



A FREE PRINTABLE CHRISTIAN GUIDE

The Ten Commandments Explained

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A thoughtful, practical guide to the commandments in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5, and to the loving wisdom Christians seek to live out today.

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A guide for the journey

The Ten Commandments are part of the covenant story of Israel. In Exodus, they follow the reminder that God brought the people out of slavery (Exodus 20:1–2); Deuteronomy retells them as Moses prepares a new generation to remember that story (Deuteronomy 5:6–21). They are not merely a list of rules. They speak about worship, trust, relationships, justice, and the shape of a faithful community.

A note on wording and numbering

This guide uses a common Protestant numbering for ease of reference. Christian traditions do not all divide or number the commandments in the same way, and translations may phrase them differently. Some traditions group the opening instructions differently and divide the teaching on coveting differently; Jewish tradition also counts the opening words and commandments according to its own framework. The biblical passages remain the shared starting point.

How to use this guide

Read each commandment alongside its passage, then consider the explanation and everyday example. The applications here are invitations to reflection, not a test of worthiness. Christians differ on how particular commands apply across covenants and settings, so use this resource as a starting point for prayer, Scripture study, and wise conversation.

The passages to keep close

Exodus 20:1–17 and Deuteronomy 5:6–21. For a Christian perspective on love as the heart of faithful obedience, see Matthew 22:37–40 and Romans 13:8–10.

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Worship and reverence

01 Put God first

Reference: Exodus 20:3; Deuteronomy 5:7

Plain meaning: Israel is called to worship the Lord alone, rather than treating another god or power as ultimate. For Christians, this points to wholehearted trust and allegiance to God.

Today: Notice what most shapes your choices, hopes, and sense of security. Work, money, popularity, or even good things can take too central a place when they become the source of our worth.

Everyday example: Before a major decision, make space to pray, seek wise counsel, and ask whether the choice reflects love of God and neighbour.

02 Do not make idols

Reference: Exodus 20:4–6; Deuteronomy 5:8–10

Plain meaning: The people are warned not to make images and worship them as gods. The passage stresses God's uniqueness and calls the community away from trying to control the divine through objects.

Today: Christians understand this command in different ways regarding religious images. A helpful shared question is whether anything we create or possess is being given the trust and devotion that belong to God.

Everyday example: Enjoy art, possessions, and achievements with gratitude, while remembering they are not divine and cannot carry the whole weight of your hope.

03 Honour God's name

Reference: Exodus 20:7; Deuteronomy 5:11

Plain meaning: God's name is not to be used carelessly, deceitfully, or to give false authority to our words. The command links reverence for God with integrity in speech.

Today: Speak about faith with respect, and do not use God's name to pressure, threaten, or mislead another person. Let our promises and public witness be honest.

Everyday example: If you have promised to help, keep your word or communicate promptly and truthfully when circumstances change.

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Rest, family, and the value of life

04 Remember the Sabbath

Reference: Exodus 20:8–11; Deuteronomy 5:12–15

Plain meaning: Set apart a regular day for rest and worship, remembering both creation and Israel's liberation from slavery. The command protects rest for the household and for those who work.

Today: Many Christians set aside Sunday for worship and rest; Christian traditions differ on how the Sabbath command relates to Sunday and to Jewish Sabbath practice. Seek a rhythm that honours God, renews you, and makes room for others to rest.

Everyday example: Protect a regular time for worship, unhurried meals, sleep, and connection, while considering people whose work schedules make a particular day difficult.

05 Honour your father and mother

Reference: Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16

Plain meaning: Children are called to treat their parents with honour and respect. The command also reminds a community that family relationships carry responsibility across generations.

Today: Honour may include gratitude, listening, practical care, and truthful boundaries. It does not require accepting abuse or pretending that every family relationship is safe.

Everyday example: Check in with a parent or trusted elder when appropriate, offer help where it is healthy, and seek support if a relationship needs wise boundaries.

06 Do not murder

Reference: Exodus 20:13; Deuteronomy 5:17

Plain meaning: Human life is not ours to destroy. The command forbids murder and, in a wider Christian ethic, invites us to value life and resist hatred, cruelty, and violence.

Today: Protect people from harm, challenge dehumanising speech, and support care for those who are vulnerable. Christian communities discuss some difficult cases differently, so approach them with humility and compassion.

Everyday example: Refuse to join in bullying or contempt, and take practical steps to protect someone who is being harmed.

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Faithfulness and fairness

07 Be faithful in marriage

Reference: Exodus 20:14; Deuteronomy 5:18

Plain meaning: This command calls married partners to sexual faithfulness and honours the trust at the heart of a covenant relationship. Its wider biblical context treats people as more than objects for our desires.

Today: Practise honesty, respect, consent, and care in relationships. Christian traditions hold varied teachings about marriage and sexuality; this guide focuses on the command's call to faithfulness and dignity.

Everyday example: Keep healthy boundaries, communicate truthfully, and treat a partner's trust and wellbeing as precious.

08 Do not steal

Reference: Exodus 20:15; Deuteronomy 5:19

Plain meaning: Do not take what belongs to someone else. The principle reaches beyond possessions to honest dealings, fair work, and respect for what others have entrusted to us.

Today: Be fair with money, time, shared resources, creative work, and private information. Where we have caused loss, Christian practice encourages us to make amends when possible.

Everyday example: Credit the artist or writer whose work you share, return borrowed items, and pay people fairly for their labour.

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Truthfulness and contentment

09 Tell the truth about your neighbour

Reference: Exodus 20:16; Deuteronomy 5:20

Plain meaning: Do not give false testimony against another person. In its original setting, this protects a neighbour from dishonest accusation; its wider wisdom calls us to truthful speech and fair judgment.

Today: Check what is true before repeating a claim, especially when someone's reputation is at stake. Truthfulness includes refusing gossip, correcting mistakes, and listening before reaching a conclusion.

Everyday example: If a rumour reaches you, do not pass it on as fact. Ask whether it is accurate, necessary, and fair to the person being discussed.

10 Do not covet

Reference: Exodus 20:17; Deuteronomy 5:21

Plain meaning: Do not let consuming desire take hold of what belongs to another person. The command reaches into the heart, naming envy and restless comparison as well as outward actions.

Today: Practise gratitude and generosity, while being honest about longing or envy rather than shaming yourself for having feelings. Christian reflection can turn that awareness towards contentment, justice, and care for neighbours.

Everyday example: When comparison rises, name one gift in your own life and consider one practical way to celebrate or support another person's good fortune.

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Living the commandments with love

Jesus summarises the law with love for God and love for neighbour (Matthew 22:37–40). Paul likewise writes that love fulfils the law (Romans 13:8–10). For Christians, the commandments can guide a life of love, while grace reminds us that our value is not earned by perfect performance.

A gentle moment to reflect

Which commandment feels especially meaningful in your life right now? Where might a small step towards truth, rest, gratitude, repair, or care help you love God and others more fully?

A practical way forward

Choose one commandment to revisit this week. Read its passage slowly, notice what it reveals about God's care for people, and choose one realistic response. If repair is needed, ask for support and take a safe, honest next step.

A compassionate close

The commandments are not an invitation to despair or to measure another person's worth. They help name what faithful love can look like, and they can also reveal where we need forgiveness, healing, and change. Christian traditions explain their continuing role in different ways, but many place them within the larger story of God's mercy and the call to love our neighbour. Take your next step with humility, hope, and compassion for yourself and others.

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