

Practical Proverbial, the Ten Commandments, 5 May 2014

And God spoke all these words:

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

"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; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.

"You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.

"Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

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

"You shall not murder.

"You shall not commit adultery.

"You shall not steal.

"You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.

"You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor." Exodus 20, verses 1 through 17.

The Ten Commandments. Today, do we still need them? If we do, what do they mean? Why would a loving God tell us so many things not to do? Why all the strict rules?

Perhaps if there are questions like this then the subject is still relevant. Here in twenty first century America, when we think of the Ten Commandments, many of us think of the Cecil B. DeMille movie. Up until I really started diving into God's Word, that's what I thought of. I thought of the cheesy acting, the blue-eyed Charlton Heston as Moses, and the fiery finger in the clouds etching out tables of stone for Moses to smash at the bottom of the mountain.

Or there's the parody from Mel Brooks in "History of the World, Part I." 15, not ten until an untimely accident changes history. It's bawdy humor, but funny.

There's so much more.

So for the next few weeks, we're going to walk through the Ten Commandments and some things that you may or may not have thought about them. I must admit: this idea isn't original. It was inspired by my friends, Mark Schaefer and Anthony Celia, who used the Ten Commandments as a vehicle for prayer and confession at our

church. Their good idea got me to thinking that there is so much more to the Ten Commandments than what we may have thought for so long. They aren't a set of rules and boundaries, and yet they are. More than that, they're an expression of love from a God who gave his favored people what they needed instead of just what they wanted. Where they wanted gold, food, and conquest, he gave them codes to live by so that they might rely on His love and providence more. From that, everything else could flow.

We're no different.

It's more than a cheesy movie. So much more. Come back tomorrow and let's dive in together. We're ready for our close up now, Mr. DeMille...but that's a different movie.

Lord, write your Commandments on my heart, then open they eyes of my heart that I might love You more because of them.

Read Exodus chapters 1 through 19.

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Practical Proverbial, the Ten Commandments, 6 May 2014

Have you read up on your Bible history lately?

The second book of the Bible is Exodus. The Bible goes from the story of creation, the Flood, man's anti-deluvian struggles, and the story of the favored family of Abraham and how God made that family into the nation of Israel. Genesis ends with the story of Joseph and how God provided for Israel by using Joseph's status as second in command in Egypt. A book that started as an expression of love ends with the death of Joseph, a happy Israel and, most importantly, a story of God's providence to a people who had rebelled against Him.

Then it all goes to pot. After Joseph comes a pharaoh who didn't know Joseph or God. Said king then enslaved the Israelites, where they languished for 400 years. Folks can lose heart in such a long period of time. They can grow bitter and hopeless. But the Israelites at least clung to the hope that God would send a deliverer who would lead them out of slavery. After centuries, when the time was just right, God sent Moses: an imperfect vain man who God mentored and led in magnificent ways. Through Moses, God delivered Israel, provided for all their needs, and demonstrated His love in countless ways.

You'd think the Israelites would have been grateful, oh ye of little faith. That's who they were, you know: they of little faith. They believed in the miracles but lost faith (and their way) when the miracles receded and life remained hard. To help them cling to their faith in Him, God gave them His code, His laws, His Ten Commandments so that they might better know Him. That they might better let Him live through them and share His holy love.

Tell me, friend reader, how are you or I different from the weak-in-faith Israelites of millennia ago? Do we cling to faith in God and rely on Him fully, or do we sometimes skirt over the yellow line and verge into the no passing zone? Are we so good, so advanced, that we don't need boundaries in our lives as well? Throughout governments across the planet, there are more laws on the books now than at any other time in human history. And still we cross the yellow line. Arguably, there are more lives in slavery to government, social ills, and sickness of the human spirit than ever before.

Do we cling to faith in God and let it govern our lives, or do we still need boundaries, guides, and rules? Without rules, civilization descends quickly into chaos. Without faith, we soon find that there is no civilization at all; anarchy results starting with anarchy of the spirit. We are no better than Moses and the Israelites because we still struggle with that same anarchy of the spirit. God's chosen people needed God's boundaries to live long and prosperous lives. They needed the Lord's Ten Commandments.

So do we. History indeed; history in the making. Come back tomorrow and we'll start our walk through the Ten Commandments together.

Lord, I need Your holy law to see Your holy love. Write Your law and love on my heart.

If you haven't done so, read Exodus chapters 1 through 19.

Practical Proverbial, the Ten Commandments, 7 May 2014

You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor." Exodus chapter 20, verse 17.

Our discussion starts with the Supreme Court. Did you know that, in the chamber where the nine justices hear arguments and announce decisions, there is a large painting of Moses receiving the Ten Commandments? Quite seriously, how ironic is that? The judicial body that has done more to officially remove all insinuation of God from American public life deliberates – and dictates – law from underneath a painting depicting how God gave the code of conduct that became the foundation of every law in the Western Hemisphere. Maybe God is trying to tell us something. Knowing that bit of trivia, let's work our way from the tenth to the first commandment, starting with behaviors and ending at the throne of God.

What is coveting and why would God include it in His list of behaviors that we are to beware? Dictionary.com defines "covet" as "to desire wrongfully, inordinately, or without due regard for the rights of others."

Think about it: don't most arguments and disagreements start with some form of envy? If every sin is a subtle (or not so subtle) form of idolatry, then perhaps the parents of that idolatry are pride and coveting. We proudly set ourselves against God thinking we are better than Him, and then we wrongfully desire what is His alone.

It's more than just envy: it's poison. When we take our eyes off God and where He is navigating us in our choices, it's easy to look around and see so much we want or think we deserve. I don't just want my neighbor's house, car, job, bank account, or status. I DESERVE it. I transpose what could have been a harmless thought into thinking of it as a misplaced need. It's a pulled thread that could unravel a much larger tapestry.

God tells us to not covet because He understands that it is the foundation of leading to other sins, the one that is a first step to walking away from Him.

Going back to the Supreme Court, isn't it ironic that so many of the disputes that end up there are founding in some kind of coveting? Sure there are genuine issues of Constitutional standing, of right and wrong. But, like other courts, the Supreme Court also settles disputes that pit one party's desire against another. Strip away the legalese and you'll end up at one party wanting something the other has. Hello: see the tenth Commandment.

And that's just the easy part of it. There's more. It dives even deeper into the human heart. Tune in tomorrow.

Lord, I'm guilty of coveting, of wanting things I shouldn't. Forgive me and teach me to do better.

Read Exodus chapter 1, the story of Israel's captivity.

Practical Proverbial, the Ten Commandments, 13 May 2014

You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor." Exodus chapter 20, verse 17.

Desire is a tough thing to live with. If you truly want something, it can become an obsession, maybe even an addiction, especially if it is substance or a behavior that acts like a drug. Desire can rip you apart if you let it. You know this.

Now, I can't speak for you, but I know I don't like people dumping a bunch of negatives on me. Perhaps that's one reason why we've lost touch with the Ten Commandments because we perceive them to be a bunch of 'shall not's' in a life that is hard enough without dog-piling a bunch of additional negatives on us, even when we may need to hear them.

So let's not do that. We know that coveting is a sin and that it's wrong. What's the opposite behavior? Instead of desiring for ourselves, how about we change our hearts and focus on giving, on sharing, on using our time and talents in service to others so that they may get what they want out of life?

I'm not calling on you to become some obsessive giver, to substitute one compulsion with another. No, I'm calling on the both of us to change the way we do things. It starts with confession and prayer, taking to God the areas where we have made mistakes and where we recognize we need His help. In that prayer, we should also remember to be thankful for all the things, large and small, that swirl around our mistakes.

Then comes the hard part: actually walking the walk. Instead of desiring what we can't have, how about we find out what others want or need, then work to answer that want or need? If there's something we want, some self-examination will usually tell why we want it. It isn't difficult, then, to turn the desire to a prayer of service for the someone or something else around our desire. That prayer is the start of the walk. That first step can lead to others that serve God instead of serving ourselves. How bad do you want to take that step?

In this way, we REALLY get a clear picture of what those Ten Commandments are for: to bring us closer to Jesus. He didn't give them to us to slam us. He gave them to us in love. What better way to share His love than to put His commandments into practice and use them to live in ways that would please Him?

Lord, search my heart and help me identify things and people I desire. Help me re-focus my desires only on You, and show me how I can serve You by serving others.

Read Exodus chapter 3, Moses meets God.

Practical Proverbial, the Ten Commandments, 14 May 2014

You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor. Exodus chapter 20, verse 16.

I'd be lying if I told you that I never told a lie. More than one, in fact; sometimes scads of them. I'm disgusted by the fact that I've done this, but the only way to get better and get past it is to fully disclose. In too many ways, I've been a dirty dog liar. "Damn you to hell," would be God's proper response in response to my confession of this sadly true fact. My lies, your lies, our lies: they're why God sent Jesus to save us.

Lying, cheating, deceit, withholding the truth, white lies, bold whoppers, perjury: they're all forms of the same thing. It's all about not telling the truth. Unfortunately, we do it so often that it must seem like lies are grafted into our DNA. Jesus said we get it from Satan, whom He called "the father of lies" who has been lying from the beginning. If you think about it, that makes sense. All sin is predicated on the lie that we can be God, and we're thick with sin. If you covet and violate that tenth commandment, you're tacking number nine onto the tab because by placing your desires over God's, you're lying to yourself (and to God). You're assuming that you know best, not unlike the four-year-old who screams "you're not the boss of me" when you tell them something they don't want to hear.

Go back and re-read verse 16. "False testimony against your neighbor." That's a special kind of lie, don't you think? It's really a special kind of stupid. Doesn't it insinuate deliberate deception, pre-meditated thought, and a definitive level of untrustworthiness? God knew what it meant to break trust, what that would mean to the relationships that He gave us. He gave us each other and our relationships together as a way to model how He interacts and loves us. And He knew how dishonesty would cut to the core in those relationships. Lie to me and I can't trust you. I lie to you and I've ruined your trust in me. False testimony: yep. That's a special kind of lie.

Or is it? Does the politician lying as a matter of course really differ from the spouse who lies to you about adultery or the child who lies about breaking the window accidentally? Isn't any violation of honesty an assault on the truth and, thus, and assault on our hearts? And God's? Noodle that thought for awhile.

I can tell you from my heart that none of them I've ever told worked out well. No good ever comes from a lie, even from a white lie told to supposedly preserve someone's feelings. Is it any wonder God commanded us to not lie? There is a better way.

Lord, please forgive my dishonesty and lies. Help me to make things right.

Read Exodus chapter 4, God gets Moses off the dime.

Practical Proverbial, the Ten Commandments, 19 May 2014

You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor. Exodus chapter 20, verse 16.

What is the opposite of dishonesty? Let's try this on for a size: "You shall be honest and forthright." How would that work for a commandment? If you think about it, that's what the message of the message of the ninth commandment really is. When God is telling us to not lie, He is also telling us to do the opposite. God is imploring us to follow the path He lays out by His word and His example. Can you imagine how much less complicated the world would be if we would simply do that?

Think about it: honesty really still is and always is the best policy. Perhaps you'll agree with me when I say that I can't think of a single good consequence that comes out of lying. Sure, we can self-justify and say "yeah, but it saved someone else's feelings" or "it prevented something worse." While you're standing there, all pretty and justified, don't you hear "two wrongs don't make a right" talking through your conscience? The lie and the cover-up that goes with it: they're those two wrongs. And you know this: EVERY lie brings a cover-up along with it.

Wouldn't it be better to just realize that Jesus really does know what He's doing when He implores us to be honest and forthright instead? To me, the cover-up that goes with the lie is even more disheartening and even more damaging. Someone close to me wrestled with this very thing just this past weekend, insisting that the lie that had been told to them was much, much more hurtful because of the cover-up – and the continued, compounding lies – that resulted from it.

Are we any different? You know the answer.

When I think of Jesus talking to me, I think of Him speaking through my conscience. To some folks He speaks clearly and directly. But I have rarely had that experience. Instead, I believe His Spirit speaks to me through my conscience, through the tool He gave to me to empower my choices. With every one of those choices comes the imperative to tell the truth or not to. It's not the choice that's difficult: it's what I do with it. Living more in Him now, I choose to stick to the truth.

That truth is fundamental to everything. Without truth, what is there to rely on? "Veritas. Quid est veritas?" In his worst moment, Pontius Pilate didn't know what to do with it...and Jesus was (literally) standing right in front of him. Centuries later, Jesus is still standing in front of you and me and everyone we know, speaking words of truth, honesty, and wisdom. What is truth? Jesus is truth. Speak Jesus and lies will never result.

Savior, speak Your truth from my heart, through Your words, to everyone.

Read Exodus chapter 5, Pharaoh get's ticked off.

Practical Proverbial, the Ten Commandments, 20 May 2014

You shall not steal. Exodus chapter 20, verse 15.

When I was a young teen, my bike was stolen. I grew up in a family where stealing was considered to be just plain wrong, so when it happened to me, I was extremely upset. I felt hurt, violated, unsafe, and angry. I had worked hard to save for the bike, and had only had for a few months. Granted, it was just a bicycle; it could be replaced. But I hadn't done anything to merit the theft and still some neighborhood kids took it. When police found the bike, the thieves had taken it apart. I got it back the next day, but it wasn't the same. I tried to fix it but it wasn't the same.

Now, I'll admit: my example is sort of over-blown. Like I said: it was just a bicycle; hardly the end of the world. But it was the first time something like this had ever happened to me and, given that I was struggling with bullying in school and having a rough time of things, it was a small trauma. I trusted and the trust was broken.

Isn't that what happens when someone steals from us? Perhaps we should get on God's level and understand why He forbade stealing in the first place. The thing is, stealing is more than just kids swiping a bicycle. It's more, even, than armed robbers knocking over a Brinks truck or devious CEOs swindling their shareholders. It's not just criminals who take things.

Taken office supplies lately? It's stealing. Ever lifted a piece of candy from a bin at the store? Stealing. Ever padded your expense report, or taken extra deductions on your taxes, or borrowed something from your neighbor and not returned it even after you remembered you had it? Lifted money from your parents? You know the answer.

There's more. Stealing, theft, robbery, larceny: they start in the heart. In truth, doesn't all sin start in our hearts? That's what makes it so insidious...and so offensive to Jesus. When we take credit without giving God His due, we're stealing His glory. When we decide how to use the truth to our advantage while being unfair in some way, we're stealing God's intended honesty. When we lie, we are stealing the truth from others. It's destructive. Like those lies, nothing good comes from it.

What happened to the kids who stole the bike? I really don't know. I didn't press charges; I got the bike back but, like I said, it wasn't the same. A year later, I donated it to Goodwill. Yet I've never forgotten how hurt I felt to realize something I valued, had worked hard for, was taken from me. Years later, I now understand that's how Jesus feels every time we steal in any way.

Lord, forgive me for the times I have stolen in any way, from You or others.

Read Exodus chapter 6, God and Moses.

Practical Proverbial, the Ten Commandments, 21 May 2014

You shall not steal. Exodus chapter 20, verse 15.

Ok, so we get it. We shall not steal. It's one of the foundations of every peaceful society on earth. I travel a lot, sometimes between 150 and 200 nights per year. Everywhere I go I watch the local news and hear about robberies, cars being stolen, and the like. It's everywhere, all over the world. Does that make us, as mankind, better? I think not, and I'm betting you would agree. Sometimes I feel that, wherever heaven is, Jesus must be shaking His head in disappointment at all our debauchery.

Isn't it time that we changed that paradigm?

"From a distance;" do you remember that song? It came out during the first Gulf War, in the early 1990s. From a distance, do you think God is watching us? I do. From a distance and up close both. And since God is watching us, wouldn't it be a better place if, instead of conspiring ways to take from each other, we conspired on ways to share, be more generous, to give, and to help each other? I'm not naïve. I know ours is a fallen world. I know that all the pretty words, even all the ways we use to explain the 8th commandment, aren't enough to quickly put an end to all the thievery we commit.

I'm not asking you to change the world. Just your part of it.

Let's change the game. I'm challenging you to start right now, where you are, today, and walk the higher road. Today, find some way to be generous towards someone. Preferably it would be to a stranger but someone all the same. Pay it forward the next time you go to Starbucks. Give of your time to the people closest to you, whether they're family, co-workers, or even strangers. Honestly try to help someone in whatever way they need it. Start small, but start anyway.

Start because the commandment still stands as a reminder: we are not to steal. Yet remember that, those beautiful words, Jesus is pointing us to a better way, to not just get hung up on the negative edge of that commandment but, instead, to listen to what He's saying. What He's imploring us to do. Instead of stealing, thou shalt give. Instead of taking from each other, how about we use today to find ways to do that? Like I said, I'm not naïve; it won't make the evening news, and it might not even be a very big thing. But it will make a difference. From the ground up, it will make a difference to someone, and that's how movements for good should begin. Beside, just like the song says, "God is watching us...from a distance."

Lord watch me, empower me, embolden me, live in my heart, and guide me to give as You want me to.

Read Exodus chapter 7, Pharaoh's hardens his heart, so the plagues begin...

Practical Proverbial, the Ten Commandments, 22 May 2014

You shall not commit adultery. Exodus chapter 20, verse 14.

This one is hard to write. If you've read this blog for any time, you've heard me talk about my affairs. To be honest, I try to not live with regrets. It's better to let God take them over, to let go of them and live in forgiveness instead. But I'd be lying to you if I said I didn't regret the affairs.

Adultery is idolatry is lying is stealing is dishonor is coveting is hatred. It starts with idolatry, putting yourself first instead of Jesus or those closest to you. Unfaithfulness starts in the heart and it starts with that thought of "what about me?" Me first; my needs; I need this. Let's be real: not all self-needs are wrong, especially if you're abused, used, or hurt by someone else. But when you put yourself before anything else, the idolatry leads to the coveting. That leads to the lies, believing the lies you tell and those told to you.

Even when you live in forgiveness, you know there's a part of you that did this thing that cut someone to the core. You did that thing that ripped apart the fabric of your relationship at its most fundamental level. I know people who step out on their spouses and can live with it. But without forgiveness, I honestly don't understand how they do it.

Adultery is more than just sex. That's the most visible and visceral part of it. But make no mistake: you don't have to take your clothes off to cheat on someone. And when you do that, there is regret. Self-loathing, anguish, regret, hurt, pain: they're all there in the eyes of the one you love most, and they're also there when you're alone in your thoughts.

The only thing that can change your heart, that can help you truly turn away from this pattern of destruction, is the love of Jesus Christ. Repenting means responsibility. It means baring what you've done and committing fully to Him, and to the good mercy of Him and those you've wronged. There are many reasons why people do it, and, to be honest, none of them are valid. When you're done, the only thing that can clean you up is the blood of Jesus.

I'm the blessed one. Forgiveness was given to me. I repented; I changed. God fixed my marriage and we became better. Yet, now and then, the regret comes bubbling up. Now and then, the sins of the past try to cloud the goodness of today. You beat it back with forgiveness. God forbade adultery because He understood how it would shred us, tear us away from Him. It did my marriage, and it did me. Only God can make that better.

Lord Jesus, forgive me of my sin and clean me up from it. Thank You for your forgiveness, for Your healing, and for a true second chance.

Read Exodus chapter 8, More plagues...what happens when our hearts are hard...

Practical Proverbial, the Ten Commandments, 26 May 2014

You shall not commit adultery. Exodus chapter 20, verse 14.

The cure for the common sin is Jesus. Adultery is no uncommon sin, however, at least not from mankind's point of view. It is visceral, cutting to the core of every relationship and every interpersonal reaction. It destroys family, friendships, faith, trust, confidence, finances, marriages, and about anything it touches. If you have a conscience, it cuts you to the core when you realize what your lack of vigilance wrought. If you let them in, the bad feelings can (rightfully) lead you to regret, anguish, anger, and hurt. Yet, if you let it happen, those feelings can take root and become something so insidious and malicious that you might just lose yourself in the darkness.

So I go back to the opening statement: the cure for the common sin is Jesus. Not a medicine: a cure. Not just a friend to lean on and a cleansing wash of the soul: a cure. A means of changing something bad into something very good.

Let it start with friendship. Let Jesus plant the friendship and let Him guide it. Just yesterday, my wife and I were driving through Denton here in North Texas. On the side of the road sat a homeless man. A vagrant, dirty, disheveled, disgusting looking old white man whose life had obviously taken him down some very nasty roads. Who knows if adultery was involved; it doesn't really matter. Something terrible had happened to land this poor man in such a predicament.

Sitting there beside him, holding onto a cross, was a young woman. A young black woman who let Jesus guide her an extra few steps to sit beside this stranger and become his friend. If you ask me, it was the most profound thing I've seen all year. We saw God at work.

With God at work, nothing is impossible. The unfaithfulness of the soul that is adultery, the breach of relationship that we cause between ourselves and God and ourselves and others, the selfish flaunting of the rules and the blatant disregard for others: all these things that are adultery are made right by the friendship blood of Jesus. Letting Him get to work in scouring out the open sore of our sins is the first step towards making things right.

And in making things right, things change. I wish there could be a happy ending for every situation; most don't end happily. Mine did, but in letting Jesus work, what was once before is no longer. Things changed. We changed, mostly for the better. Jesus promises a cure, not the status quo. Thank God for that because the status quo nearly killed me. The cure for the common sin is Jesus, and the more we trust Him, the more we see that every sin is common.

Lord, thank You. Just thank You.

Read Exodus chapter 9, the plagues on livestock, of boils and hail. You'd think that would have swayed Pharaoh...

Practical Proverbial, the Ten Commandments, 27 May 2014.

You shall not murder. Exodus chapter 20, verse 13.

Today is primary election day here in Texas. I AM SO GLAD THE PRIMARIES ARE ALMOST OVER. This year, the mudslinging has been especially vicious. If other voters feel as I do, then I think most must be sickened by politicians saying and doing whatever they think is necessary, including destroying their opponents, just to get a taste of republican (little R) power.

I've come to think that every political ad tearing down an opponent is a violation of the sixth commandment. "You shall not murder" is the same as "X candidate hates puppies, apple pie, and Captain America movies?" Are you really equating negative words with deliberate murder?

Jesus even said so. He equated anger with murder. Anger equals slander equals gossip equals disparaging remarks equals deliberate killing equals pre-meditated murder. When we are guilty of harboring malicious thoughts against others we are just as guilty as if we had actually murdered them. Thus, every time I see the political ads where one opponent tears down another, I'm disgusted at them. I look at them as if they had just murdered their opponent.

Mean Girls; same thing. That chick who gossips in church about the other women who don't look so fit in their Sunday best: murderer. The men who slander each other to try to get advantage: killers. The media that thrives on all of it: no better than the mafia. Me talking bad about someone else: murderer.

The generals who plan great battles? Not so much. God forbids murder, but not killing another person. That doesn't mean God approves of war, nor should we. Yet the Bible is replete with examples of God leading his people into war against God's enemies. I have a hard time equating making war against those who reject justice, especially God's justice, and the crime of premeditated, malicious killing. I am also conflicted by remembering that, one hundred years ago, incompetent generals, out of touch with the weapons of their day, unleashed wholesale war carnage on Europe over something that was little more than an extended family feud. It became systematic murder.

Murder, like adultery or stealing or lying, is something that is forbidden in every culture, whether every culture believes in God or not. As an offense against God, it is an offense against society. Don't believe that? Look at Sicily, or Somalia, or northern Mexico, or even Chicago. Wherever murder goes unpunished, vengeance and anarchy rule. Is it any stretch, then, to think that, wherever feelings of malice, hatred, anger, jealousy, or rage rule, so there also is a place of murder as well?

You decide for yourself. Just like on Election Day. Yes, I'm glad this primary season is over. Just go vote already and stop the character assassination. There is a better way.

Lord, forgive me of the murder in my heart.

Read Exodus chapter 10, locusts and darkness...

Practical Proverbial, the Ten Commandments, 30 May 2014

You shall not murder. Exodus chapter 20, verse 13.

Friendship. I think that, of all the traits and words we can use to describe Jesus, perhaps the best, at least by my estimation, is 'friend.' Growing up, I learned to make – and lose – friends quickly because my family moved around a lot. These days, I know a great many people but am friends with only a few even though I am friendly with most. Thus, to describe someone as my friend is to describe them in the best way I know how. And I am a friend of God.

Have you ever considered that friendship is the opposite of murder? Life is Jesus and Jesus is all about relationships, about being friends with the people who intersect our lives. It's not just that life is the opposite of murder: it is a life being lived that is killing's opposite. A life being lived is a life being lived in friendship with Christ because Christ is the friend of the world. Noodle it for awhile: friendship is the opposite of death.

How many times have you heard about estranged killers like the young man in Santa Barbara who murdered those people this past week? One common denominator seems to be that they are loners; friendless people who resort to killing to relate in some way to others. Or Grand Theft Auto: have you ever played the game? In it, you role play as a killer on the loose in the city; tragic. Perhaps if we found ways to better reach out to other people, we might not contemplate so many ways to murder other people.

Perhaps if we found ways to cherish, preserve and revere life the urge to kill might be held in check. We only get one life; why spend it in ways devised to deny others their lives? Once life is extinguished, unlike in Grand Theft Auto, we don't regenerate and start again. Once we're dead, we're dead. More and more, I find myself admiring people who go to seeming extremes to avoid killing anything, even insects. Once that life is gone, it's gone forever and nobody on this planet knows how to create another life. Other beings, yes, but the force that is life? Not so much.

Maybe we would be better off if we spent ways trying to be friends. No, I'm not some Pollyanna. The world is a dangerous and fallen place. Some folks don't want to be friendly in any way. Some folks may be beyond our friendship...except that isn't how Jesus sees them. Even the worst of us is still someone Jesus loves, and knows, and wants us to know better. Maybe if we tried to know each other better, we could find better ways to stop the senseless killing.

Lord, search my heart and help me to be friendly, to be friends with more people.

Read Exodus chapter 11, the plague on the firstborn...

Practical Proverbial, the Ten Commandments, 2 June 2014

*Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you.
Exodus chapter 20, verse 12.*

In our Kardashian, father-is-an-idiot-in-every-sitcom world, this seems, well, so 1929, so bygone. Honoring your parents went out the window with the 1960; never trust anyone over 30 (even though most of the 60s malcontents are now in their 60s). I'm a parent; a parent, in fact, whose last child formally graduates from high school this week. The prism through which I view the world changed when I became a parent, so I understand the flip side of this verse. It's a cheap, easy shot to guilt each other over honoring our parents and elders, so, instead, how about a few other overlooked things about it?

"Your God." It's a blanket statement that God is our God whether we believe in Him or not. I like such statements because they're a bare truth with which we can all relate. It's also intensely personal. God is simply because He is, and He is in our lives whether we accept that or not. God came to me, not the other way around. He came to me and, because of that, He's a part of my life. The most important part. By honoring my elders, I'm re-affirming that relationship because it's actually Him I'm honoring.

"Live long." Who doesn't want a long life? Who doesn't want to make the most out of the years we have on Planet Earth? This commandment affirms that, like His coming to us, God gives us life and wants us to live it well and long. It's His intention that we prosper here, that we live long to connect others to Him and to be blessed by Him. It's a love thing.

"Honor." We've talked about honor before. To honor is to give respect, to show reverence and deference. What do you honor? Do you honor anyone or anything, and how do you do it? God tells us we should honor our parents, those whom He used to give us life. There are times when that's a struggle because our parents are people too and they're usually the people closest to us who know us best. Sometimes it's tough for me to honor someone who knows so much about me, especially when they do things that challenge or stress me. Perhaps that's one of the reasons why God implores us to honor them, knowing that our constant reverence and forgiveness helps to keep fertile the spiritual ground in which our lives may thrive here.

Yes, the concept of honoring our parents does indeed seem 1929 but, you know, my mom was born in that year. I can live with that.

Lord, strengthen me to better honor my parents.

Read Exodus chapter 12, the Passover and the Exodus. At long last, the day of deliverance comes...and it comes after a night of unprecedented terror.

Practical Proverbial, the Ten Commandments, 4 June 2014

*Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you.
Exodus chapter 20, verse 12.*

I'm sure a theologian could dissect it better, but I'm not a theologian and to my untrained eyes, this commandment looks a bit like a bargain. Don't be fooled: it isn't. The commandment serves as a reminder to us (and not a demand of Him) that our getting in line with God's constant will in our lives allows us to see the blessings He gives us through that will.

Knowing that, I feel bad for letting Him down. I've come to think that arguing is a way to dishonor our parents, and to dishonor God. It's ok to disagree, to have different views, to have different passions; someone else isn't necessarily wrong just because they believe differently from me or you. Yesterday, the devotion with my wife was about Isaac and how he overlooked slights against him. Throughout the day, I tried to employ that same patience, that same grace, when a friend and I were disagreeing over a contemporary issue online.

I failed. My friend started disparaging faith in Christ and people who believe. It ended with him misrepresenting things myself and others said. This person and I have been friends for years, and have fundamentally disagreed on many things before, yet remained friends. Something in me snapped yesterday, though, and I reached my tolerance point. Rather than demean my friend or bring more discredit on my faith, I de-friended the guy. He contacted me later with more name calling, and I responded that I'd simply had enough. I wished him well, but also said I wouldn't miss the negativity.

Today I feel like I dishonored God by arguing the way we did, like I broke the sixth commandment. It's good to stand up for your beliefs in an upright way. I did this, yet I think now that the argument itself was the dishonoring part. Jesus said 'let your yes mean yes and your no mean no.' That's what I didn't do. My arguments aren't a bargain with God; 'let me state my point and see if You agree, Lord.' His word IS; I can't add to it. None of us can. If anything I say or do detracts from that, then I'm the one in error.

I feel bad for losing my friend, mostly because I believe his interpretation of faith was all wrong. It's my hope that he will find a relationship with the Lord on his own; perhaps he has one and I am ignorant of it. It's a good thing to stand up for what you believe, but should doing so cost us relationships? Sometimes, I'm afraid, the answer is yes. The important thing is to not dishonor God, others, or yourself in doing so.

Lord, forgive ways I've dishonored You and hurt others.

Read Exodus chapter 13, consecrating the firstborn, then into the desert.

Practical Proverbial, the Ten Commandments, 6 June 2014. For the graduates...

Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. Exodus chapter 20, verses 8-11.

I'm deviating a bit on this because today is a special day. Today is the last day of school for some seniors in the class of 2014. Congratulations to several seniors I know: Emily Wood, who has already graduated, Tieggen Collie, Andee Gordillo, Alex Huechteman, Morgan Wilkerson, and especially to Miss Kelli Hobbs and my son, Dillon.

Today is a great day to remember the fifth commandment because, as these new graduates start making their way in the world, they'll need to rest. True, one of the best things a young adult can learn to do is work. Push themselves, work several jobs, study hard, play hard, live fully: all those are important and valuable. So is rest.

It's so important that God commanded us to follow His example and rest. We are to rest from our labors each week. More than this, we are to learn to rest in Him all the time, sleeping soundly in His care, diving deeply into His Words to find our comfort, learning His ways to guide all our actions, living Him in all we do so that others will know Him better. There is no more important lesson to learn when one is starting out in the world.

Rest isn't something that comes hard to teenagers; if you know teens, you know that they get an A+ in sleep. Yet the longer they live, the more they will need to know how to rest in Jesus. Life has intruded into all these young people's lives; we fool ourselves if we think kids don't know how the world really works. Yet as they leave school and begin living as adults, so many people fall away from the faith of their fathers. That includes resting in Him.

So, as my bit of graduation advice, I advise these fine young people to work hard, then rest in the arms of Jesus. There will be plenty of time to work, and many years of that ahead. Be the best you can be and learn how things work. And take time to rest, to rejuvenate, to prepare for what's ahead, and to rest soundly in the sabbath love of God.

Lord, bless the graduates of 2014. Guide them, care for them, teach them, and love them.

Read Exodus chapter 14, God saves the Israelites from the Egyptians in crossing the Red Sea.

Practical Proverbial, the Ten Commandments, 10 June 2014

Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. Exodus chapter 20, verses 8-11.

“Lead from the front.” This is one of my friend Pat’s favorite sayings. Great military leaders do this: think Washington at Trenton, MacArthur in the trenches of France, Alexander leading his armies. Great political leaders lead this way: think Lincoln visiting the battlefields, Churchill during the Blitz, Reagan imploring the Communists to “tear down this wall.” Great parents lead from the front: think setting goals for their families, 2 AM feedings when they’re dog-tired, working for years at jobs that somehow add up to much less than their true hopes and dreams.

God is the best leader of all. He always leads from the front. Here, in the fourth commandment, He implores us to rest and uses Himself as the example. He implores us to and set aside a reasonable amount of our time – our time that He gives us as an equally distributed gift – as a way to seek out His rest. He commands us to rest in every way of our lives, physically, emotionally, and especially spiritually.

Note the “keeping it holy” clause. It doesn’t mean “sleep all day” or “get wasted” or “sit around while someone else waits on you” or “clean up the garage so you can throw a kegger next week.” Keep it holy. Not just nice; not go hang out at church with the other sinners; not give it the old college try: holy. Unblemished. Following Jesus’ example. Good luck with that.

I’m not saying that to be cynical. It’s impossible for us to be holy or to keep something holy on our own. The ONLY way to keep it holy is to turn over the entire Sabbath day to Jesus. Like Ms Underwood said, let Him take the wheel. “When was the last time you did that, Dave Terry?” you might ask. Fair question and the fair answer can only be that I’ve blown it. How about you?

Great leaders do this and great leaders know their troops need R&R after fighting at the front. Too many days in the trenches and you go crazy; go crazy and you slip into sin. God commanded us to keep the day of rest holy by keeping our rest within Him. When we do that, we find that we want to rest more than one day a week. We want to rest in Him all the time.

Lord, be my only rest.

Read Exodus chapter 14, God saves the Israelites from the Egyptians in crossing the Red Sea.

Practical Proverbial, the Ten Commandments, 11 June 2014

You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name. Exodus chapter 20, verse 10.

There's a country song on the radio now in which one of the refrains keeps singing, "Oh my God...this is my song." I like the guy singing the song, but call me old fashioned enough to think the he shouldn't be singing it. It's blasphemy. I've used that language; perhaps you have as well. In fact, I used to have a really, really foul mouth. And, since I'm in true confession mode here, sometimes I still do. Sometimes it's in the name of 'good humor.' Sometimes it slips out. Sometimes I just rant and engage my mouth before I consider what I'm saying and whether or not I should say it.

No matter the situation, it's wrong. It's mild compared to some of the stuff we hear on the airwaves these days, but wrong is still wrong. It's wrong because it's blasphemy to misuse the name of God. That includes casual references in lyrics like those I mentioned. Or countless others. You know what I'm talking about. If we say it and we think we shouldn't, then probably that's our conscience talking through. It isn't tough to figure out.

It has implications on our faithfulness because the Lord says that He reads our hearts. He knows that what we say starts in the heart, deep down inside. In reality, bad language – or good language – that impugns or misuses God's name in any way paints us accurately as the hypocrites we are.

Now, I'm not here to guilt you out because, as I said, I'm guilty of it. The worst actor, comedian, or rapper in Hollywood sometimes sounds prudish compared to things I've said. I wouldn't say such things in a job interview, or in the workplace, or in front of my grandson, or in intimate conversation with my wife. Why would I say them, then, at any time about my God and my Savior? I wouldn't damn the people I love most in the world in my conversations with or about them; why would I do it to my God and my Savior?

The folks talking about a war in our culture have a point when they insist that one of the main ways we've allowed our culture to coarsen is through our coarse language. Indirectly or directly, all of that language starts with how we misuse the name of our Creator.

It's sin. Petty, wrong, uncaring, blasphemous sin. There is a better way.

Lord, forgive me for my foul language and how I've used it to misuse Your good name.

Read Exodus chapter 15, Moses and his sister sing, then God gives everyone a drink.

Practical Proverbial, the Ten Commandments, 12 June 2014

You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name. Exodus chapter 20, verse 10.

Quit the grumbling already.

This may be a stretch but I have come to believe that our grumbling is a form of misusing the name of the Lord our God. Take the Israelites. God heard their pleas and delivered them from slavery. He kept them safe when the Egyptians attacked them. He gave them water. He gave them food. He gave them His holy code for living. And it wasn't enough. They grumbled and groused and fretted and complained that He hadn't done enough for them. The ancient Israelites were Kardashians before it was fashionable to keep up with them.

In my way of thinking, all that grumbling and complaining is a misuse of God's name. His name is His identifying promise that He will be with us always. God's name says who He is. The master, Lord, all-present IAM who is with us at all times in every way, who is divine love. To complain against Him is like misusing His love, like misusing the fact of who He is. It's a way of saying "I don't believe You're who You say You are."

I think this is true because, like the Israelites, God provides for us in every way. Like an Israelite, I have my selfish moments when I don't think it's enough, when I want more. Chalk that up to the same old, same old sin...just like an Israelite. I'm not satisfied with Him blessing me unconditionally. No, I want what I want. I want my Oompa Loompa and I want it NOW.

Quit grumbling already, Dave. El Shaddai – God Almighty – is here and now and keeping my heart beating, keeping my mind working, providing His love in every minute in more ways than I can count. If it isn't enough for me, the problem isn't God: it's my expectations.

The better way is to seek God's blessings more actively. To be thankful for the good and the bad, and to get closer to God's heart when my own feels troubled. When I do that, it's easy to be in humble awe – yet intimate communion – with the God of my Fathers who is, at once, Father, Son, and Spirit. God's name describes His entire character: His majesty, glory, supreme nature, magnificence but also His provision, love, grace, mercy, justice, knowledge, and understanding. When I stop my grumbling – my misuse and mistrust of His name – and start focusing on Who God is through who He describes Himself to be – my Savior – then it isn't a stretch to see that grumbling is wrong. That it is a privilege to let go of the complaining and embrace the amazing.

Just like the Israelites could have.

Lord, bless Your wonderful name, the ways in which You make Yourself known to us.

Read Exodus chapter 16, God feeds the hungry, complaining Israelites.

Practical Proverbial, the Ten Commandments, 17 June 2014

"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; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments. Exodus 20, verses 4-6

Face it: these verses are REALLY politically incorrect. Stop me if I'm out of line here, but I'm pretty sure God doesn't do PC.

Knowing that, it's ok to say that we are forbidden to make idols. An idol can be a statue, a document, a person, a picture, an animal, a tree, or anything else. Indeed, the second commandment, and the human personal vanity that can drive our idolatry, is the reason why the Amish don't use photographs. It's more than photographs, though. We aren't to make anything the object of our singular worship, focus, or reverence. We are to accept God only and only just as He is.

Admit it: that's a tall prescription. This commandment, perhaps more than any of the others, is one of the hardest to follow. It's tough because it goes hand in hand with the first commandment, which we haven't discussed yet. Hint, hint: it's the one that says "no other God but me." It's hard to imagine this second commandment without understanding that the first one tells us that there's no other God but God.

Yet this one, like that one, has other practical applications. "Keep your eye on the ball" is one of them, because the commandment tells us about focus. If we keep our eyes on God, we won't be tempted to let other things take His place. Another application is in remembering about vengeance. Our vengeance is cheap and humanistic. The punishment God inflicts on us for willfully pursuing things other than His divine love is anything but cheap or tawdry. It is true justice.

Finally, there are consequences: consequences for our actions. Things happen because of what we choose, and sometimes we feel the effects for many years. Not long ago, I was reflecting that, one early summer day my father visited a small town in southern Indiana. There he met the principal of the town high school and was so impressed by him that he decided to move us there. Thirty-plus years (twenty-five of them in marriage to a girl I met there a few months later), my life is still very much affected by my father's whim decision.

How much more, then, can we feel the effects of negative consequences.

There's much to unwrap in the second commandment. I encourage you to read it again and pray on it.

Lord, forgive me for when I've worshipped idols.

Read Exodus chapter 17, water and victory.

Practical Proverbial, the Ten Commandments, 18 June 2014

"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; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments. Exodus 20, verses 4-6

"Punishing the children for the sin of the parents" and "showing love to a thousand generations:" what a contrast. It would almost seem as if our God is schizophrenic. The first clause seems like a threat, threatening vengeance on those who hate Him. Then, at the end of the same sentence, He demonstrates eternal love, ensuring that those who love Him know He loves them so much more in return. It would seem improbable that, in setting out His commandments, God would offer up such stark contrasts in the same breath as He extols us to not worship anything but Him.

They aren't the ramblings of a schizo: they are the promises of a caring God. He doesn't demand anything for His love, though He does implore that we keep these commandments by living our lives according to them. God promises a tough row to hoe for anyone who revels in transgressions. God is not the hateful Allah of vengeance, but He is the just God of Israel, who demonstrated His love through that one chosen people. To keep that love holy, He demands holiness. He demands that we keep our eyes on Him and Him alone. It is very much a God we see in the Old Testament who makes this promise that bad things come to those who insist on looking for them.

Yet it is this same God who promises His New Testament person of Jesus to demonstrate how He shows love to a thousand generations in celebration of those who once loved Him. If you interpret the figurative 'thousand' literally, that's 20,000 years of love that He promises. According to the Biblical timeline, that's longer than this Earth has been around. So what does it mean? Eternity. God promises to love us eternally. That's how love works. It's 100%, not a half-measure, not a compromise.

And are we any different? When we love someone, we love them all the way, all the time. Yet living within our same loving hearts we know those lines we won't cross. And a razor's edge of anger. God made us in His image. Other than the obvious, are we any different? Look around at the things you've viewed as idols. They're cheap and tawdry. Then take a look at the God of contrasts, who demonstrates Himself to be more precious than anything else.

Lord, fill my heart to crowd out all idols.

Read Exodus chapter 18, good advice from your father-in-law.

Practical Proverbial, the Ten Commandments, 19 June 2014

I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me. Exodus 20, verses 2 and 3.

The first is the most important. This commandment is the reason for all the others. It is the reason for creation; it is the reason for reason. Before spelling out the code for living that He gave us, God reminded us that He alone is God.

In this so-called modern age, I'll ask the question that millions of young Americans regularly pose: so what?

So there I was last summer, sailing around the lakes of Northern Minnesota with two of my favorite people in the world (my son and my son-in-law). It was a place I had frequented with my Dad and Grandpa many years before when I was still a boy. All my life, I've thought of Minnesota lakes around the Canadian border is the single most beautiful place on earth. This was the first time in forty years that I had been back there, and I confess that I was overwhelmed with happiness. Basking in the sun, fishing for Northern's, sailing the lakes, the crisp and clean air, time spent talking with my guys, reveling in the obvious glory of God's creation: it was one of the best weeks of my life.

It was because of God. Because He made it all. Because it was all so alive, because of Him. Because He was there.

And just this morning, I was sitting at my daughter's table with my grandson in his high chair beside me. He's a miracle, at least to me. In reality, all life is miraculous, but I get to see him up close, watching him grow and develop. Miracle. When I was a young father, I was so busy living life, earning a living, being self-absorbed, and being consumed with the angst all young men have. I missed cherishing moments like these with my own kids, and I'm thankful more than my puny words can say to be able to share them with my grandchildren.

They're because of God. Because He made them all. Because He gave them life, because of Him. Because He is here.

The first commandment reminds us that God is God and we are not. God is life is love is justice is power is patience is knowledge is reason is understanding is holiness is truth is time is everything. He is the founder of life and the reason for life. He is the life in the north woods, in my grandson, and in everything. God gives us the gift of LIFE, not of a few years and out: life, as in forever, as in eternity. THAT is the answer to every important thing. That is the reason why 'so what.'

Lord, YOU are God and my God.

Read Exodus chapter 19. The Israelites arrive at God's meeting place, and He has a few things to say.

Practical Proverbial, the Ten Commandments, 20 June 2014. Today's topic: ending at the start

I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me. Exodus 20, verses 2 and 3.

So we end here at the beginning. We end with first principles: God is God. We are not to worship anyone or anything else. In reality, this first commandment goes with every other one. There is no sin that doesn't start without first making something else more important than God.

Let's not gloss over that slavery thing, though. You and I: we are still slaves. Paul said we believers are slaves to righteousness; that's true. Yet it's also true we are rhetorical slaves to many other things. I'm a slave to my job; you're a slave to your children; we slave out in the yard every weekend; my wife slaves in the kitchen. Blah, blah blah. As we talk down a pretty powerful word, let's not lose sight of what it really means.

Slavery is having no freedom. It is being under the complete control of another. It means someone can beat you, abuse you, work you, and kill you without your being able to do anything to stop it. For over 200 years, in colonial America then into Constitutional America, slavery was legal and normal. It took a civil war and drastic societal change to rid the nation of slavery; even then, hatred found ways to perpetuate its effects for another hundred years.

Don't kid yourself: slavery still exists in this world. There are still whole parts of Africa in which men enslave each other. The sex trade is run on slavery in every nation in on the planet. Every government, even benevolent ones, has the tendency to move from liberty to tyranny to enslaving its people; it is only we the people who prevent that. Slavery is alive and well in 2014.

The Israelites had been slaves for over 400 years, since the death of Joseph and the kind pharaoh he served. They were subjugated, beaten, tortured and worked until God delivered them into His freedom. Quickly they learned that slavery, however, needs no taskmaster. Slavery can exist when you're enslaved to your sins, to your temptations. God understood this, so He gave them this first commandment to remind them that He is God. That He redeemed them. That He is more powerful. In Him there is only love, justice and true liberty. In God, there is no cruelty of slavery. In God, there is only the true freedom of divine redemption. We were created for that loving freedom.

That's where we end this series. God started it by reminding us of His true, free redemption, then gave us reminders of how to cling to that honest liberty. How much freer could we be if we simply took His commandments at His Word, then lived our lives accordingly.

Lord, You are my only God. You are the only source of liberty, truth, and love.

Read Exodus chapter 20: the full Ten Commandments.