the model of our Father, God.

This is a high ideal; it is an ideal which demands that parents put their families as a great priority; that parents, both mother and father, spend time with their children and strive to help the children mature physically, socially, and spiritually. Which of us, as adults, is equal to the task of raising children as well as

we ought? At times we exasperate them. We aren't so honourable. We fail to spend the time and effort they need from us. The good news is this: each of us has a heavenly Father who knows our weaknesses and desires to give each of us the strength and wisdom to live honourable lives in our families.

Lord, help us live honourable lives in the sight of all people (not just kids).

*Lord, you are a forgiving God.
So I come today asking for your forgiveness.
Father, my desire is to do your will, to be more like you, and to please you in every way.
Father I know that you hate sin,
but I thank you that you love me unconditionally despite the wrong I may do.
I know that it is your desire that I be holy as you are holy.
So Father I ask that you would wash me and cleanse me of all unrighteousness.
Forgive me for using my words as weapons instead of for encouragement.
Forgive me for any thoughts that caused you shame.
Forgive me if I repaid evil for evil instead of doing good.
Search my heart, O God, and reveal to me anything that is not pleasing to you.

(Take a moment right here and listen to what God reveals to you.
If God brings any sin to your mind include it in your prayer)

Thank you, Father, for forgiving me, for washing and cleansing me.
Thank you for loving me even when I fall short of your glory.
Thank you Lord that you keep no record of my wrong.
Thank you that I am a new creature through Christ Jesus.
I love you Father and I know that you love me.
I will bless your name forever more,
Amen.*

Anonymous

Friday, August 5: 1 Peter 2:13-17, Romans 13:1-7 (Command #5 – Honour your parents)

The emperor referred to in these passages is Nero, best known for torturing and executing Christians (blaming them for the great fire that burned Rome). The challenge for us is to honour people or authorities we do not agree with. Fortunately, our government isn't nearly as corrupt or violent as Nero's was.

Our challenge, as people of God, is to show honour for our leaders. In a culture where respect and honour – for those in government and other levels of leadership – has been lost, we are to be distinctive as people who do give honour and respect to those in authority. This does not mean we have to agree with every government policy or like individual leaders (the early Christians certainly did NOT like Nero or his rule). Mercifully, in our democratic society, there is opportunity for civil, honest – and respectful – debate and discussion. We can vote. We can be very thankful for our freedoms. In every discussion, we treat people, even those we strongly disagree with, with honour and respect as persons, created and loved by God.

In 1 Timothy 2:1-4, Paul writes, *"I urge you to pray for all people. Ask God to help them; intercede on their behalf, and give thanks for them. Pray this way for kings and all who are in authority so that we can live peaceful and quiet lives marked by godliness and dignity. This is good and pleases God our Savior, who wants everyone to be saved and to understand the truth ..."*

Let's do that today: pray for our Prime Minister, MP, and federal politicians. Pray for our Premier, MLAs, and provincial leaders. Pray for our city councilors and mayor. Even if you don't agree with/like them.

Pray as well for parents you know. Living as "honourable" people day-in, day-out is difficult. Pray that God would help them live wisely, lovingly, and well.

*The God who set the stars in space and gave the planets birth
created for our dwelling place a green and fruitful earth;
a world with wealth and beauty crowned, of sky and sea and land,
where life should flourish and abound beneath its Maker's hand.*

*A world of order and delight, God gave for us to tend,
to hold as precious in his sight, to nurture and defend;
but yet on ocean, earth and air, the marks of sin are seen,
with all that God created fair, polluted and unclean.*

*O God, by whose redeeming grace the lost may be restored,
who stooped to save our fallen race in Christ, creation's Lord,
through him whose cross is life and peace to cleanse a heart defiled
may human greed and conflict cease and all be reconciled.*

*Renew the wastes of earth again, redeem, restore, repair;
with us, your children, still maintain your covenant of care.
May we, who move from dust to dust and on your grace depend,
no longer, Lord, betray our trust but prove creation's friend.*

*Our God, who set the stars in space and gave the planets birth,
look down from heaven, your dwelling place, and heal the wounds of earth;
till pain, decay and bondage done, when death itself has died,
creation's songs shall rise as one and God be glorified.*

Amen.

Timothy Dudley-Smith (1926 -)

Saturday, August 6: James 2:1-10 (Command #5 – Honour your parents)

We are called to honour all people – those in authority over us (yesterday), and those who have less than us. Think about those who “have less” than you in a variety of ways – financially, family-wise, friend-wise, intellectually, educationally ... How do we treat them? Do we treat them as “less worthy” than people who are well off financially, have a great family, are popular, are well-educated, or well-dressed?

In the early church there were “snobs among the saints.” People were treated differently depending on how they were dressed, how wealthy they were, how they looked, what their ethnic/racial heritage was.

Do we ever judge people? What criteria do we use? Do I assess people based on how they look, dress or act, what their ethnicity is? The problem is, I have no real idea where their heart is ... As God says to Samuel, *“Don't judge by appearance or height ... The Lord doesn't see things the way you see them. People judge by outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart”* (1 Samuel 16:7).

Do we give the impression that God treats certain people with more honour than others? Is this true? If judgement of people's value does happen in the church, what are we saying about God?

God seems to have a genuine heart for the poor and hurting ... if anything they have more honour in the Kingdom of God than the rest of us ...

How can I honour everyone I meet today?

*Thank you, Lord Jesus, that you raise me up from last night,
to the gladsome light of this day,
To win everlasting life for my soul, through the blood You shed for me.
Praise be to Thee, O God, forever,
for the blessings You give me:
My food, my speech, my work, my health ...*

*I pray, today, that you would
shield me from sin,
and guard me from ill.
God guide me with Your wisdom.
God chastise me with Your justice.
God help me with Your mercy.
God protect me with Your strength.
God fill me with Your fullness,
God shield me with Your shade,
God fill me with Your grace,
Give me wisdom along with your grace.
Protect me on sea and on land.*

*Lead me on, step by step,
to the peace of the Everlasting City,
for the sake of Your Anointed Son,
Jesus Christ, of the seed of David,
Visiting One of the Temple,
Sacrificial Lamb of the Garden, who died for me.
Amen.*

Gaelic prayer based on 'Urnuigh Maduinn' and 'Dhe stuir mi,' *Carmina Gadelica*

Sunday, August 7: Psalm 62

Life can seem overwhelming. The demands of work seem too much. The demands of my body – to stay health by proper diet and exercise – seem so hard. The responsibility to be a good parent/child/friend/spouse/neighbour seem too heavy. It is hard to be "honourable." I often fail ...

Pastors can be the worst offenders at breaking the fourth commandment (Sabbath). Marva Dawn says to pastors: *"We endure enormous pressure to keep working, for the tasks of nurturing belief in others or of trying to right injustices in the word can never be finished. How has it come about that we who work at such impossible-to-complete tasks feel so guilty when we cannot perform them?"*

The content of your work may be different, but do you carry the same guilt? Do you think you should be working longer, harder, etc., but your job, too, is really impossible-to-complete?

Psalm 62 reminds me that my true identity and worth is found in the Lord. I cannot be a perfect parent, employee, friend, spouse, child ... But *"My victory and honor come from God alone. He is my refuge, a rock where no enemy can reach me"* (62:7). If I am to be an honourable person, this character will come from my faith in, dependence upon, and obedience to God. He loves me. When I fail, He forgives me. When I'm exhausted, He gives me the strength to carry on. I turn, in faith, to Him ...

David concludes, *"God has spoken plainly, and I have heard it many times: Power, O God, belongs to you; unfailing love, O Lord, is yours"* (62:11-12). Spend some time reflecting upon and celebrating these truths in your life.

For your prayer, pray Psalm 62 (in your Bible or this version, from *The Message*):

*God, the one and only – I'll wait as long as he says.
Everything I need comes from him, so why not?
He's solid rock under my feet, breathing room for my soul,
An impregnable castle: I'm set for life.*

*How long will you gang up on me? How long will you run with the bullies?
There's nothing to you, any of you – rotten floorboards, worm-eaten rafters,
Anthills plotting to bring down mountains, far gone in make-believe.
You talk a good line, but every "blessing" breathes a curse.*

*God, the one and only – I'll wait as long as he says.
Everything I hope for comes from him, so why not?
He's solid rock under my feet, breathing room for my soul,
An impregnable castle: I'm set for life.*

*My help and glory are in God – granite-strength and safe-harbor-God –
So trust him absolutely, people; lay your lives on the line for him.*

*God is a safe place to be.
Man as such is smoke, woman as such, a mirage.
Put them together, they're nothing; two times nothing is nothing.
And a windfall, if it comes – don't make too much of it.
God said this once and for all; how many times have I heard it repeated?
"Strength comes straight from God,
and, you, Lord God, are a loving God."
Amen*