

Teen Lesson Three

Who's in First Place?

"You shall have no other gods before me" (Exodus 20:3, NRSV).

We are shaped and fashioned by what we love. —Goethe

SCRIPTURE

- Exodus 20:3
- 1 Kings 18:20-39
- Romans 12:1-2

WHAT YOU NEED

- Bibles
- Pens/pencils
- A copy of Handout #3.1 for each student
- Index cards (cut in 2) or small pieces of paper for students to copy Romans 12:1-2



PURPOSE

To Know: God is not content with being just one member of a long list of commitments. An idol can be anything that takes our focus and worship away from God, whether that be a person, activity, or possession.

To Value: God's will for our lives is that we simply allow him to be God of every part of our lives.

To Apply: Ask the students to read Romans 12:1-2 every morning before leaving home for the day.

WHAT'S GOING ON?

The nature of polytheism. The people of Israel continually struggled with idolatry. Throughout the Old Testament the people are warned to stay faithful to Yahweh and avoid the temptations of Baalism. Why was Baalism such a stumbling block for the people? Baal was believed to be the god of fertility and was the source of rain. The people of Israel were dependent on adequate rainfall to ensure their survival. Baalism was the attempt to manipulate the gods of nature to meet the needs of the people. It was a strong temptation because the people could be in control rather than God.

More is better mentality. Why settle with one god when you could have three or four? This is what Elijah confronted on Mt. Carmel in 1 Kings 18. In this passage Elijah asked the people to stop living in two worlds. Either Yahweh was God or he wasn't. His message was that you cannot serve both Yahweh and the gods of other nations. You cannot look other places for what only God can provide. This text is a strong image of what Exodus 20:3 is demanding from the people. To serve Yahweh is to be distinct from all other people. You do not run after the things others run after because of who you are as a child of God.

It is an issue of identity. They were the people of God and would therefore need to reflect that by the way they lived. To choose between serving God and serving others is to choose an identity. Who will you be? In what ways does your behavior reflect who you are? It is these underlying questions that penetrate Elijah's message to the people.

WHAT'S IT SAYING?

The basis of the commandment is the quality of relationship. The driving force of the Ten Commandments was to teach the people to be who they were. Rather than understood primarily as a list of moral obligations to please God, these commandments were first and foremost an ethical instruction on how to know and reflect God. The difference between these two is one of motivation. Their identity as the people of God would need to be reflected by the lives they lived. God was holy and therefore his people would need to be holy. The inner quality of relationship was the basis for the moral obligations. This is important because we, like the people of Israel, get this backwards. We want to work from the outside in while God wants to work from the inside out. Who you are is reflected by the life you live. The total sum of your words, thoughts, and actions extend from your heart. The purpose of these commandments is to align the hearts of the people with the heart of God so that their lives would reflect his.

Relationship with God is unique and impacts every sphere of life. The first commandment portrays the uniqueness of the relationship God wanted with his people. While all of the other people worshipped a pantheon of gods and would perform certain ritualistic practices in hopes of finding their favor, God said he would provide all of this as long as the people stayed faithful to him.

Set the stage. This commandment is first because it is the basis for all that will follow. The reason you abstain from certain practices and perform others is because you are in relationship with God. That single fact has implications for every sphere of life. The reason the people of Israel had so many laws and ordinances was not to make life difficult, but rather to insure that every aspect of life would be holy.

The image of God in the world. Since we find our very identity as people in relationship to God, we have a responsibility for how we live our lives. We are not our own, but God's. Life is a gift and carries with it certain obligations. This is evident in the first few verses in Exodus 20. The people were to be God's revelation in the world. In a real sense, they were to let the world know what the true God was like. The commandments are an effort to align the lives of the people to the life of God.

WHAT'S IT MEAN FOR US?

God must invade the list! God is not to be one of many on a list of commitments; He must invade the list! The relationship he calls us to is not merely to put in our time and then go about our business. He is not interested in some of our time and some of our resources. He is interested in us. He invites us to hand over the whole package. Every area of our lives must reflect our identity as children of God. Our relationships with people, our behavior behind closed doors, and our thoughts need to mirror the fact that God is the only Lord of our lives. We are ruled by none other. He holds our complete allegiance and is present in every area of our lives.

Interactive Lesson Guide

GETTIN' GOIN'

Before beginning this week's lesson, spend a few moments talking about last week's topic. Throughout this series, keep re-visiting the action steps from the previous lessons. If these lessons are to leave any defining mark on the students, it will require serious attention to the Take Out section of these lessons. The students must be challenged to "flesh out" this material through their lives. Set aside several minutes at the beginning of each class session to remind the students of last week's material and dialogue about the responsive component with the students. How did they apply the lesson during the week?

Ask two students to volunteer to act out the following role-play. One of the students, Terry, is an avid soccer player. Terry has practices four days a week and games twice a week. Terry is always thinking about, participating in, or talking about soccer. The other student, Alex, also plays soccer but is not as fanatical as Terry. Both of the students attend the same church, however, Terry misses youth group activities and Sunday services all the time to attend soccer games. In this skit Alex is trying to convince Terry that he (or she) needs to come to the youth retreat next weekend. Terry gets defensive when Alex begins talking about priorities. The students can have a little freedom in developing this dialogue. Use this skit as a springboard to talk about the importance of putting God first in our lives.

After the skit, ask **Is it okay to miss church for sports activities? What does this say about our priorities? What are the areas that compete for our allegiance with God? Say Listen to this statement: your God is that which receives most of your attention, provides most of your identity, and that for which you would sacrifice anything else. Ask Do you agree with this statement? If so, how does it challenge your priority list and focus on life?**

DIG IT

Ask someone to read Exodus 20:3. **Does this text have anything to say about our priorities and commitments?** If so, what?

Explain the nature of idolatry using the background material printed above.

Do we have a problem with idolatry today? If so, how? What are some contemporary idols that we are tempted to worship? In many ways our temptations are no different than those faced by the Israelites. The people wanted prosperity, identity, and protection. The gods we serve today are money, fame, people, etc. An idol is anything that diverts our worship away from God.

Read (or summarize) the story in 1 Kings 18:20-39. Ask **What is the first thing that comes to mind when you hear this story? Say Someone has said that moving back and forth between God's way and our way is like "limping between two worlds?" Ask What is the problem with "limping between two worlds?"**

Perform the Trust Fall demonstration with one or two students. A student will stand straight with his/her back to you (or a trustworthy student). Instruct the student to fall back with his/her knees locked and legs straight. Stand behind the student and catch him/her. Some people are not comfortable with this exercise because they feel vulnerable. They cannot

see the person who is saying "fall back, I will catch you." Therefore, people often bend their knees as they are falling back.

After the demonstration, talk about the issue of trust. Ask **How is trust related to this week's commandment? Is the problem we have with "limping between two worlds" really a matter of trust?** Often teens have a difficult time trusting people. Their trust in someone may have been betrayed or they simply fear the vulnerability. Ask **Who or what do you trust? What does it mean to trust God? How do we show God that we truly trust him?**

Using the material above, discuss the issue of lifestyle reflecting identity and relationship as the basis for the first commandment. Ask **Why is this the first commandment?** Even if you abstain from murder, lying, and stealing, you cannot live a life pleasing to God unless he is truly the Lord of your life.

TAKE OUT

Tell this story. **There was a man who was at a crossroad in his life. He had prayed for weeks that God would help him know what he should do with his life. As a last ditch effort, the man decided to enter the sanctuary one afternoon to pray. After several minutes of praying, he decided to give God a little help. He went to the church office and grabbed a notepad and pen. He said to the Lord, "I will begin writing down all of my options and when I come to the one that you want me to do, please just tap me on the shoulder and let me know." The man began writing and after a few minutes with no options remaining to be written, the man crumpled his paper and left the church. In recounting the story, the man said that as he walked out of the church, he felt the Lord speaking to him more clearly than he had ever heard before. "God was telling me to go back into the sanctuary, fall on my knees, and take out another blank sheet of paper. And rather than begin writing, the Lord instructed me to allow the blank paper to represent my life and allow him to fill it in."** What God desires from his people is that they simply allow him to be God of their entire lives, not merely part of a list of options.

Distribute Handout #3.1, Keep Life On Target. In the left column have each student write an activity in which they are deeply involved. In the middle column they can identify some parts of that activity that might draw them away from God and his plan for life. In the right column they should write something they will do to keep Jesus the Lord of that activity and their lives. This can be repeated in rows two and three. If it seems appropriate, invite the students who wish to share to talk about what they have written.

Reserve the last few moments of class for the students to copy Romans 12:1-2 on a small piece of paper or index card (cut in half). An option would be to have the scripture already printed and ready to distribute. The small size will allow the students to carry the scripture with them throughout the week. Challenge the students to read the scripture frequently throughout each day and offer a simple prayer, "Father, I offer myself to you as a living sacrifice. Show me your will for this day."

Close with a prayer of commitment.

Keep Life On Target

In the left column write an activity in which you are deeply involved. In the middle column identify when that activity might draw you away from God and his plan for your life. In the right column write something you will do to keep Jesus the Lord of that activity and your life. Repeat the process for other activities in rows two and three.

<u>ACTIVITY</u>	<u>TEMPTATIONS TO STRAY</u>	<u>JESUS IS LORD OF ALL</u>