



GODCONNECTS™

A COURSE IN CHRISTIANITY



LHM.ORG/GODCONNECTS

DISCUSSION GUIDE - SESSION 3

USING THE DISCUSSION GUIDE

This is an interactive study guide. We designed it to be flexible so it will fit both group and personal use. It includes links, which provide extra information on Internet sites where you can browse and dig as deep as you want.

A PDF discussion guide containing all 12 sessions, as well as single session guides, are available at www.lhm.org/godconnects.

To find the discussion guide on the DVD, load it into your computer (not your DVD player). You can right click the menu. Push "Open" instead of "Play" and you will pull up a list of files, which includes the discussion guide.



ABOUT US

God Connects is a ministry of Lutheran Hour Ministries (LHM). As a Christian outreach ministry, LHM supports churches worldwide, producing Christian radio and TV programming for broadcast, Internet and print communications, dramas, music, and outreach materials—all designed to reach unchurched people in the United States and more than 30 countries around the world. Lutheran Hour Ministries' flagship program, **The Lutheran Hour**, airs weekly on more than 1,400 stations and the American Forces Network. To learn more about this long-running Gospel program and LHM's other ministry resources, go to www.lhm.org.

CONTACT US

We would love to connect to you. Call us at **1-855-JOHN316 (1-855-564-6316)** E-mail to lhmresponse@lhm.org.

INTRODUCTION

GodConnects: In a difficult and confusing world, God is connecting to you!

God, are You there?

Everyone, at some point, asks this question. It can come at moments of sterile reflection or in times of deep despair. "God, if You are there, why don't You show Yourself to me?" In this confusing world where authenticity is so elusive, it seems like we cannot connect to God.

We could not connect to God, but the good news is that God connects with us. He has been doing this from the beginning in amazing ways. The most direct way God connected to us is when He became one of us in Jesus Christ. When Jesus was on this earth, He was the very revelation of God as He taught and healed and loved.

Then to restore our connection to God which had been shattered because of sin, on the cross, Jesus willingly paid the penalty for our sins—in His own death! This is the most authentic, startling and determined love the world could have ever imagined.

Now God connects to us by revealing Himself in the Bible. This God-given book has an amazing story. It tells of God's constant and compassionate work to restore our relationship with Him.

GodConnects wants to share that story with you. *GodConnects* is a course that tells this unique, unequalled story. Whether you do not believe in Christ as Savior or want to deepen your faith in Him, as you delve into *GodConnects* you will explore what the Bible says about this remarkably loving God, and how this love gives direction and meaning to your life today and forever.

On this website, you can explore these questions of faith. You will find videos and other up-to-date media that take advantage of today's technology.

So let's get started

GOD'S LAW

Session 3: A Course on Christianity

Opening Prayer: Lord God, this world often seems very cold and uncaring. I confess that sometimes I have been a part of making it that way. Teach me how You would have me honor You and treat those around me, that I may truly love You with all my heart and love my neighbor as myself. In Jesus' Name I pray. Amen.

3.1. SO WHAT ARE THE TEN COMMANDMENTS?

The Ten Commandments are the Law of God that expresses His will for us. He gave it to the Israelites shortly after He freed them from slavery in Egypt. They camped around Mount Sinai and God came down with powerful signs which showed the Israelites how serious He was about the Law He was about to give them.

On the morning of the third day there were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud on the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people in the camp trembled. Then Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they took their stand at the foot of the mountain. Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke because the Lord had descended on it in fire. The smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain trembled greatly. And as the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered in thunder. (Exodus 19:16-19)

There at Mount Sinai God's voice thundered the words of the Ten Commandments to the nation of Israel. They were so terrified by the thundering voice of God they begged Moses to speak to them on God's behalf. So God called Moses up to the mountain top and there wrote these Ten Commandments on two stone tablets, so Moses could carry them back to the people.

Jesus spoke about these commandments and showed God hasn't changed His mind about them:

(Jesus said) "Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 5:19-20)

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- Why did God make the scene at Mount Sinai so grand and terrifying when He gave His Ten Commandments to His people?
- How can remembering this context help us to see God's commandments as a matter of eternal life and eternal death?

DIGGING DEEPER

- Read the pamphlet "The Ten Commandments" (<http://lcms.org/Document.fdoc?src=lcm&id=1083>) for a brief explanation of each.
- The Bible tells us God gave us the Ten Commandments, but never identifies which is which. Historians and theologians from Judaism and Christianity have come up with two different ways to number them. This link provides [Augustine's Order](http://www.bible-researcher.com/decalogue.html) (<http://www.bible-researcher.com/decalogue.html>), which is followed by the Lutheran and Catholic Churches and others.

3.2. HOW DID JESUS SUMMARIZE THE TEN COMMANDMENTS?

Once Jesus was asked which commandment was the greatest in the Old Testament. He summed up the Ten Commandments in two commands—one directed toward God, the other toward our neighbor.

And He (Jesus) said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets." (Matthew 22:37-40)

All the commandments come down to our love for God and for one another. Or as Romans 13:10b puts it, “Love is the fulfillment of the Law.” When we love God before all things, we keep Him in the proper place in our lives. When we truly love the people around us, we protect their lives, reputation and property, and in so doing find greater satisfaction and joy in our life.

In 1 John 4:8b we read, “God is love.” Out of His great love for us He gives us life, provides for that life, and protects it from all who would bring death or harm to us. Out of that great love He also gave His Son to save us from sin, death and eternal punishment. By giving us His Ten Commandments, God is simply commanding us to love Him and one another as He has first loved us.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- When you treat another person with unexpected love and kindness, what difference does that make in your own life and outlook?
- Discuss what differences we would see in our families, workplaces, communities, nation and world if we truly loved each other as much as we loved ourselves.

3.3. Does God intend His Ten Commandments to apply to us today?

Absolutely! It wouldn't make much sense for Jesus to summarize the laws into two broad statements if He intended to abolish them. The Ten Commandments continue to provide modern society with the blueprint for living an ordered, meaningful life, which promotes peace with others and shows how we honor God.

Some might counter this point by saying the Ten Commandments are badly outdated. They were given some 2,500 years ago and don't address modern issues. For instance, how can it help direct our use of the Internet? At first glance, they seem to have a point; life has certainly changed a great deal between now and the day Moses received those tablets. The methods of delivery may have changed, but the human nature that tempts us to make sinful choices remains fully intact.

(Jesus said) “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.” (Matthew 5:17-18)

DIGGING DEEPER

- “God's Standards” (audio, <http://media.lhm.org/lutheranhour/mp3s/QA7847PD.mp3>) shows the importance of upholding God's Law today.

3.4. CAN WE EARN OUR SALVATION THROUGH FOLLOWING THE LAW?

Sure—if we can keep each of God's commandments perfectly, never violating a single law during our entire life. Our big problem is that none of us is perfect, for all of us sin. So, no, sinners can't earn salvation through following the Law.

They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one. (Psalm 14:3)

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. (Romans 3:23)

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- In session one “Why Jesus?” we discussed other world religions which lower the bar and supposedly let you earn your way to heaven. In Islam you will earn heaven as long as your good deeds outweigh your bad deeds. In Hinduism you get reincarnated and have an infinite number of do-overs, until you finally get it right and earn your way to Nirvana.
- What makes these alternatives more attractive to people than Christianity?
- How do these religions do away with the need for Jesus Christ as our Savior?
- What is the danger in judging our lives by people around us instead of judging them according to God's Law?

3.5. WHAT IS ORIGINAL SIN?

The trouble is our sinful condition goes far deeper than the evil deeds we do and the good things we leave undone. Our entire being was contaminated with sin from the moment we are conceived—long before we could do any good or evil deeds. The Bible calls this original sin. Original sin is the sinful nature we received from our sinful parents.

It all started back in Genesis 3 in the Garden of Eden. When Adam and Eve disobeyed God's command and ate the forbidden fruit their nature was changed. The holy image of God which had been created in them was replaced with a sinful nature. They passed that sinful nature on to their children at conception, who passed it down to theirs, eventually passing it on to our parents, who passed it on to us. That is how original sin continues to be passed throughout the entire human race from generation to generation.

(Jesus said) "Why do you not understand what I say to you? It is because you cannot bear to hear My Word. You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer in the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies." (John 8:43-44)

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- Why is it hard to accept that newborn babies (and even babies in the womb) are sinners who need God's forgiveness?
- When we think of sin why do we tend to focus on the bad things we have done and said, more than the thoughts and desires of our minds and hearts?

DIGGING DEEPER

- "Why are We Punished for the Sin of Adam and Eve?" (audio, <http://media.lhm.org/lutheranhour/mp3s/QA7406PD.mp3>)

3.6. HOW STRICT IS GOD ABOUT OUR OBEDIENCE TO HIS LAW?

God's holiness (that is, His absolute sinLESSness) and justice demand us to be absolutely perfect in all our thoughts, desires, words and deeds.

(Jesus said) "You therefore must be perfect, as your Heavenly Father is perfect." (Matthew 5:28)

The Bible clearly teaches that every sin and disobedience must be punished.

Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. (Hebrews 10:28)

Why so strict? God is absolutely holy and perfectly just. Why doesn't He strike us down instantly? He doesn't because He is merciful and wants to forgive our sins. But even though He is patient, He cannot tolerate sin in His presence forever.

For You are not a God who delights in wickedness; evil may not dwell with You. The boastful shall not stand before Your eyes; You hate all evildoers. You destroy those who speak lies; the Lord abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful man. (Psalm 5:4-6)

Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and you perish in the way, for His wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in Him. (Psalm 2:10-12)

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- The US was outraged when a teenager who killed four people in a drunk driving accident did not receive jail time from the judge, due to the so-called *Affluenza Defense* (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AoY1ARr7dp4>). The judge was fired. Why would we not expect God, as the perfect judge not to justly punish sin?
- What must you first acknowledge about yourself before you can believe that God really does have this reaction to your sins?

3.7. If we cannot save ourselves, how can we be saved?

Like a condemned criminal there is nothing we can do to earn His favor or turn away His wrath. But God's love and mercy for us moved Him to provide a Substitute. Jesus became human to take our sins upon Himself, and He received the full punishment for those sins in His suffering and death on the cross. Watching the brutality Jesus suffered in movies like *The Passion of the Christ* helps us realize how serious God is about His Law and holiness. But it also reminds us that God completely satisfied His holiness and justice by laying our sins on Jesus, who paid for each one in full.

For our sake He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Corinthians 5:21)

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree." (Galatians 3:13)

He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By His wounds you have been healed. (1 Peter 2:24)

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- How does watering down God's laws or taking credit for our good works make the atoning sacrifice of Jesus unnecessary?

3.8. What purposes does God's Law serve?

God's Law works in three different ways:

1. Curb - it controls violent outbursts of sin in society. The Law works to keep order in our lives, families, communities and the nations of the world. God works through the Law to curb our sinful desires, and protects our lives and possessions. You can think of this first use of the Law as a fence. While some look at it as a boundary that restricts, it is really a barrier designed to protect us from danger.

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for He is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer. (Romans 13:1-4)

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- Discuss what happens when the fence of God's Law is removed. Describe the horrible things people do after disasters such as hurricanes, tornadoes, floods, earthquakes and blackouts.
- What would life be like without law enforcement?

2. Mirror – The Law's second and most important purpose is to reveal our sinfulness so that we realize our need to seek forgiveness. Here it acts like a mirror. Mirrors show us when our hair is out of place, when we have food in our teeth, when our clothes are not buttoned, zipped or fastened correctly. In the same way the Law shows how far we have strayed from God's perfect path. It removes all excuses, convinces us we deserve eternal punishment for our sins, and shows why we need Jesus Christ as our Savior.

If it had not been for the Law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the Law had not said, "You shall not covet." (Romans 7:7b)

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- Many people set the bar for their behavior only slightly better than the people around them. Why is that still not good enough for God?
- Why is it so hard to confess our sins and admit we need a Savior?

3. Guide – It acts like a rule or guide to direct our decisions in life in a God-pleasing way. Once we have confessed our sins and received God’s forgiveness for Jesus’ sake, God’s Law serves a third purpose for us. We need this because our sinful desires still mislead us even with God’s forgiveness. The Law steps in to reveal the trap of sin and make the right path clear to us.

Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. (Psalm 119:105)

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- Describe some things that seem good and right or, at least, harmless, until the Bible shows us they are wrong and harmful for us.

3.9. What are the Ten Commandments?

First: You shall have no other gods.

Second: You shall not misuse the Name of the Lord your God.

Third: Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.

Fourth: Honor your father and your mother.

Fifth: You shall not murder.

Sixth: You shall not commit adultery.

Seventh: You shall not steal.

Eighth: You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.

Ninth: You shall not covet your neighbor’s house.

Tenth: You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

3.10. First Commandment: You shall have no other gods.

In this commandment God requires us to put Him first in our lives. We must love Him above all things, shun doing anything to displease Him, and trust Him more than we trust in anyone or anything else in our lives.

At first glance this doesn’t seem too difficult. Who bows down to idols today? But stop and think what a god really is. It is any object you trust to provide your needs and deliver you from troubles. It is something you love and fear to lose.

This is probably clearest to see in addictions. An addict is willing to lose family, job, home, money, health, even life itself to get that next high. Clearly, that person has set their addiction—whether it be a drug, alcohol, Internet pornography, or some other activity—far above God.

But addiction isn’t the only way we violate the First Commandment. We easily slip from enjoying something to making it the most important part of our lives. People get consumed with their jobs, travel, sports, reading, or other enjoyable hobbies. Others place people ahead of God when they start dating, getting married, or raising children. Wealth, fame, political gain, popularity—whatever the distraction—this commandment reminds us of the importance of keeping God at the fore.

The First Commandment is critical for everyone because God alone is the Source of our life. He alone can provide all our needs, protect us from all harm, and deliver us from death and hell. It’s not really a selfish ego thing with God either, like He always insists on being in first place. It’s because you and I too easily forget how much we need God above all people and things in our life.

Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides You. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. (Psalm 73:25-26)

Once we see God for who He really is, when we experience His love in Jesus Christ and the joy that comes from committing our lives to Him, we won’t be so easily persuaded to make worldly things our greatest passions. In fact, we can more thoroughly enjoy the good things God gives us here on earth when we give Him credit and thanks for providing them to us.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- What object would it be easiest for you to become obsessed with?
- What steps can you take to control that obsession and keep it in its rightful place?
- What things are important enough to make you willing to set aside regular time with God in worship, Bible reading, prayer, or private devotions?

DIGGING DEEPER

- “How Do I Keep Sports from Becoming My Religion” (audio, <http://media.lhm.org/lutheranhour/mp3s/QA8044PD.mp3>) helps one keep a healthy perspective.

3.11. SECOND COMMANDMENT: YOU SHALL NOT MISUSE THE NAME OF THE LORD YOUR GOD.

In this commandment we are required to think highly of God and be careful only to speak about Him and use His Name in ways that will lead others to trust in Him as well.

The clearest way we can know about God is by what He has chosen to reveal in the Bible. We call this a self-revelation of God’s Name or reputation.

And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the Name of the Lord shall be saved. (Acts 2:21)

Since we love God our Father for saving us, and fear displeasing Him we are extremely careful in how we think and speak of His Name. We don’t want to think or speak of God like an old grandfather always laughing at his grandchildren and not really caring what we say and do. On the other hand, we want to avoid focusing too much on God’s justice and holiness and forgetting His love. Without God’s love and forgiveness we cannot help but be filled with guilt and despair since nothing we do is ever perfect enough.

God’s Name is above all others in heaven and on earth, as there is power in the Name of the Lord. God wants us and all people to call upon Him, to know we are His children for Jesus’ sake, and to be confident He is always available to us through prayer by simply calling upon His Name.

Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me. (Psalm 50:15)

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- How do we affect God’s reputation in the minds of others when they see us regularly committing little sins (or bigger ones)?

3.12. THIRD COMMANDMENT: REMEMBER THE SABBATH DAY BY KEEPING IT HOLY.

In this commandment God calls us to set aside time each week to gather with fellow believers in worship and to hear His Word in worship. From this we receive great blessings from Him. In the process He puts our lives back in balance by reminding us of our purpose on earth and the life to come.

And on the seventh day God finished His work that He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work that He had done. So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all His work that He had done in creation. (Genesis 2:2-3)

God didn’t rest because He was worn out or exhausted. He was setting a pattern of work and rest for His human creatures to imitate. He created us with a need for rest and refreshing even before our first parents fell into sin. But now that our human nature has been impaired by sin we need that rest even more.

God’s command to dedicate time to worship and rest is more important to us now than ever before. Modern society, with its smartphones, tablets and instant, worldwide access to just about anything keeps us going at a pace never seen before. But even more, it focuses us on the here and now, and leads us to lose perspective on the bigger, far more important matters of life like where we will spend eternity when this brief life is over.

God gives us a tremendous privilege when He invites us to sit at His feet as His own dear children. There we are reassured of His love and forgiveness, being fed and strengthened for the days ahead. Yet how easily we excuse ourselves from worship, or allow ourselves to be distracted by small and unimportant matters.

(Jesus said) "Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:28)

Weekly worship affords us the opportunity to have fellowship with other believers, to grow in our faith and to pray together.

Not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. (Hebrews 10:25)

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- "Why Should I Go to Church" (<http://www.lhm.org/godconnects/diggingdeeper.asp#3.12>) is a booklet that wrestles with common objections about going to church.
- How can weekly worship help you reset priorities to get more out of life and give more of yourself to the people most important to you?

DIGGING DEEPER

- "Why Do We Worship on Sunday?" (audio, <http://media.lhm.org/lutheranhour/mp3s/QA7435PD.mp3>)

3.13. FOURTH COMMANDMENT: HONOR YOUR FATHER AND YOUR MOTHER.

In this commandment God reminds us He has appointed our parents and other authorities to protect and provide for us as His representatives. He commands us to honor and obey them so long as they do not command us to do things contrary to His will.

Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. (Romans 13:2)

God is the ultimate authority in our lives and in all of creation. Yet when creating this world God made mankind in "His image," delegating people to represent Him in roles of authority.

Those representatives became even more important after Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit because mankind abandoned God's high standards of love and care for one another, as each of us seeks out our own pleasure and benefit.

Parents aren't the only authorities God places over us. Beyond them He also gives us grandparents, mentors, teachers, pastors, bosses and supervisors, police officers, government officials, and other authorities who care for us and are deserving of our honor.

Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed. (Romans 13:7)

There is one case where God requires us to disobey parents or other authorities, and that is when they want us to disobey Him. If they want us to disobey God they are certainly no longer acting as His representatives.

But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men." (Acts 5:29)

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- What was the best advice you got from parents or other authorities that you now regret not following?
- Describe how your boss or supervisor serves as God's representative to you and your family.
- How can you still honor government officials when you strenuously disagree with them?
- Discuss why "God Allows Bad Rulers to Gain Power." (audio, <http://media.lhm.org/lutheranhour/mp3s/QA7544PD.mp3>)

DIGGING DEEPER

- "What is My Obligation to the Government?" (audio, <http://media.lhm.org/lutheranhour/mp3s/QA8032PD.mp3>)
- "Civil Disobedience" (audio, <http://media.lhm.org/lutheranhour/mp3s/QA7738PD.mp3>) is disobeying authorities for conscience sake. Is that okay?

- *The Intersection of Church and State* (<http://www.lhm.org/men/studydetail.asp?id=21040>) is a video that explores how the church and government properly work together.

3.14. Fifth Commandment: You shall not murder.

This commandment not only forbids the taking of human life, but it also requires us to protect the lives of other people, especially those who cannot protect themselves. We are forbidden to harm anyone in any way, even from holding grudges in our hearts. Since the Fifth Commandment prohibits us from killing other people (murder), it seems like the easiest of the commandments to keep. However, the following examples show how challenging this can be.

1. Suicide - God forbids suicide. Being the Author and Giver of life, He alone has the right to end your life or that of anyone else. Self-murder is an expression of doubt in His almighty power to forgive us, or to transform and improve our lives.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- List the various reasons people commit suicide.
- Discuss how God is the answer to each of these decisions.

DIGGING DEEPER

- "Suicide" (audio, <http://media.lhm.org/lutheranhour/mp3s/QA7921PD.mp3>) discusses difficult questions regarding this issue.
- *Surviving a Loved One's Suicide* (<http://lhm.org/godconnects/diggingdeeper.asp#3.14>) is a booklet giving hope and perspective to survivors.

2. Euthanasia - Likewise, God never gave us authority to put people "out of their misery," in order to relieve their suffering, or to ease the burden of the care of those who are seriously ill. God in His wisdom and mercy knows the right time to end people's lives. He alone retains that authority. However, when it is evident that a person is in the process of dying, it can be permissible to stop heroic medical intervention.

DIGGING DEEPER

- *Speaking of Care* (<http://lhm.org/godconnects/diggingdeeper.asp#3.14>) examines issues related to the caregiver.
- Click [here](http://www.lcms.org/page.aspx?pid=861) (www.lcms.org/page.aspx?pid=861) for list of articles on euthanasia.

3. Abortion: The Bible makes clear that each of us is a valuable person from the moment of our conception. Except to save the life of the mother, abortion is a violation of God's commandment forbidding murder.

For You formed my inward parts; You knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are Your works; my soul knows it very well. My frame was not hidden from You, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in Your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them. (Psalm 139:13-16)

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- Why do we take such heroic efforts to save a prematurely born infant, then turn around and abort a perfectly healthy unborn child?
- What help can we offer to women who are considering abortion?

DIGGING DEEPER

- A premature baby's *fight for life* (<http://vimeo.com/78393869>)
- "Abortion" (<http://lcms.org/Document.fdoc?src=lcm&id=1101>) is a pamphlet that discusses facets of this controversial issue.
- Click [here](http://www.lcms.org/page.aspx?pid=849) (<http://www.lcms.org/page.aspx?pid=849>) for a list of articles on abortion.

4. Hatred and anger - Jesus explains in the following passage that hatred and anger also break this commandment. God judges not just our actions, but also our words, thoughts and desires. You and I may never have caused someone's death by intention or accident, but which of us has not been angry at another, or insulted him, or refused to forgive? What about abuse, prejudice, bigotry and hatred?

(Jesus said) "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be judgment.' But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire." (Matthew 5:21-22)

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- Describe the various ways a person could harm his or her enemy without taking their lives.
- *There's More to Anger than Getting Mad* (<http://lhm.org/godconnects/diggingdeeper.asp#3.14>) is a booklet that gives new ways of thinking about anger.

There are times when God permits the taking of a human life. If we are defending an innocent person or ourselves from a lawbreaker, God permits the use of force, even lethal force, to curb the evil and protect the innocent. For the same reason, the government has the same authority to carry out capital punishment and wage wars for just causes.

If you do wrong, be afraid, for he [the governing authority] does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer. (Romans 13:4b)

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- List some of the professions that fall under the principle above.
- What are some circumstances where you would have the right to use force to protect your family or your home?
- Where do you draw the line in what you should protect, and what is not worth risking a human life over?

DIGGING DEEPER

- "Capital Punishment" (audio, <http://media.lhm.org/lutheranhour/mp3s/QA7846PD.mp3>)
- *Has God Abandoned Me?* (booklet, <http://lhm.org/godconnects/diggingdeeper.asp#3.14>)

Life is a gift from God. As we were created in the very image of God, we must consider our lives—and the lives of every other person—as precious and worth protecting. We should do all that we can to befriend our neighbor, offering help and support in every way we can.

3.15. SIXTH COMMANDMENT: YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY.

In this commandment God addresses His good gift of sexuality. From the very beginning God created humans as sexual beings. However, He reserves sexual activity for husband and wife in a lifelong marriage alone. He forbids all other forms of sexual activity because of the harm they inevitably bring upon us.

So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. (Genesis 1:27)

The second chapter of Genesis specifies how He created the first two humans. He formed Adam from the ground (see Genesis 2:7). Then, taking one of Adam's ribs He formed Eve (see Genesis 2:21-23). He brought her to the man, united them in marriage, and said,

Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. (Genesis 2:24)

That is the template for all marriages—and for sexual activity that is healthy and beneficial to us in body, heart, mind and soul.

Within the bounds of marriage, sexual activity serves three beneficial purposes:

1) Marital sex unites husband and wife into one flesh, strengthening the bonds that hold that marriage together.

Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. (1 Corinthians 7:5)

2) Families are strengthened. God designed sex to be confined within marriage so children would only be conceived, born and raised in a stable, loving home with a father and mother together. Again that passage “the two become one flesh” comes into play, for these children are the fruit of that one flesh.

3) Marital sex provides the only healthy outlet for the powerful sex drive God created in mankind, so we would “be fruitful and multiply” (see Genesis 1:28).

To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain single as I am. But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion. (1 Corinthians 7:8-9)

God created marriage to be the lifelong union of a husband and wife. But He doesn't leave us to our own devices. He provides the love, forgiveness and strength for every marriage to last through all the changes and hardships of this sinful world.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- What hardships have you seen God bring you through?
- How is our society redefining the family? How is it working?

DIGGING DEEPER

- Search “parent” for a list of **Project Connect** booklets (<http://www.lhm.org/projectconnect/booklets.asp>) on family life.
- *Fatherhood* (<http://www.lhm.org/men/studydetail.asp?id=17978>) is a video-based study on the key role that fathers play in their families.
- *For Better, For Worse – Maintaining a Healthy Marriage* (booklet, <http://lhm.org/godconnects/diggingdeeper.asp#3.15>)
- *Uncover the Lover Within – Rediscovering Intimacy in Your Marriage* (booklet, <http://lhm.org/godconnects/diggingdeeper.asp#3.15>)
- *Gambling* (booklet, <http://lhm.org/godconnects/diggingdeeper.asp#3.15>)

This commandment forbids common practices in our society.

1. Divorce - Since “the two become one flesh,” God never made divorce part of His plan for marriage. Divorce violently tears the united flesh of husband and wife apart, causing deep pain and physical, emotional, and mental harm to each. In the same way, it violently rips apart the fruit of that union, their children.

Each marriage is a model of the relationship God has with each believer. He forbids divorce except in two cases—adultery or desertion. In these two cases the sinning spouse has already broken the bonds of marriage (just as a person can turn away from God to go searching for an “affair” with another god as we mentioned in the First Commandment). Divorce also deeply negatively affects the children of the couple.

Of course, divorce is not the only reason children live with a single parent. Though God's ideal is for each child to be raised with a mother and father, there are many reasons this doesn't happen, including sexual activity outside of marriage, and the death of a parent. God assures us He most certainly offers His blessings of love, forgiveness and peace to children born to single mothers, or raised by single fathers.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- What pain have you experienced or witnessed in children of divorce?
- What's a good way to convince them they are not responsible, without downplaying the pain they are genuinely experiencing?

DIGGING DEEPER

- “Is Divorce a Sin” (audio, <http://media.lhm.org/lutheranhour/mp3s/QA7736PD.mp3>) examines God’s will, repentance and forgiveness!
- *Beyond Divorce* (booklet, <http://lhm.org/godconnects/diggingdeeper.asp#3.15>)

2. Sexual activity outside marriage

When we step outside God’s design for sexuality through adultery, premarital sex, and pornography, we expose ourselves to unintended emotional and physical injury. This inevitably comes whenever we use something in ways the Designer never intended. This happens because the key biblical teaching of how “the two become one flesh” (see Genesis 2:24) is a fundamental part of every single sexual act—both within marriage and outside it.

Do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written “The two will become one flesh.” (1 Corinthians 6:16)

Sexual sin causes harm far deeper than physical, mental, and emotional; it causes grave spiritual damage. In 1 Corinthians 6:17 we read, “He who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with Him.” The Bible describes this as a marriage between God and believers: Christ being the Groom, and all His believers, the church, being His bride. Just as a man having an affair cuts himself off from his union with his wife, every time we sin we cut ourselves off from our union with God.

He who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with Him. Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. (1 Corinthians 6:17-18)

This is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality: that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God; that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you. For God has not called us to impurity but in holiness. Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives His Holy Spirit to you. (1 Thessalonians 4:3-8)

Sexual sins are no worse than others sins, but they are different because we commit them directly against our own bodies. Truly this is no “victimless” crime, and God holds us accountable for how we use or abuse this body He has given us.

Co-habitation or living together before marriage is extremely common in our culture. On the surface it makes a lot of sense. Reason says, “Wouldn’t a man and woman have a better chance of making their marriage last the rest of their life if they try it out first?”

This sounds good and fine, but one thing is missing. The philosophies that lie behind marriage and living together are complete opposites. The promise of marriage is that husband and wife will stay together no matter what happens (“for better or for worse, for richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health”). Co-habitation lacks this commitment completely (“We’ll stay together as long as we get along. But if we find we don’t we’ll go our separate ways.”) Instead of practicing for marriage, they are practicing for divorce.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- Is there such a thing as recreational sex, or “sex with no strings attached,” that does not have negative consequences?
- List some of the reasons people give for co-habiting before marriage.
- How does this lack of commitment affect the children born in co-habitation?

DIGGING DEEPER

- “Live Together Before Marriage?” (audio, <http://media.lhm.org/lutheranhour/mp3s/QA7910PD.mp3>) speaks a powerful perspective on how strong relationships are built—God’s way.
- *Pornography and the Search for Intimacy* (<http://www.lhm.org/godconnects/diggingdeeper.asp#3.15>) is a booklet that discusses this problem and God’s proper plan for sexuality.

3. Homosexuality - God's Word clearly reserves sexual relations for a man and a woman in marriage only.

Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves ... For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error. (Romans 1:24, 26-27)

Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality ... will inherit the kingdom of God. (1 Corinthians 6:9-10b)

Some argue that same sex attraction isn't a choice made, but a way that a person is born. So they argue we should accept the homosexual lifestyle as a godly alternative, and even approve of homosexual marriage.

Psalm 51:5 asserts, *"Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me."* Everyone has been corrupted by sin from the moment of conception. Our sinful nature distorts and corrupts the human nature God made in His image when He first created Adam and Eve. Jesus described it in these words,

"What comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person." (Matthew 15:18-20)

Just because we are born with certain sinful desires or proclivities does not make those desires permissible or acceptable to God.

Homosexual acts are no worse sins than others. But like all other sins it must be confessed. Then the sinner can find full and complete forgiveness in Jesus Christ his Lord and Savior who paid the price for that sin as well as every other sin. The homosexual desire may well remain until Jesus restores His perfect image within the person when He returns on Judgment Day. But God is there to strengthen the believer to resist those sinful desires and to abstain from acting on them.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- What do you think about the argument that we should accept homosexuality when an individual claims, "But God made me this way"?
- How can we share God's warning against homosexual lifestyle with a gay friend or family member without driving him/her away?
- How can we show genuine love and concern for a friend engaged in the gay lifestyle without giving the impression God is okay with it and he/she doesn't need to repent?

DIGGING DEEPER

- "Homosexuality" (<http://lcms.org/Document.fdoc?src=lcm&id=1100>) is a pamphlet outlining God's will in this area and the church's response.

In summary, God doesn't want to hinder our enjoyment of sex. Instead, He provides the healthy boundary of holy marriage within which it will richly bless our lives—body, heart, mind, soul and spirit.

3.16 SEVENTH COMMANDMENT: YOU SHALL NOT STEAL.

In this commandment God gives us the right to own property. He protects that property and forbids us from stealing anyone else's property in any way, even in a way that may seem right. He also commands us to help others keep and improve those things He has entrusted to them.

Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need. (Ephesians 4:28)

This is another one of those commandments that seems pretty easy on the surface. After all, not many of us have broken into a house or robbed a bank. But before we dismiss this commandment with a pat on the back, we need to remember that there is much involved in keeping this commandment.

Sure, we should not steal money, cars or jewels, but we must also not steal from our employers through long lunch breaks, pilfering business supplies or copies, or intentionally wasting time on the job. We shouldn't steal from customers by short-changing them either.

Hear this, you who trample on the needy and bring the poor of the land to an end, saying, "When will the new moon be over, that we may sell grain? And the Sabbath, that we may offer wheat for sale, that we may make the ephah small and the shekel great and deal deceitfully with false balances, that we may buy the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals and sell the chaff of the wheat?" The Lord has sworn by the pride of Jacob: "Surely I will never forget any of their deeds." (Amos 8:4-7)

Not only are we forbidden to take the things God has entrusted to others, we are to use the gifts He has given us to provide for people in need. Throughout the Bible we are introduced to many wealthy people: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Job, King David, and his son King Solomon. God gave these men an abundance of possessions. They did not hoard these things, but generously shared them with those in need.

When the ear heard, it called me blessed, and when the eye saw, it approved, because I delivered the poor who cried for help, and the fatherless who had none to help him. The blessing of him who was about to perish came upon me, and I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy. I put on righteousness, and it clothed me; my justice was like a robe and a turban. I was eyes to the blind and feet to the lame. I was a father to the needy, and I searched out the cause of him whom I did not know. I broke the fangs of the unrighteous and made him drop his prey from his teeth. (Job 29:11-17)

Even when struck with severe poverty, God often moves His people to great generosity:

We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints. (2 Corinthians 8:1-4)

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- Give some examples of ways people "steal" from people in a way that is legal?
- Can gambling (<http://lhm.org/godconnects/diggingdeeper.asp#3.16>) be a way to get our neighbor's possessions? Or at least try?
- Share some ideas about how we can use the good things God has given us to help others.
- Describe a time you have seen someone be generous during a time of suffering in their own life.

3.17. EIGHTH COMMANDMENT: YOU SHALL NOT GIVE FALSE TESTIMONY AGAINST YOUR NEIGHBOR.

In this commandment God forbids us to lie or gossip about our neighbor. Instead, He directs us to protect our neighbor's reputation and presume the best motives lie behind their actions.

Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. (Ephesians 4:25)

This Eighth Commandment is all about protecting reputations. This commandment literally forbids us to be a false witness, that is, to lie when we are testifying in court. That hardly seems like something many people would do, but once again God is listing the worst offense to cover every lesser case of lying in our daily lives.

There are any number of reasons why we lie—some malicious, some with the best of intentions. On the malicious side are things like insults, slander and spreading gossip. Each of these seeks to accomplish one thing, the destruction of another person's reputation. Maybe we aren't out to ruin someone's reputation altogether; perhaps, we're out to enhance our own by comparison. But that doesn't change the fact that our words harmed someone else. Some lies are done with non-malicious intentions. These may be offered to cover up some wrong we have done, or to spare the feelings of our spouse or someone else. Sometimes silence is a better option.

Jesus gave us some direction when a fellow believer sins against us, *(Jesus said) "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother."* (Matthew 18:15)

Here is the perfect opportunity for gossip, but Jesus commands silence. After all, that is what God does when we confess our sins to Him. He forgives them and never brings them to remembrance again. And since each of us stumbles and sins, wouldn't we want those we've sinned against to do the same: protect our reputation by remaining silent rather than going out and publicly exposing our faults through gossip? That's what Peter meant when he wrote,

Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. (1 Peter 4:8)

Imagine if our families, churches, workplaces and communities tried hard to protect each other's reputations.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- Give some examples of little white lies you told that ended up making things worse.
- Why is truth always the best option? Describe a time you tried to do something nice for someone but ended up having your motives challenged or misjudged. (Please protect their reputation by leaving this person anonymous.)
- What difference would it make if you started thinking more positively about the people around you?

DIGGING DEEPER

- "Gossip and the Eighth Commandment" (audio, <http://media.lhm.org/lutheranhour/mp3s/QA7443PD.mp3>)
- "Is It Sometimes Okay to Tell a Lie?" (audio, <http://media.lhm.org/lutheranhour/mp3s/QA8038PD.mp3>)

3.18. NINTH AND TENTH COMMANDMENTS: YOU SHALL NOT COVET YOUR NEIGHBOR'S HOUSE. YOU SHALL NOT COVET YOUR NEIGHBOR'S WIFE, OR HIS MANSERVANT OR MAIDSERVANT, HIS OX OR DONKEY, OR ANYTHING THAT BELONGS TO YOUR NEIGHBOR.

In this commandment, God cuts through our words and actions to expose the sin lurking in our hearts and minds. He forbids us to covetously desire in our hearts those things He has given to others, and commands us to remain content with what He provides us.

Godliness with contentment is great gain. (1 Timothy 6:6)

Contentment transforms everything. Our neighbor can get that promotion or pull up in a fancy, new car. He or she might even leave on another exotic vacation, and we can praise God on their behalf.

When God is truly the center of our lives we can rest assured He will provide us with everything we need—and enough left over to help our neighbor in his or her need too.

"Delight yourself in the LORD, and He will give you the desires of your heart" (Psalm 37:4). What does it mean to covet? The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines it this way: "to desire (what belongs to another) inordinately or culpably." It's easy to look at the Ten Commandments on the surface only, thinking we have kept them if we never murdered anyone, slept with another person's wife or husband, stolen someone's property, or lied in court. But these final two commandments blow the lid off that assumption; they show God does not only judge and punish our outward words and our actions, but He delves deep into our very thoughts and desires as He searches our hearts, minds, the very depths of our soul. Nothing is hidden from God.

Suddenly a new light is shed on the previous commandments. We may not have taken someone's life, or even caused physical harm, but if we have made their life bitter or even wished they were hurt or dead, we are a murderer in God's eyes. We may never have had sex with someone else's spouse, but if we looked lustfully at another, we are an adulterer in God's eyes. We may never have stretched out our hand to take something that belongs to our neighbor, but if we deeply desire something they have, we are a thief in God's eyes.

So how does God help us battle the covetous desires of our sinful nature? He gives us contentment. When we are satisfied with the things He has provided in this life, we aren't bothered by the things He has chosen to give others.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- What answer do these commandments give to the notion that God will accept people into heaven as long as they have tried their best and lived a pretty good life?
- How do you feel when your neighbor gets a promotion, drives a new car, or leaves on an exotic vacation?
- If we find ourselves feeling covetous, what are some things we can focus on instead?
- Why is it important to shift our attention from the gifts we have to the God who has given us those gifts?

Closing Prayer: Lord God, Your Ten Commandments set the pattern for a perfect world, but they also show how far from perfect I am. Thank You for giving Your Son Jesus to save me from my disobedience. Forgive me for Jesus' sake, and give me grace and strength to follow Your laws for the benefit of my neighbor and for Your glory. In Jesus' Name. Amen.