

Teen Lesson Eight

Honoring Life

You shall not murder (Exodus 20: 13, NRSV).

SCRIPTURE

- Exodus 20: 13
- Matthew 5:21-26; 5:43-48

WHAT YOU NEED

- Bibles
- Movie clips
- Index cards
- A copy of Handout #8.1 for each student
- Pencils/pens



PURPOSE

To Know: We are to protect and uphold all human life for all are made in the image of God.

To Value: We are called to exercise justice and mercy in all human relationships. This means that we do not treat others as they always deserve, but rather we are willing to forgive, care for, and sustain human life at all cost.

To Apply: What can you do to forgive, care for, or sustain human life this week? As we will see, this lesson is not just about abstaining from evil but also working for the good.

WHAT'S GOING ON?

The simplistic structure of the sixth commandment demands careful interpretation. Is this commandment a decree that calls for an end to all human killing? Should we interpret "you shall not murder" as literally as it seems to be indicating? And if so, what about Exodus 21:12 (just one chapter later) where a stipulation is given for exercising capital punishment? Or how must we handle the texts found within the deuteronomistic history (Joshua, Judges, 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings) where God called the people to destroy the lives and villages of neighboring city-states?

There were three arenas where human life was taken by others: nationalistic war, capital punishment mandated by God for legal offenses, and personal disputes. It seems that the



main issue addressed by the sixth commandment is with respect to this last area—people killing other people for personal gain, over disagreements, and on their own accord. It seems pretty clear that the Israelites viewed war and capital punishment as instituted and compelled by Yahweh. So from this commandment we cannot infer that all human killing is a deviation from the law, but rather, the commandment seems to be focusing on human killing initiated by humans rather than God.

Human life is considered sacred because it is formed in the image of God. No person has the right to take the life of another for only God can create or abolish human life. This commandment is a practical application that expresses the value and source of identity we have as human beings.

While stated in the negative, this commandment also summons individuals to protect and support the life of others. As we have stated previously, we live within community and our lives are intrinsically interwoven. The commandment "you shall not murder" is not merely an individual matter. We are bound to one another in community and must therefore work to uphold each other's lives. When we see human injustice and exploitation, we must stand against it and lock hands with those who are being abused, neglected, and impoverished. We must vocalize the needs of those without voice and refuse to allow systems, governments, and people to deprive others of the life God intended.

WHAT'S IT MEAN?

Jesus takes the command to the heart. Jesus takes this commandment one step further by dealing with the problem at its core. In Matthew 5:21-22a he says, "you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment." Murders performed with the hand or with the tongue are always first performed with the heart, so Jesus called the people to purify their hearts. Rather than exchange life for life, the people of God are to bless those who curse and make friends of enemies (to whatever degree is possible).

Love your enemies? What is the reason behind the command "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you?" Why did Jesus change the dynamic of this commandment? What is wrong with "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth?" How is the kingdom of God different from this system of justice?

Matthew 5:45 goes on to say that we are to live this lifestyle of forgiveness and love because then we will be sons and daughters of God. The world will know God through knowing his people. The mercy of God is experienced through the mercy of his children. If the people of God fail to embody the attributes of God, the people of our world will never witness it.

It is here within the teachings of Jesus that we receive a glimpse into the heart of God. This is who God is and how he relates to us. (See Matthew 5:17-6:34.) Therefore, if we are to be sons and daughters of God, we will relate to humanity in the same manner, a lifestyle marked by unconditional love, mercy, and forgiveness. The apostle Paul in his letter to the

church at Corinth wrote, "For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again" (2 Corinthians 5:14-15). He goes on to say that this relationship we have with Christ changes not only our motivation but also the way that we see people. We treat people with love and grace rather than anger and retribution because Christ has treated us this way and we have become conduits of that love.

What about today? There are many heated and highly publicized contemporary issues that involve this commandment: abortion, euthanasia, war, suicide, and capital punishment to name a few. In dealing with this command we are confronted with four simple words that are supposed to capture our response to these significant and dividing issues. The genius and heart of this commandment is the simple fact that we are to honor God's creation and to prevent its destruction or harm.

The heart of this teaching is clearly the all-inclusive nature of the kingdom. We are to love our enemies because they are invited to the table of God's feast. In fact, we are to be the bearers of the invitation. It is through our love that they will most clearly see the grace and mercy of Jesus Christ.



Interactive Lesson Guide

GETTIN' GOIN'

Begin this week's lesson by discussing the issue of murder on a broad level. The main goal of this introduction should be to get the students thinking about whether or not murder is ever acceptable. You may want to begin by showing two or three movie clips that depict different types of murder (capital punishment, suicide, euthanasia, war, personal killing, etc.). After viewing the clips, ask the students whether any of these types of murder are justified. Possible clips to explore: *Saving Private Ryan*, *The Green Mile*, *A Few Good Men*, *Air Force One*.

Another possible opening would be a roundtable debate. Print the different types of murder on individual index cards with their respective definitions on the back of the card. Distribute the cards to the students and ask them to read the definition aloud. For each type of murder ask **When is this form of murder justifiable?** If the response is "never," ask **How do we know this is true?**

From this introduction, the students should have discussed the various types of murder and the value of human life. In what capacity is a human allowed to decide the fate of another human being? Does the Bible have anything to say about this?

DIG IT

Read Exodus 20:13. Ask **How does this scripture relate to what we have said about the various types of murder? Are all forms of murder included in this prohibi-**

tion? **Why is it difficult for us as a society to agree on these matters?** Refer to the What's Going On? section to guide this discussion.

Say **Jesus talked about this commandment in the Sermon on the Mount, but he focused on the attitude of the heart instead of merely the act of murder.** Read Matthew 5:21-26. Ask **How does Jesus reinterpret the sixth commandment? Why do you think he made it internal rather than just external? What is wrong with an "eye for an eye" and "tooth for a tooth" approach to justice? Are Jesus' teachings concerning neighbors and enemies possible and/or practical?** These questions could occupy many hours of discussion. Be careful to steer the conversation towards the goal of both the commandment and Jesus' teaching.

Say **Jesus not only taught that a person was not to harm another, but to always seek the best for another person, even if that person is an "enemy."** Read Matthew 5:43-48. Ask **What is the reason why a person should love an enemy?** God loves each of us and we should do no less. **What happens within us when we begin to pray for those who treat us poorly? What is the reward for those who love as God loves?**

Say **The genius and heart of the sixth commandment is the simple fact that we are to honor God's creation and to prevent its destruction or harm. The heart of this teaching is clearly the all-inclusive nature of the kingdom. We are to love our enemies because they are invited to the table of God's feast. In fact, we are to be the bearers of the invitation. It is through our love that they will most clearly see the grace and mercy of Jesus Christ.**

Jesus not only taught that a person was not to harm another, but to always seek the best for another person, even if that person is an "enemy."

TAKE OUT

The sixth commandment is formed in the negative as a prohibition of a certain act. If it was formed as a positive statement what would it say? For a guide to discussing these questions see the What's It Mean? section.

Distribute Handout #8.1, Agent of Life. Divide the class into three groups and assign each group one of the case studies. After a sufficient length of time, ask each group to report to the class what a person might do to be an agent of life.

In closing, ask **How will you reveal the grace and mercy of God throughout this week?** After a few thoughtful moments, close with prayer.

Agent of Life

1 • You are part of a Big Brother/Big Sister program where high school students are assigned to at-risk children at the elementary school. Even though you haven't been given a lot of background information, after meeting with Pat for a number of weeks you suspect that he was placed in a foster home because of his parents' drug abuse. You think that Pat has seen a lot of violence and self-destructive behavior. What might you do to be an agent of life for Pat?

2 • Crystal has been absent from school for several days. Rumor has it that she attempted suicide on Tuesday afternoon. You don't usually hang out with Crystal, but she is in three of your classes. When she comes back to school, what might you do to be an agent of life for Crystal?

3 • Your best friend's father has cancer. His condition was quite advanced before the cancer was diagnosed and the prognosis is not good. What might you do to be an agent of life for both your friend and his/her family?