

GOD'S GOOD LIFE

CHRIST CHURCH
HOMEGROUPS
SUMMER 2006

WELCOME TO OUR NEW SERIES OF HOMEGROUPS

The diary for this term looks like this:

Wednesday 3rd May
Week beginning 8th May
Week beginning 15th May
Week beginning 22nd May
Week beginning 29th May

PRAYER MEETING
Home-Group session 1
Home Group session 2
Home Group session 3
FREE WEEK

Wednesday 7th June
Week beginning 12th June
Week beginning 19th June
Week beginning 26th June

PRAYER MEETING
Home Group session 4
Home Group session 5
Home Group session 6

Wednesday 5th July
Week beginning 10th July
Week beginning 17th July

PRAYER MEETING
Home Group session 7
Home Group session 8

1. FOLLOWING THE RULES.

WELCOME

If you could create one new law, what would it be?

WORSHIP

Psalm 95 is one of the great psalms of praise. In the first part, it acknowledges the greatness of the Lord, in the second part it highlights the importance of listening to his word.

Use the psalm (or similar words) to praise God, and to ask him to help you to hear and obey his word.

WORD

A contractors firm was busy demolishing a church building. The workmen had strict instructions to preserve anything of value. One of them notices a stone slab with the Ten Commandments chiselled on it.

‘Do we keep that?’ he asked the foreman.

‘No’, said the foreman. ‘They don’t use them these days.’

It may come as a surprise to find that a series of home-groups called ‘*God’s Good Life*’ is actually based on the Ten Commandments. After all, the usual attitude to such rules is that they are designed to prevent us having a good life!

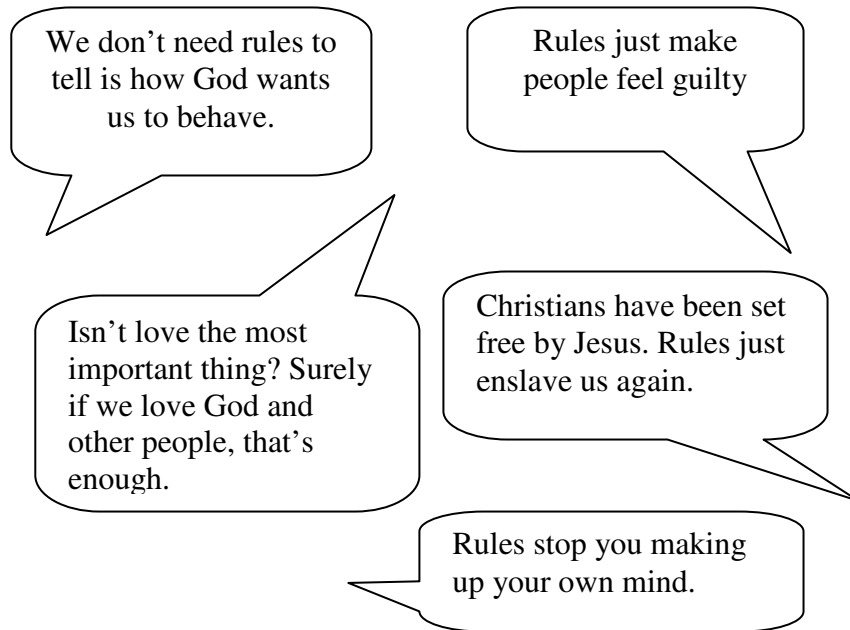
And God spoke all these words:

I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

- *You shall have no other gods before me.*
- *You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.*
- *You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.*
- *Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labour and do all your work, but 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 nor maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.*
- *Honour your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you.*
- *You shall not murder.*
- *You shall not commit adultery.*
- *You shall not steal.*
- *You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour.*
- *You shall not covet your neighbour’s house. You shall not covet your neighbour’s wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or his donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbour.*

EXODUS 20:1-17

- To what extent do you agree with any of the following statements?



Before we start, let's refresh our memories

Read Deuteronomy 5:1-22

- Are there any of the Ten that you feel worried by?
- Are there any of which you don't understand why God included them?

Every now and again there are surveys which ask people to make up a new, contemporary Ten Commandments. Interestingly, some of the actual Ten Commandments are always retained (e.g. 'You shall not murder') whilst others are frequently dropped.

- Do you think that any of the Ten Commandments are now out of date?

Look again at Deut 5:6. The Ten Commandments don't begin with rules, but with a person.

'I am the Lord your God.'

'I brought you out of slavery'

- How do these 2 statements give us a motivation for following these rules?

The Ten Commandments were given in the context of a relationship between God and his people. In that sense, they were never intended to define the law for a non-Christian society. There may be elements of the Commandments which are taken up in British Law, but they really exist, not to tell society how to live, but to tell God's people how to live as his people.

Read Deuteronomy 6:1-8

- Why did God give his people the law?

Some strict Jews still take the instruction in v.8 literally, and wear a small box with a portion of the law bound to their foreheads.

- What do you think this instruction means for us?

Of course, there is a fundamental difference between us and the Jews to whom this command was first given.

Read Galatians 3:15-25.

This part of Galatians isn't the easiest section of the New Testament to understand!

- But, what does Paul say about the purpose of the law?

Does this mean that now Jesus has come, the Ten Commandments are irrelevant?

*Rules can neither save us nor make us holy.
Salvation is a gift of God's grace, and holiness
is the fruit of his Spirit. We discover both when
we are set free from 'the law' by Jesus.*
Roy Clements in 'No Longer Slaves'

WORK

It's all too easy to study even very practical parts of the Bible, like the Ten Commandments, and yet do nothing to put them into practice.

Spend some time praying for one another in your group, that God will help you to be open to being challenged by his word, and that he will help you to change as a result of this series.

In order for this to happen, we do need to encourage one another. It would be good if each member of the group could commit to keeping the things you discuss as you meet confidential to the group. That way it will be easier for people to talk about the issues that they struggle with.

2. THE ONLY GOD.

WELCOME

What do you think is God's greatest act in creation?

WORSHIP

Psalm 8 talks about how great God is – the whole universe reflects his glory. It also reminds us how amazing it is that God cares for us. Start with the psalm, then move on to praise God, both for the wonder of creation, and also for his concern for us.

WORD

So – why should we bother with rules? Most of us probably take it for granted that law is something cold and impersonal. We may see our national law-makers on television, but that does not make us feel close to them as people. They make the rules, we have to obey. It is a case of *them* and *us*.

Read again Deuteronomy 5:1-7

As we saw last time, the 10 Commandments are introduced by a statement of the personal relationship we have with the law-giver.

➤ ***I am the Lord your God.***

Why is he your God?

(To help answer that, look at Ephesians 2:1-5)

➤ What difference does God's grace make in your life?

I brought you out of slavery

- What slavery have you been set free from?
(Look at Romans 6:17-18)

You shall have no other gods before me

- What does this mean?
- Why do you think God put this commandment at the head of the list?

Read Deuteronomy 6:1-5

- What other things could take God's place in your life?

In the ancient world people believed in many gods, each of whom was involved in just one area of life. But God is to be lord of the whole of our lives.

Are there areas where you find it difficult to put God first?

This is the Spirit in which the 10 Commandments are laid down. It is as though God is saying to his people, "I have done all this for you. I have picked you up from the floor. Remember Egypt? Now show how grateful you are by living for me in the following 10 ways.

David Field in 'God's Good Life'

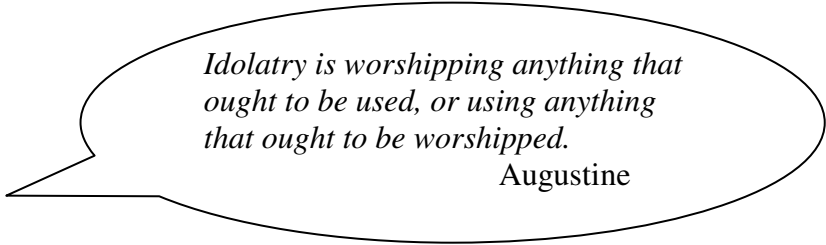
If we are to have no gods but the Lord, that leaves us with two mistakes to avoid. The first is worshipping anything other than the Lord. The second is worshipping a false idea of God.

Read Deuteronomy 5:8-10

It may seem strange to have this near the top of the 10 Commandments. After all, we don't make idols nowadays, do we?

- But – what is an idol?

- And – why is worshipping idols so wrong?



Idolatry is worshipping anything that ought to be used, or using anything that ought to be worshipped.

Augustine

For some examples of idolatry, look at

Romans 1:21-25

Philippians 3:19

Luke 12:13-21

- What idols are mentioned there?

The psychologist Stafford Clark has written that '*No-one is born prejudiced against other people, but everyone is born prejudiced in favour of himself.*'

- In what ways might we treat ourselves as idols?

Finally – read **Isaiah 44:12-22**

- Why is idolatry so foolish?

WORK

What things are you tempted to allow to take the place of God in your life? (If you think there is nothing, then you don't know yourself very well!)

How can you help one another keep these things in their right place in your life?

3. HONoured BE YOUR NAME.

WELCOME

What is your favourite Christian name, and why?

WORSHIP

The Bible gives us different names for God, which each tell us something about him. So, for example, he is *El Shaddai* – Changeless and everlasting (Genesis 17:1), he is *El Roi* – the God who sees (Gen.16:13), he is ‘the Rock’ (Deut 32), ‘the Shepherd’ (Psalm 23), ‘the Refuge’ (Psalm 46), ‘the Redeemer’ (Isaiah 41), and many more beside. And, he is ‘Our Father’ (Matt.6:9) Take some time to praise God for what his names tell us about him

WORD

One of the great privileges that Christians enjoy is to be on first name terms with the creator of the universe! We can come to him in prayer and talk to him at any time. He invites us to use his name. But the danger in such intimacy is that we could end up abusing the privilege.

Read Deuteronomy 5:11

- What sort of things do you think could be classed as ‘misusing the name of the Lord your God’?
- Why does it matter how we use God’s name?

- What do you think is the most constructive way of relating to people who use the names of God and Jesus as swear words?
Share your experiences.

Look at Leviticus 19:12

In Old Testament times people used God’s name to convince others that they were being honest. You could take an oath in God’s name that you were telling the truth. To tell a lie in order to get yourself out of trouble under those conditions would be a serious misuse of God’s name.

- How might we misuse God’s name to further our own ends?

Read Jeremiah 23:25-32

God’s people were being misled by prophets who claimed that they were speaking from God when it was actually only their own ideas.

- How do you respond when someone tells you that God has given them a word for you?
- Do you think this is ever a way of manipulating others?

Read Romans 2:17-24

- In what ways might our behaviour result in God’s name being dishonoured?

As individuals?

And as a church?

Read Matthew 6:9-13

The privilege of calling God 'Father' is balanced with a desire that his name be 'hallowed'

- Do you think that being 'over-familiar' with God erodes our reverence for him?
- How can we guard against this?

God wants us to worship him in the intimacy of close fellowship. That is good and right. But to shamble carelessly into his presence with our spiritual hands in our pockets is an abuse of that privilege. It is an insulting misuse of his name.

David Field in 'God's Good Life'

WORK

We want God's name to be honoured in our lives and in our church. We should also be doing things that will draw others to honour God's name. If you are a regular member of a home-group, you'll know that often the groups are challenged to do something which can be a contact point with non-Christians – maybe organise a barbecue or a coffee-morning to which you can invite your family or friends.

So – what will your group do this term?

4. THE BALANCED LIFE.

WELCOME

What is your favourite leisure activity?

WORSHIP

Psalm 62 talks about the source of rest. As we will see in this study, God has created us to need both work and rest. Use Psalm 62 together, then thank God for the rest that he gives.

WORD

When we come to the 4th Commandment, we again seem to enter a world that is very different from our own. What is this Sabbath' all about? Is it the same as Sunday? And anyway, why is Sunday so special?

But – before we come to the 4th Commandment, look at Genesis 1:27-2:3

- Why do we need to work? Why is it so painful to be without work?

Now, read Exodus 20:8-11

'Holy' means 'set apart', or 'special'.

- What reason does God give for making the Sabbath Day 'holy'?

- What were the Children of Israel to do on the Sabbath?

For some people this commandment seems very restrictive.
But look at **Mark 2:23-27**.

- What does Jesus say about the Sabbath?

Now look at **Deuteronomy 5:12-15**

- What reason is given here for keeping the Sabbath day 'holy'?

Soon after the resurrection Christians moved their meeting day to the first day of the week – the day Jesus was raised.

- How does this fulfil for us the instruction to 'remember'?

A balanced life requires both time for work, and time for rest. But a balanced life also requires time for relationships. And that is where the 10 Commandments now turn.

Look at **Deuteronomy 5:16**

(Your attitude to this commandment will probably depend on whether you are a parent or a child!)

The Hebrew word translated '*honour*', literally meant '*treat as weighty*', or '*treat as important*'.

- How might this affect our understanding of this commandment?

- Why should this attitude be important?

Read **Ephesians 6:1-4**

Paul tells children to 'obey your parents'.

- But – are there times when it would be right to disobey?

- And – when does a child stop being a child?

Look again at verse 4.

- Does the 5th commandment still apply when parents do exasperate their children?

If you still have some time left, look at Jesus' attitude to his parents in the following passages. What can you learn from them?

Luke 2:41-51

John 19:25-27

Mark 3:31-34

Mark 7:9-13

WORK

Three practical questions for you to think about (and hopefully act on!)

- What things can you do on Sunday to make it both a time for rest, and a day for fellowship and worship? Are there things that you need to stop doing on Sunday in order to make it a special day?
- As a church, how can we help one another in our family relationships?
- Are there members of your group who find it particularly difficult to make Sunday a day for fellowship and worship, maybe because of work or family pressures? What could you do as a group to help them?

5. THERE'S MORE THAN ONE WAY TO KILL.

WELCOME

What do you think is your best feature? And your worst feature?

WORSHIP

Psalm 139 talks of God's absolute knowledge of us, and also of his continuing care for us. Use the psalm together, then allow it to lead you into your won words of praise.

WORD

At the half way stage through the Ten Commandments, we move on to issues which sound much more legal, and which are largely still part of most societies legal systems. In Hebrew the 6th Commandment says simply '*no murder*'. But – is all killing 'murder'?

Before we get to that tricky question, we need to ask "why is life so precious?"

Look again at Psalm 139:13-16

and Genesis 1:26-27

- what do they tell you about why for the Christian life is so significant?

But – if life is precious – can any form of killing be right?

- What about Capital Punishment? (Exodus 21:12-13)
- War? (Deuteronomy 7:1-2)
- Assassinating a dictator? (Judges 3:12-23)

What about –

Suicide?

Euthanasia?

Abortion?

(You could probably spend all night arguing about these – but please don't! But hopefully it does show how complex things can be.)

One way through these complex issues is that taken by David Field in his book on the Ten Commandments. He says *'The taking of life is always bad ... But just sometimes killing may be right, as the least evil of all the options available.'*

- Do you think he is right?

It is hard enough fitting that lot together. But all too easily it becomes an academic issue – arguments about issues which often have no immediate personal connection. But Jesus took this commandment and showed its true scope – and showed how it should apply to the everyday life of his people.

Read Matthew 5:21-24

- Why do you think attitudes should be so important? (especially if we can keep them hidden!)

- And why should our attitudes affect our worship? (v.23-24 – see also 1 John 4:19-21)

And finally look at Matthew 5:43-48

- Is this really realistic? What does it mean to 'love our enemies'?
- What does it have to say about our attitudes towards those within the church who we feel some sort of enmity towards?

WORK

We've come a long way from that simple beginning, *'no murder'*! Are these people you are harbouring a grudge against? Are you willing to do something about it – or are your grudges too precious to you? What can you do as a group to help one another deal with such attitudes?

6. A BIT OF WHAT YOU FANCY.

WELCOME

What is your favourite item of clothing? Why do you like it?

WORSHIP

1 Chronicles 29:10-13 is a great hymn of praise, acknowledging that everything (including everything that we think of as 'mine') actually comes from God and belongs to him.

Use these words together, and then praise God for the good things he has given you.

WORD

Last time we looked at the commandment which our society would probably give its most definite agreement to – (though once you start to dig below the surface, there might be less agreement) Now, we come to the next 2 – again they are commandments that affect relationships within society. And again, by and large, they involve things that most people would see as being wrong – adultery, and stealing. But even though most people would say they are wrong, a lot of people in our society are quite happy to indulge in both 'as long as no-one gets hurt.' But – is that a valid spin on these commandments?

Let's start with sex. Loud voices in our society tell us that we should be free to enjoy sex – in fact many would say that sexual self-fulfilment is a basic right.

So – when the Bible says *You shall not commit adultery*, it's worth asking, 'Why?' Why should this be one of God's 10 basic rules?

Today the term "adultery" is pretty specific. But the Bible give several relationships where sex **does not** belong.

Read 1 Corinthians 6:9-16

- What kind of activities does Paul see as a misuse of sex?

But Paul also saw sex, in its right setting, as a gift from God.

Read 1 Timothy 4:1-4

Again, Jesus took this commandment beyond the act into the realm of attitudes.

Look at Matthew 5:27-30

- But – why does it matter what goes on in our minds?

Job 31:1 says, *I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a girl.*

- Should this affect the sort of things we watch on television etc?

'The Bible's line on adultery is like society's approach to glue-sniffing. Glue is great, but only for sticking things together. Use it to give yourself an artificial 'high' and you are abusing it. Sex is meant for sticking people together in the tight bond of marriage. Applied that way, it is great. But using sex outside marriage is using a good thing in the wrong way.'

David Field in 'God's Good Life'

The Bible takes marriage very seriously, and that means that adultery is effectively stealing someone else's spouse. But, of course, that isn't the only thing which gets stolen in our society. The eighth commandment is another of those nice short ones –

You shall not steal (Exodus 20:15)

And, once again, it is one which we can easily persuade ourselves that we don't need to worry about – after all, presumably few of us are in the habit of robbing banks or picking pockets.

But as with the other commandments we've looked at, this simple instruction covers a lot. The Bible gives many examples of how we should treat our own and other people's possessions

Read Exodus 22:22-27

Romans 13:5-7

Leviticus 19:9-13

Malachi 3:6-10

- What do these verses tell you about what our attitude should be to other people's possessions?
- And to our own possessions?

When John the Baptist was preparing for the coming of Jesus he had some strong words:

Read Luke 3:7-14

- How did the instructions which John gave to the 3 groups involve the 8th Commandment?
v.10-11

v.12-13

v14

WORK

These 2 issues (sex and theft) actually go very deep. According to a survey on Yahoo! Last year, only 10% of women and 13% of men have only had one sexual partner – the norm seems to be around 5 or 6. 94% of men and 63% of women use pornography regularly. In fact it is reckoned that around 12% of the internet – nearly half a billion pages, are pornographic. Statistically it is probable that people in your group are affected by this.

And in terms of possessions, many Christians happily copy CD's or DVD's.

Where are you most aware of temptation in these 2 areas? How can you help one another to resist?

7. THE WAY OF TRUTH.

WELCOME

What is your favourite book? Or your favourite film? What makes you like it so much?

WORSHIP

Psalm 100 celebrates the fact that we are God's people, and also that God is faithful. That means we can always trust what God says in his word. Use the psalm together, then thank God for the great promises that he gives in his word, and that he is faithful.

WORD

The ninth commandment again looks at an aspect of our relationship with others:

You shall not give false witness against your neighbour.
(Exodus 20:16)

This commandment had its primary application in a court of law. Within the people of Israel, many crimes carried the death penalty, so to bear false witness could mean putting someone to death by your own lying.

Whilst it might not be quite that drastic for us today, it is still all too easy to 'bend the truth' to get ourselves out of trouble, even if it means getting someone else into trouble.

But this commandment stretches further than that. It points us to the vital importance of truth.

Read Isaiah 59:9-15

- How is 'truth' connected to all the other problems Isaiah writes about?

Read 1 John 1:5-10

- What does it mean to 'live by the truth'?
- How does this relate to honesty in other areas of our lives?

In John 8:42-47, Jesus says that the devil is 'the father of lies'

Read Genesis 2:15-17 & 3:1-5

- How does this show the danger of 'half truths'?

By extension, this commandment is also about the power of the tongue.

Read James 3:1-12

- What does James compare the tongue to?
- In what ways can the things we say have such serious results?
- And is this true only of the lies we tell?

This means that as well as the truth being important, the way we use it is also important. Look at Ephesians 4:15

- How might speaking the truth without love produce the opposite of what Paul looks for here?

8. I WANT IT ALL.

WORK

We need to be people of the truth. Most naturally this relates to our being truthful with one another, since lack of truth destroys our relationships with others, with God, and even with ourselves.

But we also need to be telling others the truth about God, about sin, about salvation. Take some time to pray for one another, that God will give opportunities to speak for him to your non-Christian contacts.

p.s. – how are the plans for your event going? (If you've forgotten, look again at week 3!)

WELCOME

If you had limitless money, what one thing would you like to buy?

WORSHIP

Psalm 42 is a lovely psalm of longing for God. You might like to use the song 'As the deer' as well as the words of this psalm, and then take time to turn the words of the psalm into your own prayers.

WORD

Tonight we come to the end of our look at the Ten Commandments. We've seen first of all some which refer to our relationship with God, and some which refer to our relationship with others. But the last one is a bit different.

Read Exodus 20:17

The other commandments are to do with actions. Given that coveting is something we do in the privacy of our own minds, why does it matter whether we keep this commandment?

Read Romans 7:7-9

- The 'law' told Paul what coveting really is. What do you think he meant by that?

- How does sin turn 'desire' into 'coveting'?
- So – is all desiring or ambition wrong?
If not – what is the difference between desiring and coveting?

Read James 4:1-3

- How can coveting lead to the other sins we've looked at in the Ten Commandments?
- In what ways can coveting affect:-
Our relationship with others?

Our prayers?

Our own happiness?

- Why can coveting never lead to satisfaction?

Read Philippians 4:10-13 & Hebrews 13:5

- What is the antidote to coveting?

*'I am to love God enough to be contented;
... I am to love men enough not to envy.'*

Francis Schaeffer

WORK

We have come to the end of the Ten Commandments. Take a moment to think back – is there anything special you have learnt?

Is there anything you have changed as a result of this series (or anything you think you should change, but haven't quite got round to it yet?)

It is easy at the end of this series to feel defeated – that you have been even worse at living the Christian life than you had previously realised!

But remember:-

God the Father has given us these commandments not to make life hard, but to make life good. He created us, he loves us, he wants the best for us.

Time and time again we will fail, but

God the Son has died so that we can be forgiven. And, however many times we fail, he is always ready to forgive.

But we don't have to go on failing hopelessly, because **God the Holy Spirit** lives in us, and he gives us the power to live God's Good Life.

