

Today

refresh, refocus, renew

July/August 2026

CONSIDERING THE BEES

ALSO: THE TEN COMMANDMENTS: WORDS OF LIFE

Dear Friends:

All good things come to an end, and in July 2026 I will be retiring as the director of ReFrame Ministries. After 14 years leading ReFrame, leaving feels a bit bittersweet. Throughout this time there have been successes, challenges, and even a few disappointments, but through it all I have immensely enjoyed the honor and privilege of serving with ReFrame's gifted, dedicated staff. I give thanks and praise God for each member of the team and for the passion my colleagues have for sharing the love of Jesus Christ. Undoubtedly the greatest privilege and joy the ReFrame team has is in hearing how God has used our efforts and content to bless people around the world.



So what's next? A few years ago I wrote a series of *Today* devotions while hiking on the Appalachian Trail, a 2,000-mile pathway stretching from Georgia to Maine. In August, I plan to hit the trail again and complete the entire journey. When I'm not on the trail, I'll be teaching two courses at Calvin University next year. I'm also looking forward to picking up a stalled book project on missions in China. Beyond that, I look forward to new opportunities for serving the church as God leads.

As I look forward to new adventures and challenges, I humbly thank God for the honor of leading ReFrame, and I look forward to seeing how God continues to bless and use this wonderful ministry.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kurt Selles". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Kurt Selles

Today

refresh, refocus, renew

July/Aug 2026



"Considering the Bees"
Don Byker



**"The Ten Commandments:
Words of Life"**
Kurt Selles

Managing Editor: Jeff Bulthuis
Executive Editor: Kurt Selles

TODAY (USPS 185-140), Volume 76, Number 4, published bimonthly by ReFrame Ministries, formerly Back to God Ministries International, at 300 East Beltline Ave NE, Grand Rapids MI 49506-1208. Periodicals postage paid at Grand Rapids, Michigan, and at additional mailing offices.

Postmaster: Send address changes to Today, 300 East Beltline Ave NE, Grand Rapids MI 49506-1208.

Copyright © 2026, ReFrame Ministries. Printed in U.S.A.

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations in this publication are from The Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Photo by Wolfgang Hasselmann on Unsplash



**ReFrame
Ministries**

is the new name of
Back to God Ministries International

Considering the Bees

Don Byker

july

In my younger days I learned from relatives that my family name, *Byker*, means “beekeeper.” Then, about 20 years ago, one of my sons and I started beekeeping. We took a class, got hive boxes and other equipment, and purchased a batch of live bees. Our experiences and observations, along with learning from other beekeepers, has been fascinating. For me, this has reinforced my commitment to care for bees as well as all of God’s creation. Thanks for joining me in considering the bees. Enjoy!

Don Byker has been a pastor, a chaplain, and a seminary administrator. Now retired, he serves as a neighbor, church member, and community volunteer. He and his wife, Donna, have four married children and four grandchildren.

The Ten Commandments: Words of Life

august

Kurt Selles

In August let’s explore the Ten Commandments as the words of life that we receive from God. God’s law given in these commandments supplies the basic foundation for how God calls us to live in his world. If we want to summarize these commands in one word, it would be “love.” That’s because, just as Jesus indicated in Matthew 22:37-40, the commandments teach us (1) to love God with all of our being and (2) to love all the people around us.

Kurt Selles is the director of ReFrame Ministries, which publishes these devotions. Kurt has served as a missionary in Taiwan and China and has also taught missions. Kurt and his wife, Vicki, have three adult children.

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.”
—Matthew 5:17

A stop sign on a nearby street-corner is visible from our front yard. I often notice how people observe this traffic regulation. Some drivers come to a full stop before crossing the intersection. Many others merely slow down before rolling on through it. Some drivers don't slow down at all.

If we're honest, most of us will admit that we don't always agree with or even obey some laws. Some laws make perfect sense to us, and we readily obey them. But we might ignore other laws, like when we drive up to a stop sign that can seem unnecessary or inconvenient.

But what about God's laws? The Old Testament is filled with laws, rules, and regulations. Lots of dietary and ceremonial rules that applied to God's people before Jesus came are obsolete today. Jesus fulfilled those when he died to

pay for our sin once for all (Hebrews 9-10) and then rose from the grave to give us new life. But the Ten Commandments are not optional. Jesus summarized those when he taught about loving God and loving our neighbors (Matthew 22:37-40). The Ten Commandments tell us how we are to live in response to God and with the people around us.

This month, as we reflect on the Ten Commandments, we will see how relevant they are for our everyday lives.

Father God, only in loving and obeying you, as we have learned through Jesus, can we find peace, joy, and new life. Help us to live for you and to share your love and good news with neighbors everywhere. Amen.

KNOWING OUR SIN

Through the law we become conscious of our sin.

—Romans 3:20

When I am sitting in an airplane and waiting for us to taxi out to a runway, I can't always tell when the plane starts to move. But if I look outside and focus on a still object, I can see whether the plane is moving.

In some ways the Ten Commandments are like that, acting as a landmark to show us how we are living in God's world.

Unfortunately the commandments do not reveal movement in a positive direction. They show us how easily we can stray away from God toward destruction. Though God has given us these instructions for living and prospering in his world, we fall short in loving and obeying him. Indeed, as Romans 3 says in our passage for today, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Since none of us can live up to God's holy standards, we are all sinners who have broken

God's law. We deserve God's just punishment for our sins.

We can't earn our salvation, and we can't fix our rebellious relationship with God. That's the bad news. But the good news is this: "While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). Only faith in Jesus Christ, who obeyed God's law perfectly and gave his life as a sacrifice for us, can wash away our sins and make us right with God.

The Ten Commandments show us clearly that we are sinners. At the same time, they point us to the only way we can find salvation: through Jesus.

Father God, your commandments show that we have sinned and cannot save ourselves. Move us to faith in your Son, Jesus, the only one who can ever save us. Amen.

GRATEFUL, HOLY LIVING

So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy,
righteous and good.
—Romans 7:12

When I was a boy, the Ten Commandments were read almost every Sunday at church. The reading seemed long and dour. As I grew older, though, I learned that reading the law in worship is a fitting response of gratitude to God and a guide for spiritual growth.

The Ten Commandments have more than one purpose. God's law convicts us of our sin, and it points us to the grace and forgiveness we experience in trusting God's Son, Jesus Christ, as our one and only Savior. When we trust in Jesus and we are no longer under the curse of sin, what happens to the law? In short, the Ten Commandments, which reveal God's perfect will, become a guide, a standard for followers of Jesus.

Do you want to know how God wants you to live your daily life in relation to him and with others? Look to the Ten Commandments, which reveal

God's holy, righteous, and good will for our everyday lives.

We cannot keep God's law perfectly in this life. Though we are forgiven in Christ, we still fail—again and again.

But, trusting in God's grace, we can ask forgiveness for our daily sins, and we can pray that by the Holy Spirit's power we will continue to become like our Savior, Jesus Christ, who kept all of God's commands perfectly.

Father God, thank you for your good and perfect will. Help us to strive every day to love and serve you and others. Amen.

WORSHIPING GOD ALONE

“All the gods of the nations are idols, but the LORD made the heavens.”
—1 Chronicles 16:26

Some years ago in Cairo, Egypt, I saw an image of Ra, the Egyptian sun god. Ra is portrayed as a colorful, striking figure with a falcon's head and a sun disk perched above him. Ra was worshiped as the most important and powerful of the gods of ancient Egypt. But he wasn't the only one; the Egyptians worshiped over 2,000 gods and goddesses.

Gathered at Mount Sinai after more than 400 years of slavery in Egypt, the Israelites were familiar with Ra and other Egyptian gods. So it's no surprise that in the first of the commandments God gave them, he said, “You shall have no other gods before me.”

The God who had brought Israel out of Egypt (Exodus 12-14), who provided for their every need and made promises to them, also called his people to give him their sole allegiance. As the one true God,

the Lord who made the heavens and the earth called Israel to worship him as their only God. He commanded them to worship him alone, trust only in him, look to him for every good thing, and humbly and patiently love him, fear him, and honor him with all of their heart, soul, and mind.

I saw Ra, the old sun god of Egypt, in a museum display of dusty, ancient history. Ra was just a figment of the Egyptians' imagination. But the one true God, who is still with us today, is as living and active as ever, and he commands us to love and serve only him, with our whole being, as Jesus did.

Father God, you made us to worship you alone. Keep our hearts focused on you. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

GRAVEN IMAGES

“God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.”
—John 4:24

Years ago, while visiting in Kolkata, India, I passed through a narrow alley tightly packed with small workshops. These shops were a beehive of skilled artisans noisily hammering metals, carving wood, and pouring plaster casts to make idols. And after they were colorfully decorated, the figures were worshiped by millions of Hindus in the city.

In the first commandment, God calls his people to worship him alone. In the next commandment, God forbids the making and worshiping of idols or of any representations of himself for worship. God abhors idols, and he warns that people who keep worshiping them will be punished. Seeing idols should fill us with sorrow and compassion for the people who worship them, and this should prompt us to share with them about the one true God and Savior of us all.

Now, if we don't worship idols crafted by artisans, does that mean we can lightly skip over the second commandment? No—this commandment also deals with *how* we worship the one true God.

And how do we rightly worship God? Jesus explained that we “must worship in the Spirit and in truth.” This means we are called to worship God by acknowledging him as the Creator of heaven and earth and by following his Son, Jesus. We worship God by gathering to hear and obey his Word. We worship God by loving and serving people who are made in his image—that is, everyone.

Father, may all who worship idols turn to you in their spiritual longing. Teach us all to worship you “in the Spirit and in truth.” Amen.

HALLOWED BE YOUR NAME

“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. . . .”

—Matthew 6:9

Many years ago I climbed a mountain in Colorado to watch the sun rise. As the sun peeked over the eastern horizon, someone in a nearby group of hikers used a vulgar, profane reference to God to describe the breathtaking beauty of that dawning morning. All of these years later, I still shudder when I recall that exclamation of blasphemy.

We should never misuse God’s name. But what about times when we might use popular expressions that connect with God’s name? Some argue that, like Christmas trees and Easter eggs, those words have lost all connection to their original religious meaning. The point of the third commandment, however, is to treat God’s name as holy—at all times, in all places, and in all situations.

With some humility and self-discipline, we might think it can be fairly easy to keep this

commandment. But truly honoring God’s name means more than not saying something inappropriate.

We truly honor God’s name by trusting in his promises and taking his Word seriously, and by representing God and his love faithfully in the ways we interact with others, wherever we are. If we don’t honor God with faithfulness every day in all we do, our attempts to keep the third commandment may be more like holding on to a superstition.

When we seek to love God with all our heart, soul, and mind, we will honor his name as well.

“Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.”
May we keep your name
holy by living faithfully for
you, in Jesus Christ, our
Lord. Amen.

HONORING GOD'S NAME

God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.'"

—Exodus 3:14

In the third commandment, God teaches his people to revere his holy name, warning that they may not treat his name lightly. Over time, the Israelites took this command so seriously that they refrained from even saying God's name aloud.

As a result, whenever we read the name "LORD" in our English Bibles today, we are reading what the people of Israel said—*Adonai*, meaning "Lord"—in place of the name that God revealed to Moses: *Yahweh*, or "I AM WHO I AM." The word "Lord" (*Adonai*) fittingly indicates "power," "authority," "influence," and other important attributes of reverence for God's name, showing respect for God's ultimate place and authority over the whole universe.

Today, many Christians boldly say aloud God's name "Jeho-

vah" (a rendition of *Yahweh*) because the opposite of taking God's name lightly is to take it too seriously, as ancient Israel did. We need to acknowledge and confess God's greatness and almighty power by properly expressing and honoring his name. Even better, we may respectfully and devotedly call God "Father," as Jesus taught by his own example. Calling God "Father" not only acknowledges the Lord's power and authority but also reveals God's tender, loving care for us. We are God's children, reconciled to him and adopted through the work of Jesus, our Lord and Savior.

Father, thank you for making us your children through Jesus, your Son. Help us to live each day in devotion to you and with love for others. Amen.

TAKING OATHS

Abraham said, “I swear it.”

—Genesis 21:24

An oath is a solemn promise or declaration of the truth. In Jesus’ day, it was common for people to offer oaths to add weight to their promises or statements. For example, people would claim to solemnly swear by “heaven,” “earth,” or “Jerusalem.” But depending on how their oaths were worded, they might or might not be binding. For instance, swearing *by* Jerusalem wasn’t necessarily binding, but swearing *toward* Jerusalem was binding. Jesus strongly denounced this deceptive approach, saying, “All you need to say is simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’” (Matthew 5:37).

Does this mean that if you take an oath, calling on God’s name, you would violate the commandment against misusing God’s name? The simple answer is both “yes” and “no.” If you rashly say something like “I swear to God” or “As God is my witness” to a prom-

ise or a statement just for the sake of emphasis, that may indeed be a misuse of God’s name—especially if what you are stating is questionable or not even sincere. It’s different, though, with oaths taken in a court of law or in some other weighty situation. In cases like that, an oath can “promote truth and trustworthiness for God’s glory and for our neighbor’s good” (Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 101).

In general, we need to take care that we honor God in all that we say, and we especially do so when we speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15).

Help us, Lord, to honor you by speaking the truth. And please forgive us when we fall short. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

HAVE A REST

God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.
—Genesis 2:3

On Friday night, after a long, busy workweek, it's not unusual for me to fall into bed with a sense of relief. I am *so ready* for a rest!

After creating the heavens and the earth, God gave us the example of taking a rest, and he blessed the seventh day of the week as holy. Does that mean God was exhausted like we can be at the end of a week of work? No, God has infinite power and energy; he doesn't need rest as we do. God paused because he was finished creating. We are limited and finite in our power and energy, however, so we all need to rest from our work. To help us, God built into the rhythm of our world the gift of a day of physical and spiritual rest.

Does God's gift of a day of rest mean that we can use this rest for whatever purpose we like? No, at the very heart of taking

a day of rest is the deliberate pause to confess that God is our Creator, sustainer, and provider. The fourth commandment reminds us that we depend on God to provide rest for us. However, if we use that day of rest merely for our own delight, we act as if the day belongs to us because we have earned it. When we honor God's gift of rest as the commandment directs us to, we acknowledge that only in God do we find the rest we truly need.

Thank you, God, for the wonderful world you have made. Thank you also for the gift of weekly rest in our busy lives. Help us to trust in you as we honor your gift of rest. Amen.

KEEPING THE LORD'S DAY

Early on the first day of the week...

—John 20:1

While I was growing up, there were certain things our family did not do on Sundays. We did not eat at restaurants, go shopping, or work in the yard, among other things. Occasionally we would go swimming on a Sunday, but only after sunset. Over the years, that definition of “keeping the Lord’s Day” has changed for many of our friends and family.

The understanding of keeping the fourth commandment has changed since the people of Israel received it as well. The Israelites strictly and carefully (and often legalistically) observed their Sabbath on the seventh day of the week (Saturday). But after Jesus rose from the dead and ascended to heaven, the early Christians began to celebrate their Sabbath on the first day of the week (Sunday), calling it “the Lord’s Day” in celebration of Jesus’ rising from the grave.

While observance of this day has varied in different times and places, a core element stands at the center of remembering and celebrating Jesus’ victory over sin and death: worship.

Though we can and should worship God in everything we do, the New Testament emphasizes the importance of meeting weekly as Christ’s body to worship together—praising God, hearing his Word, sharing the sacraments, and fellowshiping with each other. Till Jesus returns, worship will remain at the heart of keeping the Lord’s Day.

Lord Jesus, your resurrection frees us from sin and death and unites us as one body throughout the earth to worship and praise you when we gather together. Amen.

ETERNAL REST

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and
I will give you rest.”
—Matthew 11:28

Often Sunday nights are my least favorite time of the week. Though I enjoy my work, Monday morning means rising early to face a demanding new work-week. At times, however, those feelings of reluctance about the coming week remind me of the promise of the eternal Sabbath.

In the context of our Bible reading for today, Jesus rebukes the Jewish religious leaders for taking a legalistic approach to daily living. They were critical of the way Jesus and his followers observed the Sabbath (Matthew 12:1-14), and those leaders thought they had all the answers about following the law and getting right with God.

But it's impossible for any of us to get right with God by trying to follow the law perfectly, and Jesus knew that. So he invites all who are weary and burdened to come to him, because he alone will give us true rest.

Couched in Jesus' invitation is his declaration that he is the only Savior. Only he has the power to give his followers rest from sin and from fruitless striving to please God. In short, Jesus himself is our true Sabbath. He promises us peace with God—true, lasting peace—and this is available for us now, wherever we are.

Though it may seem as if we are forever facing challenges, we can count on Jesus to be our forever Sabbath. We can look forward to resting in God's presence with all of his children eternally. Freed from pain, sorrow, and fear of death, we can worship God and enjoy him forever in Christ.

Lord Jesus, Savior of all who come to you, help us to find our rest in you, now and always. Amen.

HONOR YOUR PARENTS

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.
—Ephesians 6:1

Have you ever noticed that most of the Ten Commandments forbid certain behaviors while only some call for positive action? The fourth commandment, for example, is positive, calling us to keep the Sabbath. And the fifth calls for honoring our parents. What's more, only the fifth commandment includes a promise.

The people of Israel took this commandment very seriously. Children could be stoned to death for being stubborn and rebellious to their parents (Deuteronomy 21:21).

In the New Testament, the apostle Paul takes this commandment seriously as well, but he frames it positively in the context of life in Christ. While discussing family relationships and how to submit to each other in love, Paul instructs children to obey their parents. He doesn't call for merely obeying parents' direc-

tions, though; he calls for the deeper duty of honoring and respecting parents as well. When we honor and obey our parents, we honor and obey God and celebrate his gift of this fundamental human relationship in our lives.

Paul notes that parents too have a basic responsibility to their children. Parenting children is an awesome responsibility that includes nurturing love, wisdom, and patience. When children and parents submit to each other in love in the life God has given them, we can expect to see flourishing, peace, and wisdom.

Father in heaven, thank you for the blessings of family life. Help us as parents and children to mirror your love and care. In Jesus' name, Amen.

HONORING OUR AGING PARENTS

Listen to your father, who gave you life, and do not despise your mother when she is old. —Proverbs 23:22

Some years ago, as our nearly adult daughter was on the verge of “leaving the nest,” I mentioned something about the fifth commandment’s call for children to obey their parents. She looked me in the eye and asked, “Does the Bible really teach that adult children need to obey their parents?”

That was a great question, and I’ve often thought about it since then. On the one hand, she was right: as children grow into adults, the dynamics of obedience to their parents will change. Yet the instruction for children to honor and respect their parents, regardless of their age, remains at the core of the commandment.

In this section of Proverbs we find the helpful advice to “listen to your father”—and this points to the fact that through experience gained from years of life’s ups and downs, our parents may well have signifi-

cant wisdom to offer us. We also find here a wise reminder not to dismiss or neglect our aging parents. In fact, for many of us today, caring for aging parents can be one of the most challenging seasons of our lives. Yet as God placed our early care into the hands of our parents, he also places the care of our elderly parents into our hands.

May we strive to do our best to love and honor our parents throughout our entire lives, as God calls us to do.

Father, thank you for the gift of parents. Help us to obey them when we are young, and to honor and respect them throughout our lives. Amen.

RESPECTING AUTHORITY

Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established.
—Romans 13:1

Throughout history, most cultures around the world have understood the family as the “building block” of human society. And many of these cultures operate with the foundational idea that where the family is strong, the society is strong.

This general understanding of the importance of the family unit should come as no surprise, since this is how God has ordered human social life for flourishing. In the family, children learn to honor, respect, and obey their parents, whom God has given them. From lessons learned in the home, children mature into productive citizens in the societies where God, in his sovereign wisdom, has placed them. And just as God has called children to honor and obey their parents, all people are called to honor and obey the earthly authorities God has established.

So the scope of the fifth commandment extends beyond the family to include the authority of teachers, elders, pastors, and governing authorities. In Romans 13 the apostle Paul lays out in detail the consequential meaning of submitting to those in authority over us. No earthly authority is absolute, of course. But in general God calls us to submit to governing authorities and to pray for wisdom as they make decisions for the common good. Authorities and governments can be changed, if necessary, but if they seek our good and that of our neighbors, they generally serve as God’s instruments for peace and well-being.

Almighty God, as we trust in your love and wisdom, help us to honor and obey those in authority over us. For Jesus’ sake, Amen.

DO NOT MURDER

“What have you done? Listen! Your brother’s blood cries out to me from the ground.”
—Genesis 4:10

One of my guilty pleasures is to watch crime shows on Friday evenings while enjoying chocolate and apple slices. Though I like the puzzle effect, drama, and suspense of these TV shows, I sometimes feel uneasy that murder is usually at the heart of this entertainment. God doesn’t find murder amusing at all.

Early in the Bible’s account of human history, we encounter a murder story. There’s nothing entertaining or mysterious about this calculated murder: Cain, out of sheer resentment, jealousy, and malice, brutally kills his innocent brother, Abel. And ever since then, the pages of human history have been soaked with the blood of countless murders.

In the sixth commandment God declares his hatred of murder. Though the command itself does not include a reason, we learn in Genesis 9:6 that

God hates murder because every person is made in the image of God. Killing others is an affront to God himself. Because only God can create life, only God may take it. After Abel’s murder, God swiftly brought Cain to justice.

We should hate murder too. We should hate the senseless killing we see in our world and in our societies—not only murders recognized as crimes, but also those considered as “medical” necessities that represent a devaluing of human life. We should hate the taking of life as an offense to God and to his design for human society.

Jesus, you gave up your life for us so that we might live for you. Help us to honor, value, and protect others as you call us to do. Amen.

THE HEART OF THE MATTER

“I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment.” —Matthew 5:22

As we learn from Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 5, the commandment “You shall not murder” addresses not only our physical actions but also our words and our thoughts.

I have never physically murdered anyone, but I’m humbled—even horrified—to realize that I cannot begin to count the number of times I have violated the sixth commandment. Jesus explains that if we so much as become angry and hateful toward a person and we call them a name that demeans them, we are “subject to judgment.” This gets right to the heart of the matter.

In moments of anger, hurt, resentment, or sometimes even out of mere frustration and annoyance, I have called others or thought of them as “stupid,” just as the religious leaders of Jesus’ day did when they called a brother or sister a “fool.” According to Jesus, this kind of

attitude violates the sixth commandment by showing contempt for others made in the image of God.

As a confessional statement of the church puts it, “I am not to belittle, hate, insult, or kill my neighbor—not by my thoughts, my words, my look or gesture, and certainly not by actual deeds . . .” (Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 105).

I am often guilty of diminishing other people. I need to continually ask God to forgive me and to create in my heart a deep, genuine love for others.

What about you?

Lord Jesus, please forgive me for diminishing and hurting so many people you have made in your image. Help me to learn to love everyone as you do. Amen.

TWO SIDES OF THE SAME COIN

“Am I my brother’s keeper?”

—Genesis 4:9

Sometimes we recognize that two things are closely related or even the same, although they appear to be different—and we describe them by saying they are like two sides of the same coin.

God’s command “You shall not murder” is an example of this. While he orders that we may not harm or kill anyone, God is also calling us to care for and protect our neighbor’s life. Although we might think these are two different things, they are very closely related.

In Jesus’ parable of the good Samaritan, two Jewish religious leaders ignore a man who has been left beaten and half dead on a deserted road. Out of fear, indifference, or a sense that it’s not timely or convenient to help, they pass by the bleeding man. Then a Samaritan, someone despised by the Jews in that day, comes along, and he stops to help the man.

He binds up the man’s wounds and takes him to an inn to be cared for.

The flip side of the command “You shall not kill” involves loving our neighbor, just as the Samaritan in this parable did. The Bible is full of calls to and examples of loving and protecting life: feeding the hungry, housing the vulnerable, welcoming strangers, shielding the weak from the powerful, ensuring justice for all, and even loving our enemies.

If we fail to love and care for the people around us, we are breaking the sixth commandment.

Lord Jesus, just as you have shown love to all, even your enemies, help us to love and care for all the people around us. In your name, Amen.

SAVING MARRIAGE

A man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.
—Genesis 2:24

If atoms are the so-called “building blocks” of matter, what are atoms made of? Scientists have identified protons, neutrons, and electrons as particles that make up atoms, and even more fundamental particles are quarks and leptons.

In some ways similarly, if families are the so-called “building blocks” of society, what is the family made of? Well, there are parents, children, aunts, uncles, and grandparents—and marriage is the foundation of the family unit.

Genesis 2 recounts the creation story, informing us that God made us human beings and that male and female are made for each other. In verse 24 we see also that God established marriage. While no marriage is perfect, marriage in general, and at its best, is a physical and spiritual relationship in which a husband and wife promise to love, honor,

and cherish one another throughout their lives. For the family and for society, marriage is a precious, lasting gift from God.

God promises to bless marriages, and he strictly warns against violating the sacred union between husband and wife. The seventh commandment states: “You shall not commit adultery”—and this refers to all things that would demean or disfigure the gift of marriage. Christians should do all they can to preserve and protect the beauty and holiness of marriage for the sake of families and societies.

Lord God, thank you for marriage. Help us to do all we can to preserve and protect this fragile gift from everything that seeks to destroy it. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

PROTECTING OUR EYES

“If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away.”
—Matthew 5:29

Many years ago, the Christian college I attended did not allow dancing. To skirt this rule, “foot functions” were sometimes held in dormitory basements. Today we may smile at such a quaint restriction, but behind it was concern about a serious challenge to Christian purity: lust.

Recognizing the destructive power of lust, the Bible clearly warns against lustful thinking and behavior that degrades or harms others, as well as endangering the souls of the guilty. Jesus, for instance, in his Sermon on the Mount, declares that anyone who looks at another’s body with lustful desires would be better off gouging out their own eye. Likely using exaggeration here to highlight the danger, Jesus warns that sexually impure thinking is a violation of the command “You shall not commit adultery” (Exodus 20:14). Fol-

lowers of Christ are therefore called to have pure hearts and pure minds.

The permissive and pervasive sexual ethos of our age, jet-fueled by easy, private access to pornography, presents a huge challenge for Christians today. How do we guard our hearts from this evil influence? We need to take the apostle Paul’s advice to his young friend Timothy: “Flee the evil desires of youth and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart” (2 Timothy 2:22). And, if needed, reach out for professional help.

Jesus, help us by purity of heart and thought to honor our bodies and those of others as your holy temples. Amen.

A GREAT MYSTERY

This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church.
—Ephesians 5:32

On weekday evenings, my wife, Vicki, and I can usually be found in our favorite seats in our living room, with Vicki knitting while I read. Occasionally I'll glance at her from over my book, and often I am filled with a rush of gratitude and wonder—grateful for over 42 years of marriage and awed by how intimately our two lives are intertwined.

In his discussion of household relationships in Ephesians 5, Paul addresses marriage. Noting the calls of husbands and wives from different angles, he points out that both spouses are to submit to each other "out of reverence for Christ." According to Paul, the physical and spiritual union of husband and wife points to an even more profound mystery: the union between Christ and his bride, the church.

Being married isn't necessary for being able to understand

some of the mystery in Christ's relationship with the church. Paul wasn't married, and yet through his relationship with Jesus and his experience of the Holy Spirit's work in his heart, he could attest to Jesus' sacrificial love, his cherishing favor, his spiritual nourishment, and, above all, his unconditional acceptance and forgiveness.

Jesus' love for his bride, the church, embraces people of every language and nation under heaven.

In what ways can the Lord's love inspire us to care for and work with each other in his body, the church worldwide?

Jesus, how amazing is your love for us—and for your bride, your church! Help us to mirror your love to each other in marriage and in the church. Amen.

PROPERTY CRIME

“You shall not steal.”

—Exodus 20:15

The story of Achan in Joshua 7 is very disturbing. During the battle for Jericho, Achan steals an ornate robe along with a hoard of silver and gold. Knowing he has committed a serious sin, Achan buries the stolen goods under his tent. Achan's wrongdoing highlights the truth that the cost of breaking the eighth commandment —“You shall not steal”—can be enormous.

Achan cheated God, who had commanded the Israelites to take no plunder for themselves at the battle of Jericho.

But Achan wasn't the first person to cheat God. That started when our first parents took fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3). In stealing from God, Adam, Eve, and many others revealed their dishonesty and a lack of trust in God's promises to provide for all their needs.

God hates our dishonesty and our failure to trust in his assured provision. In Achan's case, not only did he and his family suffer the most drastic consequences, but the whole nation of Israel suffered also. The consequences of Adam and Eve's theft were even more dire, affecting all of their descendants, including each of us. Yet even in their sin, we see God's goodness toward the guilty. Right at the scene of their crime, God promises a Savior to crush the devil who tempted them to sin (Genesis 3:15), and Jesus' finished work provides forgiveness for all who believe in him.

Lord, all that we have comes from you. Help us to trust in you to provide for all our needs and, above all, our need for your Son, Jesus. Amen.

RESPECTING PROPERTY

Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need.
—Ephesians 4:28

Can you guess what the most common crime is in any country?

If you guess that stealing is the most common crime, that's right—shoplifting, burglary, identity theft, credit card fraud, tax evasion, embezzlement, graft, car theft, plagiarism, and more. There are so many ways to steal from others that it can be tricky to list them all.

In the eighth commandment—"You shall not steal" (Exodus 20:15)—we can see that God loathes theft.

Why does God condemn the taking of others' property, possessions, and more?

The root problem is that when we take what God has given to others, even in small amounts, we demean them. We do so by reducing others and their possessions to "resources" that

we want to use or just keep for ourselves. Moreover, when we take from others, we rob them of the opportunity to be stewards of what God has given them to show gratitude to him and to bless others. Ultimately, theft isn't just a shifting of property and possessions; it shows contempt for the fact that we are "created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness."

The eighth commandment reminds us that in trusting God for our own needs, we also display our love for others.

Lord, God, all that we have is a trust from you. Help us to faithfully take care of and use what you have given us and to protect what you have given to others. Amen.

WORKING WITH OUR HANDS

Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life: You should mind your own business and work with your hands. . . .

—1 Thessalonians 4:11

Have you noticed that most of the Ten Commandments begin with a negative order, saying, “You shall not . . .”? In commandments six through ten, the negative orders set clear, concrete boundaries for how we are to treat people. Without the command “You shall not steal,” for instance, it would be impossible to live together with our neighbors. Stealing and deceit destroy trust and create enemies.

In his letter to the Christians at Thessalonica, Paul offers solid advice for respecting the property of others: “Work with your hands.” Does this mean the Bible only approves of livelihoods involving manual labor? No, we can glorify God and love others with all kinds of honorable work we can do. What Paul suggests in this passage is that work itself is good. Work is a gift and a resource,

and it reflects our Maker, who works faithfully with all kinds of creativity. When we work diligently, using the gifts and talents that God gives us, we earn others’ respect and avoid being overly dependent.

Theft has been with us since human beings fell into sin. But today it can seem as if taking advantage of others and their possessions is more rampant than ever. In contrast, by using what God gives us in gratitude and contentment, we can show others how to live in community as God has designed us to do. And this can help us share with others what God has given us.

Lord, all that we have is a gift from you. Help us to use our gifts and talents to share your love and your blessings to us with others. Amen.

TRUTH AND JUSTICE

“You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.”
—Exodus 20:16

Courtroom dramas can make for interesting and engaging stories. Why? Because often in a court of law, two of the most basic concerns for living together in society come into sharp focus: truth and justice. These two main concepts are the foundational principles behind the ninth commandment: “You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.”

In settling a dispute between two parties, the ancient people of Israel had neither a police force nor crime labs to produce evidence. They had to rely on the testimony of witnesses to resolve legal disputes. This was especially true in high-stakes cases involving murder. Only on the testimony of at least two witnesses could the truth of a crime be discovered. Then justice could be served to protect the innocent and hold the guilty accountable. And if a witness was found to be a liar,

that person received the harshest of penalties (Deuteronomy 19:19).

Justice in society is impossible without truth-telling. When all that people ever hear is lies, their life together as citizens and neighbors is reduced to uncertainty and chaos. Sadly, because of rampant lying and disinformation in our societies today, it’s difficult to trust anything some people say. We need to see the utter importance of telling the truth.

God never lies. Nor should we, as we seek to love him and our neighbors.

With the power of your words, Lord, you created the heavens and the earth. Help us to honor you and others with truthful words always. Amen.

A BLATANT LIE

“You will not certainly die,” the serpent said. . . .

—Genesis 3:4

Sometimes we might hear or even tell little lies in attempts to be polite or to spare someone's feelings. Though not recommended, those kinds of lies are far different from lies that are told out of callous self-interest for personal gain or even malice to harm others. Of all the lies told in history, the most blatant, malicious lie of all took place when the devil tempted Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3).

There Satan, appearing as a serpent, lied about the consequences of disobeying God's command not to eat the fruit of one of the trees in the garden. In this way the devil aimed to thwart God's design for his creation and to mar his human creatures forever. Satan lied about God's own truthfulness. His false insinuation awakened a jealousy and desire in our first parents, and the results have reverberated

across our world ever since that day, causing hostility, suffering, and death. Jesus came to save us from the certain destruction we would face, and he called Satan out as “the father of lies.”

How do we overcome the deadly shadow of lies in our world? We do so by acknowledging that God never lies (Hebrews 6:18) and that he hates lying. And we turn to Jesus, the true light and living truth (John 14:6), asking him to help us recognize the truth and to share it with our neighbors everywhere. Doing so, we begin to participate in God's redemption plan by sharing his truthfulness and love with all people.

Father of light, may our words embody your truth in genuine love and mercy always. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

STRIKING A BALANCE

Speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.
—Ephesians 4:15

Sometimes hard conversations are necessary. Perhaps you need to discuss a painfully difficult situation with a family member, a neighbor, or a colleague. Maybe you are dreading it, but you know you must do it. The hardest part of a difficult conversation is to strike the right balance between speaking honestly and speaking with compassion. Speaking without honesty and truth risks misunderstanding, and speaking without compassion risks destroying the relationship.

When we need help with hard conversations, the apostle Paul provides some sound spiritual wisdom. After laying out the rock-solid foundation of Jesus Christ in the life of the church, Paul provides practical advice in Ephesians 4 for living together in maturity and unity. According to Paul, though Christ has given some mem-

bers in the church gifts for teaching and leadership, he calls *every* member to grow in maturity and to strive for unity in the church. Then we will not be blown around “by every wind of teaching” and “deceitful scheming,” he says. Instead, we will grow mature as we speak the truth in love.

With the Holy Spirit’s guidance and blessing, when we keep truth and love in balance, we can expect that growth and maturity will take place in the body of Christ. Truth and love should guide all of our conversations, whether they are easy or difficult.

Lord, you speak to us with truth and love wherever we are. Help us also to speak with others in all situations with truth and love. Amen.

THE RIGHT ANTIDOTE

I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances.
—Philippians 4:11

If you are bitten by a rattlesnake, the right antidote can neutralize or block the venom that begins spreading into your body. The antidote can prevent death or even sickness.

Spiritually speaking, the sin of coveting can also introduce a poison that can lead to committing other sins in our lives.

The tenth commandment forbids us from coveting anything that belongs to our neighbor. When we covet what belongs to others, we develop a deep longing for what they have, and these other persons become little more than an obstacle to the fulfillment of our desires. Coveting becomes intertwined with envy, and these sins diminish us too, by making our spirits restless and filling our hearts with the toxins of bitterness and resentment.

But the Bible offers a powerful spiritual antidote. Paul wrote

to the Philippians from prison, where everything had been taken from him, including his freedom. And he offers his own straightforward prescription: learn to live in contentment with what God has already graciously provided. At the most basic level, contentment means trusting that God knows what's best for us and will always provide what we need. Deep contentment also leads us to rejoice in what God has graciously given to others.

Contentment is not a quick-acting antidote. It comes gradually through the long, sometimes painful process of dying to ourselves and being made new in Christ, who died for us.

Lord, forgive our coveting. Help us to look to you for all good things and to rejoice in all you have given others. Amen.

THE HEART COMMAND

I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, “You shall not covet.” —Romans 7:7

Most people agree that the commandments we have been discussing lately—about promoting justice, honesty, respect for others and their property, and more—offer clear, practical boundaries for living together in society. Guidelines like these are found in all kinds of societies around the world.

We might even think, like many of God’s people in ancient Israel did, that keeping these commands is possible. But the law doesn’t satisfy God’s requirements for our hearts. The apostle Paul painfully realized this when he wrestled with the darkness in his own heart. Though he thought he had been able to keep these commandments through his actions, he was cut to the heart when he read, “You shall not covet.” God commands that we show love not only through our actions but also with our hearts. By

this standard, we are all guilty of failing to love others.

Thankfully, our heart problem can be solved. “While we were still sinners,” Paul writes in Romans 5:8, “Christ died for us.” Jesus is the only one who could ever satisfy the demands of God’s law for perfect obedience and love. And since we are forgiven through Jesus’ sacrifice for our sake, the Holy Spirit gives us new hearts directed toward loving God and our neighbors.

Our new life in Christ moves us beyond mere outward obedience. By trusting Jesus, our restless hearts find true satisfaction in him alone, so that we can truly love others.

Jesus, thank you for rescuing us. By your Spirit, fill our hearts so that we can love others as you have loved us. Amen.

REORDERED DESIRES

If anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.
—Philippians 4:8

Some people claim that we can establish a good habit in as little as 21 days. Others say it takes much longer—between 66 and 254 days—to form a good habit. By sheer effort and discipline, can we will ourselves into a habit of keeping the Ten Commandments?

No. We can only begin on a new path of living for the Lord when we recognize that we need our sins forgiven through Christ and as the Holy Spirit breathes new, eternal life into us. Then, although initiating and achieving righteousness is not up to us, we are responsible to live as God calls us to do.

In our reading for today the apostle Paul offers some helpful instructions for focusing our minds on practical Christian living. “In every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God,” he says. “And

the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

Paul also urges that we focus on whatever is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, and praiseworthy. Then, day by day, as we “keep in step with the Spirit” (Galatians 5:25), we can form holy habits that please God.

When we concentrate on what’s pleasing to God while striving, in the Spirit, to obey him in gratitude, we become more loving toward him and others.

Holy Spirit, thank you for the gift of redeeming love. Renew our hearts and desires in Jesus to focus on pleasing you and loving others. Amen.

TRUE AND PERFECT LOVE

“All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”
—Matthew 22:40

As boys, my brothers and I often played a Bible trivia game at our grandmother's house. The game cards helped to hone our knowledge of various facts in the Bible. “Name the twelve tribes of Israel.” “Name the twelve apostles.” “List the Ten Commandments in order.” Today, I'm not sure I could answer any of these questions without stumbling.

I can, however, give a basic summary of the Ten Commandments. When tested by a teacher of the law, Jesus did that for us. He summarized God's two main principles for living in a right relationship with the Lord and with others. Drawing on the foundation of the entire Old Testament, Jesus said, in effect, “You shall love God with your entire being, and you shall love your neighbor as yourself” (see Matthew 22:37-40).

If we distill Jesus' summary a

step further, we also find the essential keyword: *love*.

Tragically, since the fall into sin, our natural inclination is to hate God and others. Only when God has renewed our hearts can we truly love him. We can also begin truly loving others. And when we truly love others, we demonstrate that we truly love God.

Though our love for God and others will never be perfect, the perfect love on which the Ten Commandments are based is perfectly revealed in Jesus Christ. There's nothing trivial about Christ's perfect love. His perfect love should be our highest aim as we seek to follow him.

Our Father in heaven, remold our hearts to love you truly and to love others as we love ourselves. In Jesus' name, Amen.

TRUST AND OBEY

“If you love me, keep my commands.”

—John 14:15

As I’ve been reflecting on the Ten Commandments, an old gospel song keeps running through my mind: “Trust and Obey.” This simple hymn expresses the bedrock faith and action of seeking to live for the Lord. By trusting God and, through his strength, turning to him for support each day, we find joy in the new life we are promised forever in Christ.

The Ten Commandments reveal to us and convict us of our sin, our deeply ingrained failure and inability to love God and our neighbors as we are called to do. But through the gracious cleansing and renewing of our hearts, the Holy Spirit sets us on a new path of obedience. And on this new path, God’s commands become a guide for gratefully living in obedience to God.

Though we continue to struggle with sin in this life, God still calls us daily to trust him and

obey him. The Ten Commandments and other helpful summaries of God’s law—Micah 6:8; Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 13; Galatians 5:22-25; Ephesians 2:8-10; and more—are faithful guides along the way.

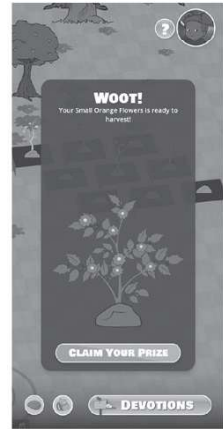
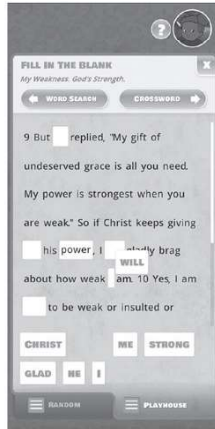
When we trust and obey the Lord, as the song puts it, we can expect to be “happy in Jesus.” Actually, a clearer description is that we can be *joyful* through the inner contentment and wonder grounded in God’s amazing grace and love for us in the Savior, Jesus Christ.

In what ways can you share the joy of new life in Christ with others today?

Help us, Lord God, to walk in the light of your Word, trusting and obeying you in all things, so that our lives overflow with your joy. Amen.



THE KIDS CORNER APP MAKES KIDS' DEVOTIONS EXCITING AND INTERACTIVE!



With Bible readings, games, and rewards, kids explore their faith and build a lifelong habit of prayer and devotions.

AVAILABLE FOR FREE NOW!



App Store



Google Play

Today

refresh, refocus, renew



ReFrame
Ministries

is the new name of
Back to God Ministries International

300 East Beltline Ave NE
Grand Rapids, MI 49506-1208
800-626-3060
info@todaydevotional.com
www.todaydevotional.com
facebook.com/todaydevotional
