

connect 360

BIBLE TEACHING GUIDE

Pillars: The Ten Commandments

*Still Standing After
Centuries of Change*

Pamela Culbertson

K. Randel Everett

Charles Glidewell

Randy Johnson

Keith Lowry



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Pillars: The Ten Commandments—Connect 360 Bible Teaching Guide

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How to Make the Best Use of This *Teaching Guide*

Leading a class in studying the Bible is a sacred trust. This *Teaching Guide* has been prepared to help you as you give your best to this important task.

In each lesson, you will find first “Bible Comments” for teachers, to aid you in your study and preparation. The three sections of “Bible Comments” are “Understanding the Context,” “Interpreting the Scriptures,” and “Focusing on the Meaning.” “Understanding the Context” provides a summary overview of the entire background passage that also sets the passage in the context of the Bible book being studied. “Interpreting the Scriptures” provides verse-by-verse comments on the focal passage. “Focusing on the Meaning” offers help with the meaning and application of the focal text.

The second main part of each lesson is “Teaching Plans.” You’ll find two complete teaching plans in this section. The first is called the “Discovery Plan,” which emphasizes discovery learning techniques; and the second is called the “Discussion Plan,” which provides questions and suggestions for dialogue about the Scriptures. Choose the plan that best fits your class and your style of teaching. You may also use and adapt ideas from both. Each plan is intended to be practical, helpful, and immediately useful as you prepare to teach.

The major headings in each teaching plan are intended to help you sequence how you teach so as to follow the flow of how people tend to learn. The first major heading, “Connect with Life,” provides ideas that will help you begin the class session where your class is and draw your class into the study. The second major heading, “Guide Bible Study,” offers suggestions for helping your class engage the Scriptures actively and develop a greater understanding of this portion of the Bible’s message. The third major heading, “Encourage Application,” is meant to help participants focus on how to respond with their lives to this message.

As you begin the study with your class, be sure to find a way to help your class know the date on which each lesson will be studied. You might use one or more of the following methods:

- In the first session of the study, briefly overview the study by identifying for your class the date on which each lesson will be studied. Lead your class to write the date in the table of contents in their *Study Guides* and on the first page of each lesson.
- Make and post a chart that indicates the date on which each lesson will be studied.
- If all your class has e-mail, send them an e-mail with the dates the lessons will be studied.
- Provide a bookmark with the lesson dates. You may want to include information about your church and then use the bookmark as an outreach tool, too. A model for a bookmark can be downloaded from www.baptistwaypress.org under the “Teacher Helps” tab.
- Develop a sticker with the lesson dates, and place it on the table of contents or on the back cover.

Here are some steps you can take to help you prepare well to teach each lesson and save time in doing so:

1. Start early in the week before your class meets.
2. If your church’s adult Bible study teachers meet for lesson overview and preparation, plan to participate. If your church’s adult Bible study teachers don’t have this planning time now, look for ways to begin. You, your fellow teachers, and your church will benefit from this mutual encouragement and preparation.
3. Overview the study in the *Study Guide*. Look at the table of contents, and see where this lesson fits in the overall study. Then read or review the study introduction to the book that is being studied.
4. Consider carefully the suggested Main Idea, Question to Explore, and Teaching Aim. These can help you discover the main thrust of this particular lesson.

5. Use your Bible to read and consider prayerfully the Scripture passages for the lesson. Using your Bible in your study and in the class session can provide a positive model to class members to use their own Bibles and give more attention to Bible study themselves. (Each writer of the Bible comments in both the *Teaching Guide* and the *Study Guide* has chosen a favorite translation. You're free to use the Bible translation you prefer and compare it with the translations chosen, of course.)
6. After reading all the Scripture passages in your Bible, then read the Bible comments in the *Study Guide*. The Bible comments are intended to be an aid to your study of the Bible. Read also the small articles—"sidebars"—in each lesson. They are intended to provide additional, enrichment information and inspiration and to encourage thought and application. Try to answer for yourself the questions included in each lesson. They're intended to encourage further thought and application, and you can also use them in the class session itself. Continue your Bible study with the aid of the Bible comments included in this *Teaching Guide*.
7. Review the "Teaching Plans" in this *Teaching Guide*. Consider how these suggestions would help you teach this Bible passage in your class to accomplish the teaching aim.
8. Consider prayerfully the needs of your class, and think about how to teach so you can help your class learn best.
9. Develop and follow a lesson plan based on the suggestions in this *Teaching Guide*, with alterations as needed for your class.
10. Enjoy leading your class in discovering the meaning of the Scripture passages and in applying these passages to their lives.

Premium Commentary. Plan to get the additional Bible study comments available online. Visit our website, call 1-866-249-1799, or e-mail baptistway@texasbaptists.org to order the *Premium Commentary*. It is available only in electronic format (PDF) from our website. The price of these comments is \$5 per person. A church or class that participates in our advance order program for free shipping can receive the *Premium Commentary* free. Call 1-866-249-1799 or see www.baptistwaypress.org for information on participating in our free shipping program for the next study.

Premium Teaching Plans. An additional teaching plan is also available in electronic format (PDF) by visiting our website or calling 1-866-249-1799. The price of these plans for an entire study is \$5 per person. It is available only in electronic format (PDF) from our website. A church or class that participates in our advance order program for free shipping can receive the *Premium Teaching Plans* free. Call 1-866-249-1799 or see www.baptistwaypress.org for information on participating in our free shipping program for the next study.

FREE! Downloadable teaching resource items for use in your class are available at www.baptistwaypress.org. Watch for them in the “Teaching Plans” for each lesson. Then go online to www.baptistwaypress.org and click on “Teaching Resource Items” under the “Teacher Helps” tab for this study. These items are selected from the “Teaching Plans.” They are provided online to make lesson preparation easier for handouts and similar items. Permission is granted to download these teaching resource items, print them out, copy them as needed, and use them in your class.

Writers of This Teaching Guide

K. Randel Everett wrote “Bible Comments” for lessons one through thirteen in this *Teaching Guide* and the accompanying lessons in the *Study Guide*. Randel spent four decades pastoring churches in Florida, Virginia, Arkansas, and Texas. He founded the John Leland Center for Theological Studies in Falls Church, Virginia, and has served as the Executive Director of the Baptist General Convention of Texas. He currently serves in leadership for the Baptist World Alliance and is the Founder and President of the 21st Century Wilberforce Initiative based in Washington, DC. 21Wilberforce focuses attention on religious persecution abroad and the enduring importance of religious liberty in the United States. Throughout his career, Randel has traveled to nearly forty countries and witnessed persecution firsthand. Randel and his wife Sheila live in Waco, Texas.

Pamela Culbertson, wrote the “Teaching Plans” for lessons one through four. Pamela is a graduate of Hardin Simmons University and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. She served as a Minister of Youth for over thirty years in churches in Texas and Germany. Currently she serves as an Intercultural Sunday School Specialist. Pamela makes her home in Dallas, Texas.

Randy Johnson, writer of “Teaching Plans” for lessons five through seven is a graduate of Howard Payne University and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, where he received a Master of Divinity from the School of Theology. He retired after completing thirty-eight years of full-time Youth Ministry. He served at Monterey Church in Lubbock, Texas, the First Baptist Church of Bryan, Texas, and for twenty-eight years at First Baptist Church, Richardson, Texas. Randy and his wife Carol, who is employed by the Richardson Independent School District, have been married for forty years. They have two adult daughters and two grandchildren.

Charles Glidewell wrote the “Teaching Plans” for lessons eight through eleven. He is the senior pastor of First Baptist Church, New London, New Hampshire. Charles received the Master of Divinity degree from Logsdon Seminary, Abilene, Texas. His favorite activities include reading, writing, skiing, hiking, going to the beach, and anything that involves spending time with his family. Charles and his wife Lisa Dawn, have three children, Kaitlin, Jonathan, and Jack.

Keith Lowry wrote the “Teaching Plans” for lessons twelve and thirteen. Keith has served churches in Louisiana, Texas, and Tennessee for forty-four years. He worked with the Baptist Sunday School Board, (*now Lifeway*), as an Adult Sunday School consultant, and with Texas Baptists’ Great Commission Team as an Adult Discipleship Specialist for eleven years. He launched the internationally recognized National Boomer Conference, “Catch the Boomer Wave”—www.boomerwave.org. In January of 2019 Keith began ministry with First Baptist Richardson, Texas, as Discipleship Pastor. Keith makes his home in Arlington, Texas, where he happily lives with his wife, Suzanne. They have three grown children and five grandchildren.

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lesson 1

Holding on to Absolutes in a Nihilistic World

MAIN IDEA

God gave us the Ten Commandments as our moral foundation.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

Are our ethics shaped more by culture or by God's laws?

TEACHING AIM

To lead adults to recommit themselves to God's standards of righteousness



Bible Comments

Understanding the Context

Israel was not the first nation to have written laws. The Code of Hammurabi was the written law of the Babylonians (1690 B.C.). Some believe the Ten Commandments borrowed content from the Code of Hammurabi. Others have written that the Israelites received much of their law system from the Canaanites, who derived theirs from the Babylonians. However, in Exodus 20:1, the Scripture is clear, “Then God spoke all these words.”

Even though the written law was given to Moses, God had already defined moral boundaries for Adam and Eve by forbidding them to eat from the fruit of the tree in the middle of the Garden of Eden. Afterward, he created an awareness within humans that signaled wrongdoing. Cain knew it was not right to kill Abel, and Lamech recognized Cain’s guilt was multiplied to him, “If Cain is avenged sevenfold, then Lamech seventy-sevenfold” (Genesis 4:24).

By the time of Noah, “The Lord saw the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Genesis 6:5). However, Noah still chose to rebuke the standards of his culture and stand for righteousness. “Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his time; Noah walked with God” (Genesis 6:9).

Even before the written law was given to Moses, God revealed his righteousness and exposed the wickedness of humanity. Laws were essential to civil society to prevent anarchy. However, the law was not enough. When Moses reminded his people of the Ten Commandments in Deuteronomy 5, the people responded to him arrogantly, “. . . speak to us all that the Lord our God speaks to you, and we will hear it and do it” (v. 27). And God answered, “Oh, that they had such a heart in them, that they would fear me and keep all my commandments always, that it may be well with them and with their sons forever” (v. 29)!

God gave the commandments to his people that they might live in harmony with him and with one another. However, he was also looking toward the day when he would give them new hearts.¹

Interpreting the Scriptures

The Commandments Are Unique (20:1–17)

Recognizing the various purposes of the Ten Commandments, we can begin to think about their characteristics. First, they are absolute. They are not ten suggestions! The phrasing of each says emphatically, “You shall!” or “You shall not!” There is no ambiguity.

Second, the commandments are personal. This personal element is not readily apparent because in English there is no difference between the second-person singular and second-person plural. In the Hebrew text, however, the word “you” is singular in each of the Ten Commandments. They are written to and for you, to and for me. They are addressed to each person individually, and not to Israel generally. This emphasizes the importance of internal motivation in obedience rather than corporate pressure or external coercion.

Eight of the commandments are negative. For that reason alone, some say, “They are invalid today. They are an expression of a negative faith.” However, by looking closely at the commandments, we can analyze their reach. The first four are vertical, requiring reverence for God. The last six are horizontal, demanding respect for humanity.

Western society’s laws and culture have derived more from the Ten Commandments than from any other document of antiquity. A society without boundaries is anarchy; right and wrong must be established. As a society and as individuals, we must be clear about absolutes lest we destroy one another. A study of the Ten Commandments helps us secure the necessary boundaries.

The Commandments Were Given to Bring Moral Light (20:1–17)

The story of Scripture is a tale of moral decadence from Adam and Eve to Lamech, and then to the people of Noah’s day, the selfishness of Lot, the immorality of Sodom and Gomorrah, the treachery of Joseph’s brothers, and the cruelty of the Egyptians toward the Hebrews. The biographies of individuals and nations tell of those who did what was right in their own

eyes—stories of deceit, treachery, selfishness, immorality, and greed. God created humanity to live in fellowship with him and each other, but they descended to live like animals.

Those living in darkness needed a light. Society needed a moral standard defining the absolutes of righteousness and lawlessness. The decadence continues today. In the name of their god, terrorists are ravaging and burning villages, kidnapping and raping girls, blowing up airplanes and buildings. Gangs terrorize inner city neighborhoods; illegal drugs destroy lives, families, and communities. Innocent children and worshippers are gunned down in schools and churches.

Along with that decadence, there is a subtle path of rebellion often ignored by those of us who claim to be Christ-followers. Vicious slander, malicious gossip, racism, and greed destroy lives.

The institution of marriage is mocked, and society promotes all kinds of sexual perversion and is intolerant of any who disagree. According to the Guttmacher Institute, approximately 914,000 babies died by abortion in the United States in 2015. In addition to this horrific statistic, many children brought into the world are sentenced to childhoods without the loving care of a mother and father.

Our culture's war against absolutes not only ignores the Ten Commandments, but it also celebrates as progress the slide toward enlightenment and the movement away from absolutes. God's commandments are absolutes, not suggestions. The One who created us knows what brings hope and fulfillment. We ignore these commands at our peril.

The Commandments Are Given to Strengthen Relationships (20:1–17)

Dr. Oscar Thompson, an evangelism professor at Southwestern Seminary, wrote the book *Concentric Circles of Concern*. One night when Oscar and I were leaving the library, he made a statement that he later included in his book. He said the most crucial word in the English language, apart from proper nouns, is the word *relationships*. The first four commandments address our relationship with God and the last six speak to our relationships with one another. If our relationship with God is not right, then the foundation for our relationships with one another is compromised.

What a stunning difference is made when a family loves God with its whole heart and loves one another as oneself! Such devotion can change our churches, cities, and our nation. Compare this with families, churches, or societies that do what is right in their eyes. God created us with a desire to live in harmony with him and with one another, that is why he sent his only Son to make such a life possible.

The Commandments Are Given to Point us to Christ (20:1–17)

Consider these biblical admonitions concerning God’s commandments:

For, on the one hand, there is a setting aside of a former commandment because of its weakness and uselessness (for the Law made nothing perfect), and on the other hand there is a bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God (Hebrews 7:18–19).

Do not think I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets, I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished (Matthew 5:17–18).

Therefore, the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith (Galatians 3:24).

God gave his law to the Hebrew people so they would walk in harmony with him and one another. He provided moral clarity to a world driven by violence and selfishness. He gave light to people living in darkness. He also pointed them to a hope beyond themselves: One would come after them that would offer them a new nature.

Focusing on the Meaning

Dr. John Newport was a favorite professor for my wife and me when we were students at Southwestern Seminary. On one occasion, when I had returned to Fort Worth as a pastor, I had the privilege of preaching a funeral with Dr.

Newport for a mutual friend. The service was in Dallas and the burial in Fort Worth, so that allowed us to spend some time together as we drove between the two cities. After the service, I asked Dr. Newport to describe one of his most significant life lessons.

Without hesitating, he said, “My momma was right.” She said, “The straight and narrow road leads to freedom.” At first, he thought his mother was wrong. How could a life with so many negatives bring freedom? However, he told me he was glad he followed her advice. He said the life of restrictions kept him from smoking, drinking, and other harmful practices that may have affected his health. He was also faithful to one woman, his wife, who brought him love, joy, and a lifestyle free from fear of the physical, mental, and emotional traumas of immorality. He also remained faithful to Christ, and that opened for him incredible relationships, joy, and peace in a fulfilling vocation. Dr. Newport said, “Yes, the straight and narrow brought me freedom and life.”

The Ten Commandments may be primarily negative and restrictive, but they certainly produce freedom and positive relationships.

Teaching Plans

DISCOVERY PLAN

Connect with Life

1. Before class, secure newspapers from the week and some news magazines—or print online news stories. Create small groups and give the following assignment:

Using newspapers, a magazine, and cell phones, find headlines that depict the ethical and moral chaos prevalent in the world today.

Say, *Like the world of ancient Israel, our world is in cultural chaos. Today, we begin a study of the Ten Commandments. Ask,*

- *Can ten ancient laws save our present society from destruction?*
- *How are the Ten Commandments different from the moral laws of other cultures?*

Guide Bible Study

2. In advance, enlist someone who enjoys doing research and acting to prepare a Moses monologue that depicts the cultural environment in which the Israelites found themselves. The researcher/actor will want to use the *Teaching Guide* and commentaries for the research. Introduce Moses by saying, *Today, we have a special guest who was present when the Ten Commandments were given. Welcome Moses to class, and ask him to speak. (Moses will remain for Step 3.)*
3. Before class, prepare sentence strips on which you write one of each of the Ten Commandments. (A copy of these sentence strips is available in Teaching Resource Items for this study at www.baptistwaypress.org). Randomly, attach a sentence strip to the backrest of ten classroom chairs. Say, *On the backrest of some the chairs, you will find a sentence strip. Call on class members to read aloud their sentence strips. Ask, What are these statements? Ask the ten people who have the Ten Commandments*

to come to the front of the class and line up in the order in which God gave the commandments to Moses.

When the class thinks the Ten Commandments are in the proper order, call on Moses to read aloud Exodus 20:1–17. Collect the sentence strips, invite everyone to take a seat, and thank Moses for his presentation. You will want to attach the sentence strips to the focal wall where they will remain for this unit of study. Say, *The first four commandments focus on our relationship with God, and the remaining six focus on our relationship with others.* (Option: Randomly attach the Ten Commandment sentence strips to a focal wall before class. Ask class members to put them in the order they were given without referring to their Bibles.)

4. Create three groups and give the following written assignments. (A copy of these assignments is available in Teaching Resource Items for this study at www.baptistwaypress.org).

Group 1

Using the *Study Guide*, turn to the section “The Ten Commandments are from God.” Summarize the section and discuss this question: *If the law of God is written on our hearts, why do we need the Ten Commandments?*

Group 2

Using the *Study Guide*, turn to the section “The Commandments Reflect God’s Character.” Summarize the section and discuss these questions: *Why was the law given? What did we learn about God and man in the giving of the law?*

Group 3

Using the *Study Guide*, turn to the section “The Commandments Are Based on an Exclusive Relationship.” Summarize your section and discuss how the law reveals our need for a Savior.

Allow time for groups to share the responses to their assignments.

5. Direct the class to the *Study Guide* sidebar “A Generation in Crisis.” Recruit a volunteer to read the sidebar aloud as the class follows along. Then, ask the following questions:
- *How has secularism challenged the absolutes of the Ten Commandments?*
 - *How have shifts in our culture affected the church?*
 - *How do you respond to people who say Christianity is a life lived with a lot of “do-nots?”*
 - *Can you think of examples of when Christians must say “No” to the world and proclaim Christ’s truth to a culture in chaos?*

Encourage Application

6. Ask, *How do the Ten Commandments help you in your daily work and as you engage the world around you?* Say, *The Commandments were given to help us cultivate a deep and growing relationship with God.* Lead class members in a time of silent meditation, asking God to help them adjust their lives to live for him.

DISCUSSION PLAN

Connect with Life

1. Say, *Throughout your life, you have lived with rules and laws. Name some rules and laws that were set by:*
- *Your family.* Allow for responses.
 - *Your city/state/country.* Allow for responses.
 - *Your work places.* Allow for responses.

Ask, *Why were these rules or laws established? Which ones were absolutes? How does a world in cultural chaos influence someone’s responses to rules and laws?*

Guide Bible Study

2. Direct class members to work in groups of two or three. Give each group a blank piece of paper. Say, *Let’s consider another set of laws. Within your*

group, list from memory the Ten Commandments in the correct order. Allow time for groups to work and then call time by displaying a prepared poster that lists the Ten Commandments. Ask, *How did your group do?*

Enlist a class member to read aloud Exodus 20:1–17. Call attention to the title of today’s lesson. Ask class members to use their phones or a few dictionaries you provide to look up what the words *absolute* and *nihilistic* mean. Encourage volunteers to share the definitions. Say, *Today, we begin a study of the Ten Commandments, which were given to Moses 3,500 years ago. Ask, Are the Ten Commandments treated as absolutes in our lives? Are they still applicable today?*

3. Before class, use the *Teaching Guide* and commentaries to prepare a short lecture on the moral and ethical crises the Israelites faced leading to God’s giving of the Ten Commandments. Say, *The Israelites came to Mount Sinai within three months of leaving Egyptian slavery. It was in the wilderness of the Sinai Peninsula that God declared his covenant to his people. Then launch your lecture.*
4. Display a poster of the outline of the lesson. Read the outline aloud.
 - The Commandments are from God. Say, *Exodus 20:1 tells us “And God spoke all these words.”*
 - The Commandments Reflect God’s Character.
 - The Commandments are Based on an Exclusive Relationship.
5. Instruct class members to read the information found in the *Study Guide* section “The Commandments Reflect God’s Character.” Then, ask them to silently read Romans 3:19–21 in their Bibles. On a markerboard, make two columns and entitle one *God* and the other *People*. Ask, *What do the commandments show us about who God is?* (He is holy and he is righteous.) Write the responses under the column entitled *God*. Ask, *What do the commandments show us about people?* (People are sinful, unrighteous, immoral.) Write the responses under the column entitled *People*.
6. Say, *These commandments serve to keep order, restrain individuals who cause disorder, and help the world take a giant step away from cultural chaos. Refer to the “Questions” in the Study Guide and ask, How has secularism challenged the absolutes of the Ten Commandments?*

7. Enlist a class member to read Galatians 3:24 aloud. Then, read aloud the third statement on your poster: “The Commandments are Based on an Exclusive Relationship.” Say, *It is through the law that we realize we need a Messiah.* Read aloud Matthew 5:17. Ask, *How did Jesus fulfill the law?*

Encourage Application

8. Ask class members to reflect on this question: *Are your ethics and moral principles shaped more by culture or God’s laws?* Then, direct them to look at the poster of the Ten Commandments displayed at the front of the room. Say, *Consider what is lost when the Ten Commandments are broken (relationships, lives, property, happy home life, etc.).* Close in prayer, asking God to help class members make every effort to live by the Ten Commandments and positively transform the moral climate of the culture.

Notes

1. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations in lessons 1–13 are from the New American Standard Bible (1995 edition).