

THE 10
GREATEST
struggles
OF YOUR
LIFE

FINDING
FREEDOM
IN GOD'S
COMMAND

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STUDY GUIDE

This study guide is ideal for personal study or as part of a regularly scheduled group discussion, whether at home or church. For group study, this guide is designed for use in ten sessions. Read one chapter of this book, and then prepare your answers to the questions that follow before the group meeting.

Please note that sentences shown in boldface in each set of questions come directly from the corresponding chapter in the main text. They are emphasized both to show their importance and to help you locate them in the corresponding text.

Our prayer for you is that in this material you will recognize these ten great struggles in your own life and by God's grace cultivate a growing love for Him and other people.

CHAPTER ONE
YOUR STRUGGLE WITH GOD

1. Think back over your life and identify one person whose directions or instructions you gladly followed. Maybe it was a pastor, teacher, coach, or a parent: _____

What, in particular, made you want to follow them?

2. **The God you worship will shape the values you hold, and the values you hold will shape the lifestyle you choose.**

Name a lifestyle decision you are currently thinking about:

Take the two options you are considering and trace them back to the values behind them. Then trace the values back to the object of your worship.

Option: _____

Value behind it: _____

Object of worship: _____

Option: _____

Value behind it: _____

Object of worship: _____

Write down your observations:

3. **This attempted reshaping of God is not new. It goes all the way back to the garden of Eden.** God had told the first man and woman not to touch the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. But Satan wanted them to make a different choice. His **goal** was to change how they *behaved*. His **strategy** was to undermine what they *believed*.

Satan's strategy sought to undermine three *areas of belief*:

#1—*Did God really say . . . ?*

(How can you be sure you have the *correct interpretation*?)

#2—*You will not surely die.*

(This talk about *death* following sin is surely *exaggerated*.)

#3—*You will be like God. . . .*

(You can *decide* your own *values*.)

Which area of belief is most difficult for you? (Give an example.) Why?

Area: _____ Example: _____

Why? _____

4. You are dependent. You depend on food, air, and water. But God depends on no one. He exists in the power of His

own eternal life. **He is God whether you believe Him or not.** He is who He is. So to make Him your God is to come in line with reality.

Place a check mark on the line below that best represents your orientation to God:

hatred _____ avoidance _____ love _____

Try to identify or describe the *primary reason* for your current orientation:

5. God introduces Himself by saying: *"I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery."* If God were to deliver the Ten Commandments to you personally, today, how do you think He would introduce Himself to you?

Write in your own words what you think He would say:

6. The Creator, who has all power and is accountable to nobody but Himself, does not make His appeal to you on the basis of raw power, like a dictator. Instead He says, "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery" (Exodus 20:2). It is on the basis of His unconditional grace, mercy, and love that He appeals to His people to follow His commands.

8. Let these applications of the first commandment stimulate your thinking:

a. *Baby Step: Cultivate your affection for God.* (Choose one or more to concentrate on this week.) Pursuing a life of loving loyalty to God means cultivating your affection for Him. As with any relationship of genuine love, it involves thinking about Him, appreciating Him, honoring Him, desiring Him, fearing Him, trusting Him, hoping in Him, delighting in Him, calling upon Him, and giving thanks to Him.

b. *Substantial Move: Turn away from all that offends God.* (Evaluate this list and turn away from anything you find here.) I've found it helpful to identify some of the sins that break the first commandment: pride, hero worship, infatuations, allowing other people to bind your conscience, superstition, consulting the devil, mediums, fortune-tellers . . . impatience with God . . . teaching or believing that all religions lead to God . . . despair.

c. *Radical Life-Change: Embrace the Lord unconditionally.* When Jesus said "follow Me," none of the disciples knew where that would lead, and you can't know that either. Making Christ Lord of your life could get you into some tough situations. It might lead you to the other side of the world. It may even cost you your life. But God is calling you to a step of commitment based on trust, because you know that He is God and that He is good.

As you reflect on the applications above, write below how you would like to respond to God's words to you in the first commandment:

CHAPTER TWO YOUR STRUGGLE WITH WORSHIP

1. Did any of the following play a part in your religious experience growing up: icons, beads, pictures of Jesus, religious paintings or sculptures, or a crucifix with Jesus on it? If so, how do you believe it may have shaped your understanding of God?

2. **God is greater than your highest thought about Him.** You cannot reduce Him to a system of logical thought. You cannot confine Him to the narrow boundaries of your experience. Nothing in creation can represent the Creator.

Which are you more inclined to do?

- Try to reduce God to a system of logical thought
- Try to confine Him to the narrow boundaries of my experience

We know Him not by cultivating our imagination, but by believing His revelation. When might your inclination (identified above) tend to *complement* (“supplement”) His revelation, and when might it *eclipse* it?

complement: _____

eclipse: _____

3. Saint Augustine said **idolatry is worshiping what should be used or using what should be worshiped**. Try and re-write this in your own words.

4. **The way to dethrone created things that could become idols is to ask what they are for**. Describe what you believe is the purpose of each of the following:

- Marriage _____
- Family _____
- Money _____
- Work _____
- Church _____

5. **God is not some impersonal force that exists to fulfill your fantasy. He is who He is**, and any attempt to make Him conform to what we want Him to be is utterly offensive. Loving God means embracing Him as He is.

What are some ways we can protect our love for God by guarding ourselves against this human tendency to make God conform to what we want Him to be?

6. **Jesus is the one true image of the invisible God.** He is the exact representation of God's being (Colossians 1:15; Hebrews 1:3). That is why Jesus could say, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father," (John 14:9).

Nothing created can lead you to the Creator. But you can come to God through Jesus, in whom God has drawn near to you. If you will embrace Him, He will embrace you, and that is where eternal life begins. Do you agree or disagree with these statements? Why or why not?

7. **Let God be "I AM WHO I AM" and some will call you intolerant, arrogant, or even a bigot.** But others will consider the words of Christ and because of your declaration and the Spirit's power believe the no-holds-barred words of Jesus: "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6).

Have you ever been called intolerant, arrogant, or a bigot because you declared the uniqueness of salvation through Christ? What happened?

What do you think they meant by it when they called you by that name?

Have you ever led someone to Christ by declaring Jesus' unique message? What happened?

8. Reflect on these "next steps." How might God be calling you to respond to the second commandment?

a. *Baby Step: Admit to God that I am using Him.* (Confess this to God and to another Christian you trust and ask them to pray for you.) Something within me wants to use God more than I want to worship Him. I want Him to forgive my sins. I want Him to get me into heaven. I want Him to give me good health, long life, an intimate marriage, success in my career, healthy children, and multiple grandchildren. The list is unending, and if I find that I go without one of these things, I am tempted to find fault with God.

b. *Substantial Move: Take steps to dethrone an idol in my life.* (See question 4.) Make plans to shift your relationship with this idol in order to dethrone it.

c. *Radical Life-Change: Begin praying in submission to God's will.* (Stop praying primarily as a means of asserting your own will.) We are never in more danger of seeing God as a resource to be used than when we come to Him in prayer. Somewhere deep in our hearts lurks the idea that

if God really loves us, He is under an obligation to give us what we ask and that if we ask in faith, He really owes it to us to come through. That's idolatry. Prayer is not a tool for manipulating God. True prayer is offered in the name of Jesus Christ, and that means that it can only be offered in submission to His will.

As you reflect on the applications above, write below how you would like to respond to God's words to you in the second commandment:

CHAPTER THREE YOUR STRUGGLE WITH RELIGION

1. The way that you use a person's name says a great deal about what you think of them. Think of a positive and a negative example of this truth:

positive: _____

negative: _____

2. **Big names cause people to sit up and take notice.** Identify a celebrity "name" that causes you to sit up and take notice. What impressions do you associate with it?

name: _____ *impression(s):* _____

When you talk to family, coworkers, or neighbors, do their attitudes about God or the church reflect any of the above problems? Give an example:

5. Take McDonald's as an example. One day, I decide to get creative so I start thinking: *McDonald's is a wonderful Scots/Irish name, but there's nothing distinctively Scottish about the menu. So why don't I do something about it? Instead of the Big Mac, I can serve up haggis burgers. Then for breakfast I can offer oatmeal, and instead of coffee I can serve hot mugs of tea.*

You can't use the name McDonald's to endorse your own thing, and you can't use the name of God like that either.

What item(s) do you think belong on the menu of someone who bears the name "Christian"?

6. "You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, *for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name*" (Exodus 20:7, emphasis added). The third commandment points directly to two New Testament Scriptures that speak about a sin for which there is no forgiveness. Jesus said: "I tell you the truth, all the sins and blasphemies of men will be forgiven them. But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will *never be forgiven*; he is *guilty of an eternal sin*" (Mark 3:28-29, emphasis added).

This statement has troubled many people who wonder if they may at some time have committed this unforgivable sin. Do you ever wonder about this?

The Bible does not teach that anyone who misuses the name of God, Jesus, or the Holy Spirit will inevitably/ automatically go to hell. But it does teach that unless you make the right use of God's name you will not go to heaven. Try to write this statement in your own words:

7. **God's answer to a world that blasphemes His name is a community who honors His name.** "All day long my name is constantly blasphemed. *Therefore my people will know my name*" (Isaiah 52:5–6, emphasis added). Honoring the Lord's name is our highest calling. Christ will be honored when the world sees a community of people who show awe and affection for Him.

How do you reflect to the world an *awe* of God?

How do you reflect to the world an *affection* for God?

8. **If you are a Christian, you bear the name of Christ and the reactions of many people to God's name will be informed by what they see in you.** Let these applications of the third commandment stimulate your thinking:

a. *Baby Step: Stop using God's name as a vulgarity.* If you have gotten into the pattern of saying "Oh my God," or "good God" every time you are surprised, ask for God's help to overcome the habit, and ask a good friend to hold you accountable as you make the change.

b. *Substantial Move: Leave room for testing what God has said and a place for listening to other believers who also have the Holy Spirit.* We should be very careful about using God's name as an endorsement for an idea that could in time turn out to be a mistake. It is more honoring to Christ, and more fitting to the spirit of humility, to say "I *believe* that the Lord has led me," or "I *feel* that the Lord has directed me," when describing our experience of guidance.

c. *Radical Life-Change: Turn away from a life of using the name of God in your own way or for your own ends.* "Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'" (Matthew 7:22–23).

As you reflect on the applications above, write below how you would like to respond to God's words to you in the third commandment:

CHAPTER FOUR YOUR STRUGGLE WITH TIME

1. **The overfilled plate of our lives leaves us unable to walk freely, and we often feel that we are just one step away from disaster.** Identify what's on your plate:

Relationship Plate	Family Plate	Work Plate	Leisure Plate	Church Plate
				
1. _____	1. _____	1. _____	1. _____	1. _____
2. _____	2. _____	2. _____	2. _____	2. _____
3. _____	3. _____	3. _____	3. _____	3. _____
4. _____	4. _____	4. _____	4. _____	4. _____

2. **Some Christians have thought that they were honoring God by making Sunday the dulllest day of the week, a day marked by long lists of things that you could not do, rather than a day of delight.**

Growing up, how did you typically experience Sundays—as a day at church?—a day to sit in front of the TV?—a day just like every other? —or something else?

Did you look forward to it? Why or why not?

3. **God could have made the world in an instant, so why did He choose to make the world in six days?** The answer would seem to be that God was modeling a pattern of how we should divide our work. “Six days you shall labor and do all your work . . . for in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them” (Exodus 20:9, 11).

The successful worker will be one who learns the ability to divide the work and establish priorities. Write down what you need to accomplish in one area of your life—then break it down.

area: _____ What needs to be accomplished:

Let’s break it down. What needs to be accomplished . . .

this *year*? _____
this *month*? _____
this *week*? _____
tomorrow? _____

4. “Six days you shall labor and do all your work” (Exodus 20:9). **Divide your time as God did, and you will be able to enjoy completing your work.** At the end of each day, God

saw that His work was good. You don't find God saying, "I've made the moon and the stars, but I haven't gotten around to the fish and the animals, and I'm nowhere near starting on the man!"

Instead, God enjoyed His completed work at the end of each day.

a. Think back over your last week of work—how much did you enjoy it?

←—————→
almost no satisfaction ___ occasionally satisfying ___ great personal satisfaction ___

Too often, I feel burdened by what I have to do tomorrow more than I find pleasure in what God enabled me to do today.

b. Think back over your last week of work—how would you describe the effects of worrying about what you needed to do tomorrow?

←—————→
minimal ___ debilitating ___ overwhelming ___

Do you believe your work should be satisfying and enjoyable? Why or why not?

5. **Rest is the enjoyment of completed work. That's what God did on the seventh day.** "He rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and *made*

it holy” (Exodus 20:11, emphasis added). God calls us to follow His pattern by keeping the Sabbath day holy. The word *holy* means separate or different, not bound up with the rest. So God is calling us to make one day different from the rest of the others so that we can savor the joy of what has been completed.

Spend some time thinking about what a Sabbath day for you (or you and your family) might *include* and what you would *exclude*. (If you are married and/or have older kids, discuss this with your spouse and/or children.)

include: _____

exclude: _____

Are there further resources you would need to actually do this? What are they?

6. “Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy” (Exodus 20:11). God’s pattern of resting on the seventh day reminds us that we can enter into rest only when we have completed our work. We do not rest in order that we will be able to work; we work so that we will be able to rest.

It is an anticipation of the day when all our work will be complete and God’s people will celebrate together in the full splendor of His immediate presence. **The Sabbath is a window in time to strengthen your grip on eternity.**

Brainstorm ideas for bringing the eternal implications of the Sabbath into focus:

7. We cannot rest until our work is done. **If I cannot finish the work of keeping God's commandments, how can I hope to enter into God's rest?** It would be possible only if someone else completed the work for you, and that is precisely what Jesus Christ has done. That is why Jesus is able to say, "Come to me . . . and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).

Have you experienced this kind of rest? Are you experiencing it now?

8. **Christ's finished work sets me free to offer my work as a loving expression of gratitude and worship, flowing out of the rest that I find in Him.** How would God have you respond to the fourth commandment?

a. *Baby Step: Divide up your work and set priorities for a month.* (Build on your work from question 3.) The successful worker will be one who learns the ability to divide the work and establish priorities.

b. *Substantial Move: Help someone enjoy the blessing of the Sabbath.* Some people have responsibilities from which it is very difficult to rest. I'm thinking especially of single parents, those who care for the elderly, or parents

of special-needs children. It takes a community to make it possible for folks with unrelenting responsibilities to enjoy the blessing of the Sabbath.

c. Radical Life-Change: Provide the means of rest for those in your sphere of influence. “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 manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates” (Exodus 20:10, emphasis added).

How did the applications above stimulate your thinking? Write below how you would like to respond to the fourth commandment:

How would you need to realign your values to be obedient to God in this area?

CHAPTER FIVE YOUR STRUGGLE WITH AUTHORITY

1. The first people God puts in the path of your life are your father and your mother. **Parents are the first authority figures in our lives.**

What one thing are you thankful for in your relationship with your parents?

What one thing have you struggled with in your relationship with your parents?

2. **Your first experience of a person with authority will shape your reaction to other authorities.** If, in your early experience, you saw parental authority used well, you will most likely have an instinctive respect for people who are given authority in other areas of life. But if you experienced the abuse of authority, you may find that you are instinctively suspicious of other authorities, and that where you encounter authority, you want to resist it and establish your independence from it.

How do you typically respond to authority? Write down a couple of examples of people in authority over you, and describe how you have responded to them.

Example: _____ *Response:* _____

Example: _____ *Response:* _____

3. The fifth commandment would be easy if it said, "Honor your father and mother *as long as they are honorable.*" But God's Word doesn't say that. He puts certain people in our way, and some of them are difficult to honor.

He does not allow us the luxury of choosing who we should honor. Identify a situation you are facing or have recently faced (let the scenarios below stimulate your thinking), and write down what goes through your mind as you consider honoring this person.

- a. You are a Christian student and find yourself in class with a difficult teacher.

- b. You have a difficult boss who behaves dishonorably or unethically.

- c. You feel your pastor or elders are leading the church in an inappropriate way.

Situation: _____

Feelings: _____

Barriers: _____

Excuses: _____

Other: _____

4. **[God] puts certain people in our way, and some of them are easy to honor. With others it is extremely difficult.**

Where have you seen God's authority best represented?

Where have you seen God's authority most distorted?

5. **The greatest challenge for any parent is to consider how you are representing God in the life of your child.** (This is also true in any other position of authority we hold.)

a. **Wisdom**—Wisdom can tell when your child is being a wild donkey, and when he or she is like a bruised reed. Discern the difference and then you will know how to use your strength.

b. **Sufficiency**—The healthy parent and the effective leader is the one who finds his or her sufficiency in God and therefore is free to serve those God has placed in their care. A parent who has not fulfilled their own hopes and dreams can easily slide into living them out through their children. A father or mother who has not felt loved may try to find what they lack in their child.

c. **Love**—Authority without love is always destructive. This is especially important for Christian parents. Sometimes, we can long so deeply for our children to follow Christ that we run the risk of manipulation. Love woos but it never forces, and a wise parent will discern the difference.

Reflect on your own exercise of authority. In light of the three boundaries above, where do you think you are the strongest? Where are you weakest? Why? (Try to be as specific as you can.)

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Strongest: _____ *Why?* _____

Weakest: _____ *Why?* _____

6. **A wise father once said to his son, “If I ever have to choose between being your father and your friend, I will always choose the role of your father. You have many friends, but you only have one father.”**

Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not?

7. **“We must never be too direct in this matter [making a decision for Christ] especially with a child; never be too emotional. If your child feels uncomfortable as you are talking to him about spiritual matters, or if you are talking to someone else’s child and he feels uncomfortable, your method is obviously wrong. . . . You are bringing pressure to bear. That is not the way to do this work.”**

Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not?

8. Here are some ideas to stimulate your thinking about how you could respond to the fourth commandment:

a. *Baby Step: Make God's Word your primary parenting resource.* Of all the materials that are available on parenting today, there is no greater resource than the Word of God. Learning who God is will give you the ultimate template for parenting. Think of all the ways in which you stand in the place of God for your child. You are the child's guardian, provider, shepherd, intercessor, teacher, and example. What your child experiences from you will shape that child's impressions of God.

b. *Substantial Move: Pray for yourself and for your parents.* If your parents are still in that position [unworthy of honor], you may feel alienated from them. But even if the relationship has broken down, you can still ask God to give you compassion for them. Pray that God will give them what they lack. That's the Spirit of Jesus: He does not treat us as our sins deserve.

c. *Radical Life-Change: Take your eyes off your parents' failures.* If you have suffered through abused authority, you may have feared the authority of God, and therefore kept at a distance from Him. But the healing of many wounds will begin as you look away from the failings of your parents and up into the face of God. Maybe you are wondering where you can find the wisdom, sufficiency, and love that you need for parenting your children. The answer is that you will find all these things in God Himself. He is our wisdom, and He is completely self-sufficient, the great I AM.

How did the applications above stimulate your thinking?
Write below how you would like to respond to the fifth commandment:

CHAPTER SIX YOUR STRUGGLE FOR PEACE

1. **The reason that human life is so valuable is that it bears the image of God.** The offense involved in taking a human life is that it involves destroying the image of God. “You shall not murder” (Exodus 20:13).

Describe in your own words what it means to be made “in the image of God.”

2. “Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man” (Genesis 9:6). In these words, God made it clear that there is a vast chasm between the life of fish, plants, and animals and the life of a man or a woman who is made in God’s image.

Many people today have lost sight of that chasm. Where do you see evidence of this in our culture today?

3. When discussions about the sixth commandment get going, two controversial issues usually come up. One is the issue of war, and the other is capital punishment. Christians have held different positions on both of these issues, and there is room for legitimate debate on both between people who are serious about applying the teaching of the Bible.

I'm convinced that there are some situations in which if a life or lives are taken, many other lives may be saved. Do you agree or disagree? Why?

4. "You shall not murder" (Exodus 20:13).

a. God forbids acts of *murder*. This would involve taking the life of your neighbor, whom God calls you to love.

b. The sixth commandment speaks to the issue of *abortion*, which is taking the life of an unborn child.

c. The sixth commandment also speaks to the issue of *euthanasia* in our society. Euthanasia involves making a decision that a person's life is no longer worth living and that some action should be taken to end it.

d. Another application of the sixth commandment is the issue of suicide; that is an attempt to take your own life, which has been made in the image of God.

Have you ever struggled with one of these areas? If so, how did you decide?

Which of the neighbors above do you believe our society has the hardest time loving: the one who murders, aborts a child, practices euthanasia, or commits suicide? Why do you think this is the case?

5. Jesus makes it clear that **the scope of this commandment goes far beyond acts of murder, and that it searches out the thoughts and attitudes of our hearts.**

Jesus taught that abusive speech is a direct violation of the sixth commandment. We might call this rudeness, but Jesus makes it clear that it is a station on the line of conflict and that language that is rude, insulting, abusive, or demeaning is a violation of the sixth commandment.

If angry words that insult or diminish another person are a violation of the sixth commandment, then all of us are guilty. Put an "x" on the line below where you believe your position is, based on the sixth commandment:

- I plead no contest! _____ the jury is still out _____
 innocent until proven guilty _____

Explain why you placed the “x” where you did:

6. God calls you to love your neighbor as yourself, and that means that He wants you to take good care of your own life and your health. You are a steward of the life that God has given you. It is of unique and irreplaceable value, so handle your own life with care.

You can break the sixth commandment by neglecting a proper pattern of sleep, by addiction to work, by an improper use of food, drink, or drugs, or by a lack of proper exercise. Evaluate your thinking about the stewardship of your own life:

These things don't “really” matter _____

I have “nagging” concerns about these things _____

I take these things seriously _____

7. When Christ explained the meaning of the sixth commandment, He applied it by saying that we should **settle our disputes as quickly as possible** (Matthew 5:25). This theme runs throughout the New Testament.

Are you involved in a dispute with someone? What has been your approach to this conflict?

waiting for them to take the first step _____

hoping it will just “go away” _____

settling it as quickly as I can _____

8. Consider the following applications of the sixth commandment:

a. *Baby Step: Steward your body.* You can break the sixth commandment by neglecting a proper pattern of sleep, by addiction to work, by an improper use of food, drink, or drugs, or by a lack of proper exercise.

b. *Substantial Move: Settle a dispute.* The principle is clear: If there is a way to settle a dispute with integrity, take it. That's what God wants you to do. Jesus is the Prince of Peace. He is able to bring peace into the deepest wounds of your life.

c. *Radical Life-Change: Embrace the life God gives you to the full.* Look over the following suggestions. Choose one to stimulate your thinking. Develop plans to embrace the life God has given you more fully. Share your plan with someone who knows you well and will encourage you to pursue this.

- *Ask God to give you a vision of what your life can be.* Take a couple of hours alone every week for the next couple of months to pray and ask God to give you a vision for your life. Keep a journal of this time with God for future reference.
- *Seize every opportunity to develop yourself.* Identify an area of personal development that you or someone else has rejected as “too selfish” or “not important enough.” Begin gathering info to take a first step in this direction.

- *Look for ways you can be a good steward of all the gifts God has given you.* Read Matthew 25:14–30. What investment(s) can you make this year (or over the next five) that will multiply the talents God has given you for His kingdom?
- *There is no greater way to embrace life than to begin a relationship with Jesus Christ.* Jesus said “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full” (John 10:10). Talk to a Christian friend or pastor, and ask them to help you get started with this new life.

How did the applications above stimulate your thinking? Write below how you would like to respond to the sixth commandment:

CHAPTER SEVEN YOUR STRUGGLE FOR PURITY

1. **The seventh commandment is about keeping your promise.** Think about your life and the people who have kept their promises to you. Choose one person and try to describe some of what it must have cost for them to keep their promises to you:

people: _____

one person: _____ the cost: _____

2. **The best message I ever heard on the seventh commandment was given to a class of elementary-age children in our church.** The Sunday school teacher was launching into a story that has stayed in my memory ever since. It's about a boy called Sam and his friend called Johnny.

- Johnny loved Chuck E. Cheese's. (*competing loves*)
- He found that his other friends were all going to Luke's party. (*opportunism*)
- He had promised to go to Sam's party, but now he felt like he wanted to go to Luke's. (*feelings*)

Look again at Johnny's thinking as he considers breaking his promise to Sam. Which one of the reasons is the *strongest pull for you* when you struggle with keeping your promises? (Place a check mark in the box.) Identify a specific time when you struggled with this.

3. **"You made a promise, and then you got what seems like a better offer."** Consider the words of Johnny's father to his son:

"Johnny, what if *I got a better offer* for a wife? You know, *there are a lot of really smart* women at my office. *Some of them are really friendly.*"

Now consider Johnny's response:

"You can't do that, Dad.
You made a promise to Mom."

Why is it so much *easier* for Johnny to see that breaking a promise is wrong for his dad? Why is it *harder* for us to see this in our own lives?

4. The entrance of sin into the world has affected all of us in every area of life, including our sexuality. The effects of the fall vary in each of our lives, both in its nature and in its degree. We do not all share the same battles, but all of us have some struggles in relation to our sexuality. None of us are yet as God intended us to be.

One of the most common struggles comes when we are tempted to use God's gift of sexuality as a means of finding release or fulfillment, rather than as a means of expressing love. *Contrast* what you think it means to use God's gift of sexuality to express love with what it means to use this gift as a means to finding release or fulfillment:

5. **If all this makes you feel that you are staring failure in the face, let me lead you to the door of hope.** The first thing he wanted to do when he was released from prison was to go to church, and so on the first Sunday morning of his new freedom, he slipped into a church building and sat down in the back row.

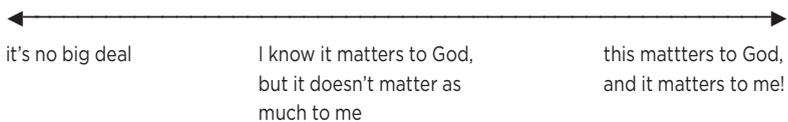
Put yourself in the converted thief's shoes. Would you . . .

- Feel condemned?
- Sit through the service feeling defeated?
- Get up and walk out?

What would have given you hope?

6. The Bible records the single strategy that sustained Joseph and enabled him to stand throughout the entire time of this temptation: Joseph said, “How could I do such a *wicked thing*, and sin against God?” (Genesis 39:9, emphasis added). He called the temptation sin, and he saw the wound that it would bring to the heart of God.

If you are going to overcome the power of temptation, the first step is to identify the activity to which you are being tempted as sin. Try to remember the last time you were tempted sexually—put an “x” in the place that best represents your attitude about it:



Then [you need] to see the connection between the sin and the cross of Jesus. What connection do you see between sexual temptation and Jesus' cross?

7. Jesus gave us a beautiful picture of the healing that comes when repentance meets forgiveness in the story of the Prodigal Son. When the son repents, he begins the long journey back toward his father, no doubt wondering all the way how he will be received. But as soon as the father sees his son on the horizon, he rushes out to meet him.

Jesus told this story so that we would know what God is like. He is the Father who meets us in our repentance. Put yourself in the place of the *Prodigal Son* (or daughter). How does this encounter transform your relationship?

Now try and put yourself in the place of an *observer*—the older brother (or sister). What *questions* does this raise in your mind about the father?

God does not stand at a distance from us waiting until our repentance is complete. Is your relationship with your heavenly Father characterized by the transformation of an encounter with Him or by the questions of an observer?

8. Here are a number of applications of the seventh commandment. Read them and let them stimulate your thinking:

a. *Baby Step: Move out of isolation and into fellowship.*

The strength of your love for Christ will be the key to your triumph over sexual temptation. A new love can be stronger than an old habit. That's why the first step in overcoming the power of sexual temptation is to cultivate your love for Christ. That's why I'm convinced that most people who struggle with these temptations will find greater help by growing in their knowledge of Christ and the Word among a company of healthy believers.

b. *Substantial Move: Fight sexual temptation.* "By the Spirit . . . put to death the misdeeds of the body" (Romans 8:13, emphasis added). When it comes to your battle with temptation, God does not say, "Pray about it;" He says, "Act against it." When you find impure thoughts buzzing around in your mind about that person in the office who shows an interest in you, or the adult store that you could visit on the way home, or the Internet site that was advertised on your computer, you treat these thoughts exactly like the wasp. You put the thought to death. You cut it off, give it no quarter. Swat it! If you are a Christian, you have the power to do this because the Holy Spirit lives within you. So don't listen to the Enemy when he tells you that you can't!

c. *Radical Life-Change: Ask for God's help to embrace a spouse's repentance.* If you find that your marriage has been violated by unfaithfulness either in mind or body, the first thing you should look for from your spouse is repentance. If you do not see that, pray that it will come, and when it does, ask God to help you embrace it. If your spouse can repent, you can forgive. God's grace will make

both of these things possible. And as your spouse's repentance deepens, so will your forgiveness. There are two struggles here, and the healing of the one can be the healing of the other.

How did the applications above stimulate your thinking? Write below how you would like to respond to the seventh commandment:

CHAPTER EIGHT YOUR STRUGGLE FOR INTEGRITY

1. **Stealing can be defined as [trying] to get as much as possible while giving as little as possible.** When you think about the different stations on the line of stealing, which do you think are culturally acceptable and which culturally unacceptable? Circle “yes” for each that is acceptable; “no” for each that is unacceptable.

Acceptable?

- 
- yes/no a. breaking into a home (a thief)
- yes/no b. paying your employees as little as possible (employer)
- yes/no c. giving less than full value to do the work you were hired for (employee)
- yes/no d. overpricing or doing work that is only “good enough” (cutting corners)
- yes/no e. using others’ material as if it were yours (plagiarism)
- yes/no f. not paying for what you use (copying: music, software, etc.)

How might someone justify the *culturally acceptable* ones?

On what basis would the *culturally unacceptable* ones be considered wrong?

2. Remember that stealing can be defined as trying to get as much as possible while giving as little as possible. The desire to get as much as possible is *greed*. The desire to contribute as little as possible is *laziness*.

Which of the root problems (greed or laziness) do you most naturally associate with stealing? Why?

What does the other root problem contribute to your understanding of stealing?

3. If you are an employee, complete the following ranking; then proceed to item 5. If you are an employer, skip to item 4.

Rank the following from 1 to 5 (1—the form of stealing you are *most tempted* to do and 5—the one you are *least tempted* to do).

Study Guide

_____ a. Arriving late/leaving early/stretching lunchtime or break times

_____ b. Expanding the work to be done to fill the time available

_____ c. Doing the work that you like and consistently avoiding what you don't

_____ d. Using work time to pursue your own projects

_____ e. Engaging in evangelism or other forms of ministry during work time

Look again at the items you ranked 1 and 2. Which root problem drives these issues for you—greed or laziness? Write down any comments about this below:

As an employer, reflect on some of the names and faces of those you employ. Ask yourself, "What is the value these workers bring to me?" Try to quantify in dollars what their work contributes to your wealth. Write your comments below:

value (in \$) _____ comments: _____

Now ask yourself, "How am I compensating these individuals?" Is it the minimum amount? Is there a gap between

their value to you and your compensation of them? Write any comments below:

5. “You shall not steal” (Exodus 20:15). In which of the following areas have you seen family, friends, fellow students, or coworkers give in to stealing?

- “borrowing” other people’s papers or speeches and pretending it’s their own
- illegally copying computer software
- copying musical CDs so they don’t have to buy them

What was your reaction? Did you do or say anything?

How do you think a Christian ought to respond in situations like these?

6. **We often make the mistake of creating a huge chasm in our minds between what we call “sacred” and what we call “secular.”** We do this because we feel certain that God is interested in prayer, preaching, and evangelism; but we are not quite so sure that God is interested in microcircuits, school lunches, and grocery store checkouts. Write below any work you have done and the approximate years you did this:

c. *Radical Life-Change: Learn to value your work as a good gift from God.* Do not look at work as a necessary evil that you have to endure in order to get money. View it as a God-given opportunity to contribute. Give thanks to God for giving you work and the ability to do it. (Take time each morning before you start your work, offering the work of your day directly to the Lord and give thanks to Him for this gift.) If you are employed, thank Him that somebody values what He has enabled you to do so highly that they would pay you money to do it for them.

How did the applications above stimulate your thinking? Write below how you would like to respond to the eighth commandment:

CHAPTER NINE YOUR STRUGGLE WITH TRUTH

1. Where have the effects of someone else's lies hit closest to home for you?

2. **The essence of lying is saying what will achieve the desired result without regard to whether it is the truth.**

Approach a trusted friend, family member, or spouse (someone who has your best interests in mind) who frequently has the opportunity to hear you talk with others. Ask him or her which of the following you most easily slip into.

The trusted person: _____

- Flattering**—saying to someone's face what you would never say behind his or her back (*you want to make a good impression*)
- Exaggerating**—overstating what you said, did, or accomplished, taking credit that really belongs to someone else (*you want to impress*), or overstating the wrong that was done to you (*you are looking for sympathy*)
- Gossiping**—passing on news about another person that may or may not be true

Ask for a specific example (if they cannot think of one, ask another person):

3. Satan's first strategy was to question God's truth. "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?" (Genesis 3:1). Can you *really* know what God has said? Undermining confidence in the Word of God set the stage for Adam and Eve's rebellion.

If a person can't be sure about what God has said, how could he or she be expected to put it into practice? Where do your greatest areas of doubt lie in relation to the question: *Can I really know what God has said?*

- I'm not sure I can trust God (or His words).
- I'm not sure that the Bible really contains God's words (revealed by God).
- I'm not sure we can really understand the Bible (different interpretations).
- I'm not sure I can really grasp the whole Bible message (my own ability).
- I'm not sure the Bible even speaks to my life today (irrelevant).
- I'm not sure the Bible contains enough to help me (insufficient).

Study Guide

- I affirmed a belief from God's Word.

What did you hear and affirm?

- I held to Jesus' teachings (by putting it into practice).

What was your step of obedience?

- I knew the truth (it became more clear and personal for me).

What became more clear and or personal?

- The truth set me free (I experienced its power).

What were you able to do that was previously impossible for you?

6. "Any group of people, whether married couples, friends, church staff, or Bible study groups, will run into serious trouble if they emphasize self-disclosure and emotional expression as premium values," writes Larry Crabb.

What characteristics would you expect to find in a group that emphasizes self-expression over Christ-centeredness?

What characteristics would you expect to find in a group that emphasizes Christ-centeredness over self-expression?

7. Our calling is to “speak the truth *in love*” (Ephesians 4:15, emphasis added). That means that I am to speak the truth in a way that will be in the best interests of the hearer.

So there will be times when I have to exercise courage and say what someone does not want to hear (confront), **and there will be other times when I have to exercise restraint and hold back what a person is not ready to hear** (conceal). Which of these is most difficult for you? Why?

8. Here are some applications of the ninth commandment for you to consider:

a. *Baby Step: Take a step of personal obedience this week.* When you take a step of obedience, Jesus promises that two things will happen. First, “you will know the truth.” What seemed cloudy and distant will become clear and personal. It will be in you, and it will be true for you. Second, “the truth will set you free.” Things that bound you will bind you no longer. Things that you could not do before will become possible for you.

b. *Substantial Move: Stop flattering, exaggerating, or gossiping.* (See your notes from question #2.) The reason we are prone to lying is that we are more deeply committed to ourselves than we are committed to the truth. Truth is hard for sinners because it never puts us in a pure light. We like to think of ourselves as seekers after truth. In reality, our first instinct is to run from it.

c. *Radical Life-Change: Practice speaking the truth in love.* “Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen” (Ephesians 4:29). Learn to weigh the effects of what you say in the light of the trust you have earned.

How did the applications above stimulate your thinking? Write below how you would like to respond to the ninth commandment:

CHAPTER TEN YOUR STRUGGLE FOR CONTENTMENT

1. When do you most notice your own struggle with contentment?

4. There are many reasons why people live a moral life that have little or nothing to do with loving God or neighbor.

Think back over your last week and identify three moral decisions you made:

1. _____ primary: _____ secondary: _____
2. _____ primary: _____ secondary: _____
3. _____ primary: _____ secondary: _____

Place the abbreviation from below next to the decision above, indicating the primary and secondary reasons (if you can identify them) for your behavior:

The peer factor—PF (We all know that a large part of our behavior will reflect the behavior of [our] friends.)

The fear factor—FF (Sometimes the reason that we do not steal, lie, or commit adultery has to do with the fear of the consequences.)

A deep love for God—DL (Your thoughts reveal the real condition of your heart.)

Was there a time this week when you wrongly assumed that doing “the right thing” was evidence of your love for God? If so, explain:

5. “I would not have known what sin was except through the law” (Romans 7:7). For many years, Paul had looked at the commandments and concluded that he was morally up-right. Now he tells us that the commandments showed him that he was a sinner. What made the difference?

The answer is the tenth commandment. “I would not have known what it was to covet if the law had not said ‘Do not covet.’” (Romans 7:7). **It strangled the life out of my self-righteousness.** How is your self-righteousness?

strangled! _____
(by the tenth
commandment)

limping along _____
(wounded by the
tenth commandment)

alive and well! _____
(unscathed by the
tenth commandment)

6. There are many ways to change a person’s behavior. If all you want to do is to stop drinking or break free from some other compulsive habit, you don’t need Jesus to do that. You can do it with some good therapy, accountability, and an effective support group.

There are many ways to deal with the symptoms, but only Christ can deal with the disease. Do you agree/disagree with this statement? Why or why not?

7. **Their idea of Christianity is that we do our best to follow the Law and ask for forgiveness when we fail to live up to this standard.** The gospel is more than forgiveness and the Law. When you come to faith in Jesus Christ, God puts His Spirit within you. That’s His promise. “I will give you a *new*

heart and put a new spirit in you. . . . I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws” (Ezekiel 36:26–27, emphasis added).

What is the *difference in expectations* between these two views of Christianity?

8. Consider these applications of the tenth commandment:

a. *Baby Step: Take your cues from Christ through repentance and faith.* Peer factor morality doesn't bring you any closer to God because it does not arise from love but from conforming to what everyone else is doing. God calls us not just to do right but to be right, and that means He is looking for something deeper than actions that reflect the behavior of other people around us.

b. *Substantial Move: Take up a new battle strategy: fighting against sin.* Sin is not merely a matter of actions and deeds; it is something within the heart that leads to the action. Sins are nothing but the symptoms of a disease called sin, and it is not the symptoms that matter but the disease, for it is the disease that kills, not the symptoms. (See also Psalm 51.)

c. *Radical Life-Change: Reevaluate your position before God.* The apostle Paul saw the hollowness of his own morality. He embraced the tough message of his failure before God's Law. That led him to Christ and to a new life.

THE 10 GREATEST STRUGGLES OF YOUR LIFE

How did the applications above stimulate your thinking?
Write below how you would like to respond to the tenth
commandment:
