

MAKE IT **COUNT**

A 10-week study for leadership teams by *Influence* magazine

# The Ten Commandments and Leadership

By STEPHEN BLANDINO



**DISCUSSION GUIDE**

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A 10-Week Study  
For Leadership  
Teams

## What Is Make It Count?

**M**ake It Count is a leadership development resource for use individually or with staff, volunteers, or board members.

Each installment is also available online as a downloadable PDF, along with interactive pages for group member use. The underlined words and phrases in the following text correspond to fill-in-the-blank sections on team member pages. Access these free resources at [influencemagazine.com/Downloads](http://influencemagazine.com/Downloads).

These lessons are written by **STEPHEN BLANDINO**, lead pastor of 7 City Church in Fort Worth, Texas, and the author of several books.



**W**hen Moses received the Ten Commandments, it was a defining moment for the people of Israel. God had established the Law, making clear what He expected from His people.

But the Ten Commandments are much more than an ancient list of rules. They have application for every part of our lives, including our ministries. This edition of Make It Count takes a closer look at the Ten Commandments and considers principles for leadership. Lessons include the following:

1. *Receiving God's Goodness.* God gave the Ten Commandments to protect and provide for His people. When we understand God's nature, we discover a beautiful motivation for our leadership.
2. *Defeating Idols.* God commanded His people to have no other gods

# The Ten Commandments and Leadership

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and no form of idols before Him. For leaders, idols often take the shape of success, budgets, affirmation, and even personal ministry philosophies. We must instead give our full allegiance to God alone.

3. *Speaking Reverently.* Leaders must be careful about how they represent God. Putting words in God's mouth exposes irreverence, insecurities, and inabilities. Instead, we must revere the name of the Lord as we lead.
4. *Keeping a Sustainable Pace.* God made the Sabbath for our benefit. When we honor the

principle of sabbath rest, we're able to take a break from work, spend more time with God, and trust Him with the outcomes.

5. *Leading Respectfully.* Leaders must not only honor their parents, but they must also demonstrate honor through every facet of their leadership. This means learning to honor up, down, and across, exhibiting the deepest respect for others.
6. *Uprooting Anger.* The Law prohibited murder, but Jesus raised the bar during His Sermon on the Mount. Jesus taught us to exercise self-control by protecting our hearts, guarding our reactions, and owning our anger issues.
7. *Avoiding Impurity.* Sexual misconduct in the Church devastates lives and ministries. To guard against impurity, we must invest in the health of our hearts, set clear boundaries, and establish accountability.
8. *Stewarding With Integrity.* A number of personal and organizational applications arise from God's prohibition against stealing. Wise leaders are tithers — refusing to rob God — and good stewards. In addition, they establish the systems and accountability structures to sustain healthy ministry.
9. *Maintaining Honesty.* Lying in leadership may take the form of exaggerating metrics, portraying an inauthentic image, or misusing Scripture. God calls us to conduct ourselves with honesty.
10. *Overcoming Covetousness.* The Tenth Commandment tells us not to covet possessions or relationships — or anything else, for that matter. Ministry leaders must also be careful not to covet resources, success, roles, and recognition. Instead, we must learn to be content and celebrate others.

As you read and discuss each lesson, embrace the Ten Commandments to help you lead with a greater commitment to what is good, right, and pleasing to the Lord.

# 1 | THE TEN COMMANDMENTS AND LEADERSHIP

## Receiving God's Goodness

### Assess

How do the Ten Commandments shape your view of leadership?

### Insights and Ideas

When we hear the word, “command,” we don’t always think of something good, positive, or supportive. Instead, we tend to think about words and actions that are harsh, domineering, or confining. When someone issues a command, we interpret it as controlling.

However, when giving Moses the Ten Commandments, God first described *who* He is and *what* He did: “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery” (Exodus 20:2).

God introduced the Ten Commandments with a reminder that He brought the Hebrews out of slavery. He initiated these commands out of His goodness and love.

This passage highlights three perspectives to keep in view:

1. **The perspective of a personal God.** Not only did God identify who He is (“I am the LORD”), but He also made himself personal (“your God”).

Church leaders should help the people they serve experience God through a personal relationship with Him. We’re not leading people to a religion or ritual, but to a God they can know intimately and personally.

2. **The perspective of *grace*.** Freeing the Israelites from Egyptian slavery was a divine act of grace. Throughout Scripture, God deals with humanity out of the abundance of His grace.

The posture from which we initiate ministry should likewise be one of grace. As Christ’s ambassadors, we must represent Jesus’ character as we deliver His message of salvation by grace.

3. **The perspective of *guidance*.** The Lord reminded the people of their freedom from slavery, but He also gave them the road map for *staying* free. God’s Word provides the guidance we need to experience His ongoing protection and provision.

As leaders, we should minister with the intent of guiding people into lives of freedom and flourishing in Christ. Instead of one-time wins to boost our metrics, we must seek lifelong transformation that produces ongoing spiritual fruit in the lives of people.

### Reflect and Discuss

1. How does God’s introduction to the Ten Commandments affect the way you view His commands?
2. Which of the three perspectives above challenges your leadership? Why?
3. How should the spirit of Exodus 20:2 influence the spirit in which we lead?

### Apply

As we prepare to study the Ten Commandments and their application to leadership, take time to read Exodus 20:1–17. Reflect on the significance of the Ten Commandments and how you could apply them to the way you lead.

# 1 | THE TEN COMMANDMENTS AND LEADERSHIP

## Receiving God's Goodness

When we hear the word, “command,” we don’t always think of something good, positive, or supportive. Instead, we tend to think about words and actions that are harsh, domineering, or confining. When someone issues a command, we interpret it as controlling.

“I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery” (Exodus 20:2).

Three perspectives on the introduction to the Ten Commandments:

1. *The perspective of a personal* \_\_\_\_\_.

Not only did God identify who He is (“I am the LORD”), but He also made himself personal (“your God”).

2. *The perspective of* \_\_\_\_\_.

Freeing the Israelites from Egyptian slavery was a divine act of grace. Throughout Scripture, God deals with humanity out of the abundance of His grace.

3. *The perspective of* \_\_\_\_\_.

The Lord reminded the people of their freedom from slavery, but He also gave them the road map for *staying* free. God’s Word provides the guidance we need to experience His ongoing protection and provision.

### Apply

As we prepare to study the Ten Commandments and their application to leadership, take time to read Exodus 20:1–17. Reflect on the significance of the Ten Commandments and how you could apply them to the way you lead.



## 2 THE TEN COMMANDMENTS AND LEADERSHIP

# Defeating Idols

### Team Review

What insights for leadership did you glean from your reading of the Ten Commandments?

### Assess

How might leaders make idols out of ministry?

### Insights and Ideas

It's easy for Christian leaders to slip into an unhealthy attitude that assumes they've mastered the Ten Commandments. After all, we've surely conquered the basics, right?

But the Ten Commandments have profound applications for ministry, beginning with the first two commands. God said, "You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an image 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 parents 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" (Exodus 20:3–6).

At first glance, we may give ourselves an A+ on keeping these commands. But a closer look could reveal a different reality. How might ministers break the first two commandments? The following idols are particularly common in ministry:

1. **The idols of *growth* and *success*.** While growth and success are nice, they can quickly become idols we worship. In fact, if the growth rate slows or the success is eclipsed by someone else, we may find ourselves chasing strategies to revive these idols and make them even bigger.
2. **The idols of *buildings* and *budgets*.** Buildings provide environments for ministry and budgets provide resources for ministry, but neither is the purpose of ministry. If we're not careful, we can turn the beauty of our buildings and the bigness of our budgets into idols that capture the affections of our hearts.
3. **The idols of *affirmation* and *applause*.** No matter the size of your church or ministry, the desire for affirmation and applause can become problematic. If we don't receive praise after we preach, we may subtly start fishing for compliments. Week after week, the idol grows larger.
4. **The idol of *ministry philosophy*.** Some leaders make idols out of their approach to ministry. In their minds, they've discovered the *right* way or *only* way to do ministry. It doesn't take long for the superiority of their philosophies to turn into idolatry.

These aren't the only idols in leadership, but they are some of the most common. Each one is dangerous and destructive.

### Reflect and Discuss

1. Which of the idols above most tempts you?
2. What other idols do you find among ministers?
3. How can we protect our hearts from such idols?

### Apply

Invite the Holy Spirit to examine your heart. Have you erected any idols in your life and leadership? If so, confess and repent, seeking the Lord's grace and mercy.

## 2

## THE TEN COMMANDMENTS AND LEADERSHIP

## Defeating Idols

“You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an image 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 parents 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” (EXODUS 20:3–6).

Common idols in ministry leadership:

1. *The idols of* \_\_\_\_\_ *and* \_\_\_\_\_.

If the growth rate slows or the success is eclipsed by someone else, we may find ourselves chasing strategies to revive these idols and make them even bigger.

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If we’re not careful, we can turn the beauty of our buildings and the bigness of our budgets into idols that capture the affections of our hearts.

3. *The idols of* \_\_\_\_\_ *and* \_\_\_\_\_.

No matter the size of your church or ministry, the desire for affirmation and applause can become problematic.

4. *The idol of ministry* \_\_\_\_\_.

Some leaders make idols out of their approach to ministry.

**Apply**

Invite the Holy Spirit to examine your heart. Have you erected any idols in your life and leadership? If so, confess and repent, seeking the Lord’s grace and mercy.

## 3 | THE TEN COMMANDMENTS AND LEADERSHIP

# Speaking Reverently

### Team Review

As you've reflected on the idols of ministry, what has God revealed in your own heart?

### Assess

How have you seen leaders misuse the name of the Lord?

### Insights and Ideas

Leaders stand in a position of authority, and with that authority comes a measure of influence and power. But what happens when a leader doesn't get his or her way? What happens when a minister's ideas or decisions meet resistance from church members?

Unfortunately, in these critical moments, some leaders leverage their authority for personal gain, essentially telling others, "Thus saith the Lord." In other words, they misuse the name of God by putting words in God's mouth. In doing this, they conveniently ignore the Third Commandment: "You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name" (Exodus 20:7).

Power can be addictive, and if leaders don't guard their hearts, they risk using the Lord's name to advance personal agendas. When a minister uses the Lord's name for personal gain, it's a sign of three problems in the leader's life:

1. **Irreverence.** Misusing the Lord's name is an act of irreverence that shows disrespect and disregard for God. We must never leverage a holy God for unholy ambitions. Putting words in the mouth of the Lord is the equivalent of elevating ourselves to the position of God or reducing God to the position of a human. Both are expressions of pride and contempt.
2. **Insecurity.** Insecure leaders rarely listen to feedback without getting defensive. In those testing moments, they may invoke God's name to silence opposition. This puts followers in the awkward position of feeling like any resistance to the leader is resistance to God. However, as author Steve Moore observes, "Insecurity in the life of a leader undermines loyalty in the life of a follower."
3. **Inability.** When leaders put words in God's mouth, it reveals an inability to build influence and create buy-in. Because they don't have the ability to lead effectively, they manipulate the voice of God to give authority to their own voice.

These are dangerous signs in the life of a leader. Remember this: "The LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name." You may win in the short-term with these tactics, but you can be sure it comes with a cost.

### Reflect and Discuss

1. When have you been tempted to use the name of the Lord for your own benefit?
2. Can you think of a time when your insecurities got the best of you?
3. What does it look like to use the name of the Lord in a way that is good and honorable?

### Apply

Put together a plan to address the area in which you are most vulnerable to misusing the Lord's name: irreverence, insecurity, or inability. Then, create three questions a friend could ask once a month to hold you accountable for guarding your heart in this area.



## 3

## THE TEN COMMANDMENTS AND LEADERSHIP

## Speaking Reverently

Leaders stand in a position of authority, and with that authority comes a measure of influence and power. But what happens when a leader doesn't get his or her way? What happens when a minister's ideas or decisions meet resistance from church members?

Some leaders leverage their authority for personal gain, essentially telling others, "Thus saith the Lord." In other words, they misuse the name of God by putting words in God's mouth.

"You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name" (Exodus 20:7).

Misusing God's name indicates three problems:

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Putting words in the mouth of the Lord is the equivalent of elevating ourselves to the position of God or reducing God to the position of a human. Both are expressions of pride and contempt.

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**Apply**

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## 4 | THE TEN COMMANDMENTS AND LEADERSHIP

# Keeping a Sustainable Pace

### Team Review

What are some of the questions you created to protect your heart from misusing God's name?

### Assess

How would you define the Sabbath?

### Insights and Ideas

For ministry leaders, Sunday is typically a day of work. As a result, many of us never take any kind of sabbath. And yet, the Fourth Commandment says, "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor 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 male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns. 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" (Exodus 20:8–11).

Jesus said, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27). Commenting on this Gospel text, author Gene Edward Veith Jr. observed, "The Sabbath is God's gift to busy, distracted, weary human beings. He gives us a break, time to recharge our lives by spending time with Him, our families, and ourselves."

Taking a sabbath helps us lead with a sustainable pace and from a place of rest. A sabbath provides an opportunity to do three important things:

1. **Take a *break from work*.** To take a sabbath is to cease work for 24 hours. It's an intentional decision to rest our bodies, rejuvenate our souls, and rekindle our relationships. In fact, a break from work actually makes the week of work ahead more productive.
2. **Spend *time with God*.** Author Lance Witt said, "The first thing the Bible ever declared holy was not an object or a place, but a 'time,' a twenty-four-hour period called Sabbath." By embracing a sabbath, we make space to savor God's presence, Word, and goodness.
3. **Demonstrate *trust in God*.** Making space for a sabbath isn't a *time* issue as much as it's a *trust* issue. We are trusting God that everything will be OK without our involvement or labor. We are trusting that the world won't cease when we cease work. I can certainly relate to this tension.

Author Robert Morris said, "The Sabbath is a gift and our observance of it is a bold declaration of our trust in God's goodness and ability to provide what we need — heart, mind, and body." When we don't take a sabbath, we demonstrate a reliance on ourselves rather than on God.

### Reflect and Discuss

1. How well do you keep a regular sabbath?
2. How have you seen sabbath rest enable others to lead with a sustainable pace and from a place of rest?
3. Which of the three practices of sabbath keeping most challenges you? Why?

### Apply

What would it look like for you to embrace the Fourth Commandment more intentionally so you can cultivate a sustainable pace of leadership?

## 4 | THE TEN COMMANDMENTS AND LEADERSHIP

### Keeping a Sustainable Pace

“Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor 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 male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns. 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” (EXODUS 20:8–11).

Taking a sabbath helps us lead with a sustainable \_\_\_\_\_  
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Three sabbath practices:

1. *Take a \_\_\_\_\_ from work.*

To take a sabbath is to cease work for 24 hours. It’s an intentional decision to rest our bodies, rejuvenate our souls, and rekindle our relationships.

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“The first thing the Bible ever declared holy was not an object or a place, but a ‘time,’ a twenty-four-hour period called Sabbath.” — Lance Witt

3. *Demonstrate \_\_\_\_\_ in God.*

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#### Apply

What would it look like for you to embrace the Fourth Commandment more intentionally so you can cultivate a sustainable pace of leadership?

## 5 THE TEN COMMANDMENTS AND LEADERSHIP

# Leading Respectfully

### Team Review

What reflections have you gleaned about applying the sabbath to your life?

### Assess

What does it look like to be an honoring leader?

### Insights and Ideas

The Fifth Commandment is clear and to the point: “Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you” (Exodus 20:12).

Healthy honor isn’t about controlling other people. Instead, true honor is the deliberate choice to use our words and behavior to show respect, esteem, and regard for others without feeling threatened by their success.

Author Bill Johnson observed, “Every person deserves honor for at least two reasons: they are made in the image of God, and God gave them gifts and abilities.”

One of the best ways for leaders to apply the Fifth Command is by expressing 360-degree honor — up, down, and across.

1. **Honor up.** Hebrews 13:17 says, “Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit to you.”

Honoring “up” is all about showing respect for the people above you — regardless of whether you report to them. An honoring leader acknowledges the sacrifices and faithfulness of those who have traveled before them.

2. **Honor down.** This does not suggest you are better than anyone else. It is just a reminder you should honor those you oversee and those who report to you.

When the apostle Paul sent Epaphroditus to the Philippians, he said, “So then, welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honor people like him, because he almost died for the work of Christ. He risked his life to make up for the help you yourselves could not give me” (Philippians 2:29–30).

Paul obviously had the authority to send Epaphroditus to the Philippians, but he did so in a spirit of honor, instructing the believers to show honor to him.

3. **Honor across.** Paul said, “Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves” (Romans 12:10). When we lead from a posture of honor, we don’t view our co-laborers as competition. We see them as friends and partners in a mission bigger than ourselves.

Healthy honor is a two-way street. It travels up and down, and side to side, as we honor one another through our attitudes and actions.

### Reflect and Discuss

1. Can you share a time when it was hard for you to show honor?
2. What character traits can we develop that would make it easier for others to honor us?
3. What are some practical ways to show honor to those above you, below you, and beside you?

### Apply

Take some time to check your heart’s posture toward the issue of honor. Do you demand honor? Do you struggle to honor others? What changes do you need to make to become a leader worth honoring and a leader who actively honors others?

## 5

## THE TEN COMMANDMENTS AND LEADERSHIP

## Leading Respectfully

“Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you” (Exodus 20:12).

Healthy honor isn’t about controlling other people. Instead, true honor is the deliberate choice to use our words and behavior to show respect, esteem, and regard for others without feeling threatened by their success.

“Every person deserves honor for at least two reasons: they are made in the image of God, and God gave them gifts and abilities.” — Bill Johnson

360-degree honor:

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“Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit to you” (Hebrews 13:17).

2. *Honor* \_\_\_\_\_.

“So then, welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honor people like him, because he almost died for the work of Christ. He risked his life to make up for the help you yourselves could not give me” (Philippians 2:29–30).

3. *Honor* \_\_\_\_\_.

“Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves” (Romans 12:10).

**Apply**

Take some time to check your heart’s posture toward the issue of honor. Do you demand honor? Do you struggle to honor others? What changes do you need to make to become a leader worth honoring and a leader who actively honors others?

## 6 THE TEN COMMANDMENTS AND LEADERSHIP

# Uprooting Anger

### Team Review

What steps are you taking to become more honoring of others?

### Assess

How does anger show up most often in the world of leadership?

### Insights and Ideas

**T**he Sixth Commandment contains only four words: “You shall not murder” (Exodus 20:13). That’s straight to the point, and it doesn’t require much interpretation.

You may think this commandment has little relevance for your leadership. But let’s look at it through the lens of Jesus’ teaching.

Jesus said, “You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, ‘Raca,’ is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell” (Matthew 5:21–22).

Those words make the Sixth Commandment very applicable to leaders. So, how do we cultivate self-control and keep anger from getting the best of us? Begin with three actions:

1. **Protect your *heart*.** Murder starts in the heart, not in the hand. First John 3:15 says, “Anyone who hates another brother or sister is really a murderer at heart. And you know that murderers don’t have eternal life within them” (NLT). Be vigilant to protect your heart from the danger of anger.
2. **Guard your *reactions*.** When anger boils within us, it can easily spew onto those around us. This usually happens through overreactions. Like the striking of a match, this kind of anger quickly flares up and just as quickly dissipates.  
The problem with overreactions is they make us unpredictable as leaders. People will have a hard time trusting us if they are unsure how we will respond in certain situations. If we’re not careful, this kind of behavior can produce a culture of fear.
3. **Own your *issues*.** The anger Jesus is referring to in Matthew is a deep, selfish, grudge-filled, simmering bitterness. If you struggle with this kind of anger, it’s your responsibility to own it. Bring it before the Lord and repent of your attitudes and actions. If necessary, seek counseling to address the root cause of your anger and find the healing to move forward.

When you find yourself getting angry at a leadership situation, team member, or someone in your congregation, choose self-control. Be careful to protect your heart, guard your reactions, and own your issues.

### Reflect and Discuss

1. What tends to make you most angry in ministry and leadership?
2. How have overreactions gotten you in trouble in the past?
3. What steps can we take to protect our hearts, guard our reactions, and own our anger issues?

### Apply

Ask yourself two questions: *Is there someone to whom I need to apologize for an overreaction or outburst of anger? Is there an anger issue I need to own?* In either situation, make things right with others and seek healing in your life.



## 6

## THE TEN COMMANDMENTS AND LEADERSHIP

## Uprooting Anger

“You shall not murder” (Exodus 20:13).

“You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, ‘Raca,’ is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell” (Matthew 5:21–22).

Cultivating self-control and uprooting anger:

1. *Protect your* \_\_\_\_\_.

“Anyone who hates another brother or sister is really a murderer at heart. And you know that murderers don’t have eternal life within them” (1 John 3:15, NLT).

2. *Guard your* \_\_\_\_\_.

When anger boils within us, it can easily spew onto those around us. This usually happens through overreactions.

3. *Own your* \_\_\_\_\_.

The anger Jesus is referring to in Matthew is a deep, selfish, grudge-filled, simmering bitterness. If you struggle with this kind of anger, it’s your responsibility to own it.

**Apply**

Ask yourself two questions: *Is there someone to whom I need to apologize for an over-reaction or outburst of anger? Is there an anger issue I need to own?* In either situation, make things right with others and seek healing in your life.

## 7 THE TEN COMMANDMENTS AND LEADERSHIP

# Avoiding Impurity

### Team Review

What steps are you taking to control your anger?

### Assess

What do you think are the most common reasons leaders fall into sexual sin?

### Insights and Ideas

Of all the things that can disqualify a minister from leadership, one of the most damaging is sexual misconduct. The Seventh Commandment deals directly with sexual sin: “You shall not commit adultery” (Exodus 20:14).

Sexual sin is rampant in today’s world, but God calls us to remain faithful and live in a way that is above reproach (1 Timothy 3:2). To protect yourself, your family, and the ministries you lead, you need to do three things:

1. **Invest in your heart.** We know we should pray, engage in Scripture, and spend time with God. However, most people who experience moral failures have allowed lapses in these important disciplines. Investing in habits that keep you in step with the Spirit should be your highest priority.
2. **Set boundaries.** Author Andy Stanley said, “I’ve concluded that while nobody plans to mess up their life, the problem is that few of us plan not to. That is, we don’t put the necessary safeguards in place to ensure a happy ending.”

Leaders need to establish clear boundaries for what they will and won’t do. Think about boundaries in five categories: people (With whom will I be?); places (Where will I go?); technology (What will I view?); time (What kind of schedule will I keep?); and finances (How will I spend money?). Answer the positive and negative of each question: “I will” and “I will not.”

3. **Establish accountability.** Most people don’t naturally crave accountability. “Accountability, however, does not bring pain,” Steve Moore notes. Instead, “the pain comes from the underlying problem; accountability merely exposes it.”

You need accountability personally and organizationally. Personal accountability involves submitting to another person who has permission to ask tough questions. Organizational accountability involves establishing a structure in which you are accountable to a leader, board, or group of overseers. Both are necessary to keep you accountable.

Sexually immoral behavior wrecks lives and ministries. Taking the steps above will help you avoid such transgressions.

### Reflect and Discuss

1. Which of the three steps do you see leaders violate most often?
2. Which of the three most speaks to you?
3. What kind of boundaries would be healthy for us as a team to ensure we maintain healthy habits and relationships?

### Apply

Do an audit of your heart. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal any area of your life that is at risk of moral compromise. Then walk through the three steps above, making the necessary changes to safeguard your life and leadership.

## 7

## THE TEN COMMANDMENTS AND LEADERSHIP

## Avoiding Impurity

“You shall not commit adultery” (Exodus 20:14).

Steps to protect ourselves from sexual sin:

1. *Invest in your* \_\_\_\_\_.

We know we should pray, engage in Scripture, and spend time with God. However, most people who experience moral failures have allowed lapses in these important disciplines.

2. *Set* \_\_\_\_\_.

“I’ve concluded that while nobody plans to mess up their life, the problem is that few of us plan not to. That is, we don’t put the necessary safeguards in place to ensure a happy ending.” — Andy Stanley

- People (With whom will I be?)
- Places (Where will I go?)
- Technology (What will I view?)
- Time (What kind of schedule will I keep?)
- Finances (How will I spend money?)

3. *Establish* \_\_\_\_\_.

You need accountability personally and organizationally. Personal accountability involves submitting to another person who has permission to ask tough questions. Organizational accountability involves establishing a structure in which you are accountable to a leader, board, or group of overseers. Both are necessary to keep you accountable.

**Apply**

Do an audit of your heart. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal any area of your life that is at risk of moral compromise. Then walk through the three steps above, making the necessary changes to safeguard your life and leadership.

## 8

## THE TEN COMMANDMENTS AND LEADERSHIP

## Stewarding With Integrity

## Team Review

What observations have you made about setting boundaries to avoid impurity?

## Assess

What are the most common challenges you've seen when it comes to leaders, churches, and money?

## Insights and Ideas

The Eighth Commandment is straightforward: "You shall not steal" (Exodus 20:15). Rather than taking someone else's belongings, each person was to make an honest living and engage in good stewardship of what God had provided.

We too need to steward resources with integrity. To evaluate your stewardship, consider three *personal* and three *organizational* questions.

First the personal questions:

1. **Are you robbing God?** Malachi records the sobering words of the Lord: "Return to me, and I will return to you," says the LORD Almighty. 'But you ask, "How are we to return?" Will a mere mortal rob God? Yet you rob me. But you ask, "How are we robbing you?" In tithes and offerings. You are under a curse — your whole nation — because you are robbing me'" (Malachi 3:7–9). As ministers, we must lead the way in generosity.
2. **Do you steward the other 90% wisely?** You can tithe but still poorly manage the other 90% of your income. How are you stewarding resources to meet your needs while avoiding unnecessary financial stress and chaos?
3. **Are you investing in your future?** If we give little thought to retirement, we'll be unprepared when that day finally comes. Invest now to ensure you can take care of your family's needs in coming years.

That brings us to the organizational questions:

1. **Are there safeguards in place to protect the church's resources?** Safeguards can include a variety of measures, such as having an offering counting team (rather than one individual), accounting procedures that ensure the same person isn't writing and signing checks, a compensation committee to help set healthy salaries, and banking tools to ensure the highest level of security.
2. **Have you established a budget and reporting process?** You need a good system for setting, approving, and monitoring budgets. This should involve the lead pastor, staff pastors, and a governing board. The board should approve the budget and receive monthly financial reports.
3. **Does the church's financial system balance accountability with healthy ministry?** Churches often swing to extremes with finances. Some churches have no accountability, which can lead to financial abuses. Other churches have so many restrictions they function more like banks than ministries. The goal should be generously funding ministry while maintaining healthy systems, boundaries, and accountability.

Financial structures should protect pastors, leaders, and the church without creating bureaucratic systems that are so complicated and cumbersome they prevent healthy ministry from taking place.

## Reflect and Discuss

1. How have you seen money become a major issue for leaders?
2. Which of the personal questions most challenges you? Why?
3. To which of the organizational questions does our church need to give more attention?

## Apply

Do an assessment of how you handle money personally and organizationally. Then implement systems to improve management, accountability, and the funding of ministry.

## 8

## THE TEN COMMANDMENTS AND LEADERSHIP

## Stewarding With Integrity

“You shall not steal” (Exodus 20:15).

Three personal questions:

1. *Are you \_\_\_\_\_ God?*

“Return to me, and I will return to you,” says the LORD Almighty. ‘But you ask, “How are we to return?” Will a mere mortal rob God? Yet you rob me. But you ask, “How are we robbing you?” In tithes and offerings. You are under a curse — your whole nation — because you are robbing me” (Malachi 3:7–9).

2. *Do you \_\_\_\_\_ the other 90% wisely?*

You can tithe but still poorly manage the other 90% of your income.

3. *Are you investing in your \_\_\_\_\_?*

Three organizational questions:

1. *Are there safeguards in place to \_\_\_\_\_ the church’s resources?*

2. *Have you established a \_\_\_\_\_ and reporting process?*

You need a good system for setting, approving, and monitoring budgets. This should involve the lead pastor, staff pastors, and a governing board. The board should approve the budget and receive monthly financial reports.

3. *Does the church’s financial system \_\_\_\_\_ accountability with healthy ministry?*

Churches often swing to extremes with finances. Some churches have no accountability, which can lead to financial abuses. Other churches have so many restrictions they function more like banks than ministries. The goal should be generously funding ministry while maintaining healthy systems, boundaries, and accountability.

### Apply

Do an assessment of how you handle money personally and organizationally. Then implement systems to improve management, accountability, and the funding of ministry.

## 9

## THE TEN COMMANDMENTS AND LEADERSHIP

## Maintaining Honesty

**Team Review**

What systems have you established personally and organizationally to manage money wisely?

**Assess**

What are the most common ways ministry leaders are tempted to lie?

**Insights and Ideas**

The Ninth Commandment says, “You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor” (Exodus 20:16). Giving “false testimony” means speaking or testifying with a lie or deception. And the command warns us not to do this against our neighbor. Simply put, don’t lie to anyone or *about* anyone.

Truthfulness in leadership creates trustworthiness, which in turn gives people the confidence to follow you. Unfortunately, some leaders find ways to bend the truth for their own gain or to advance their own agendas. In ministry circles, lying often shows up in three ways:

1. **Exaggerating *metrics*.** For some reason, many pastors feel a need to make their churches look bigger than they are. As a result, they may exaggerate the numbers, whether attendance, giving, baptisms, or some other metric they feel demonstrates success.

This happened during COVID when some ministers boasted of the thousands who were viewing their services online — even though many of those views lasted only three seconds. Author and pastor Gerald Brooks offered an interesting perspective on counting online views: “Don’t count it unless you’re willing to pastor it.”

2. **Portraying a false *image*.** Some leaders feel a need to portray a certain image of themselves. Therefore, they talk, dress, and act in ways that support the image they’re trying to communicate. The most effective leaders, however, are those who are authentic and genuine.

Rather than trying to be somebody else, become comfortable in your own skin. God is not interested in blessing a facade. Give Him — and others — your authentic self.

3. **Manipulating *Scripture*.** When we preach, we have a responsibility to hold Scripture in the highest view and with the deepest reverence. After all, James said, “We who teach will be judged more strictly” (James 3:1).

Unfortunately, some pastors and teachers have chosen to manipulate Scripture — often in subtle ways — for their own gain. This is common within prosperity gospel circles. Truths about giving, generosity, and blessing often become twisted into name-it-and-claim-it messages that pad the pockets of leaders.

Lying is sin. There’s no need to lie about the numbers, who you are, or the precious truths of Scripture. Instead, be honest, authentic, and full of integrity.

**Reflect and Discuss**

1. Why do you think the three issues above are challenging for many ministry leaders?
2. Which of the three most concerns you?
3. How can leaders better cultivate truthfulness, authenticity, and integrity?

**Apply**

Lies often emerge from insecurities and selfish desires. Regardless of the source, lying dishonors the Lord. Ask your team to hold you accountable when they see you exaggerate the numbers, portray an inauthentic image of yourself, or communicate Scripture in a way that’s not true to the text.



## Maintaining Honesty

“You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor” (Exodus 20:16).

Giving “false testimony” means speaking or testifying with a lie or deception. And the command warns us not to do this against our neighbor. Simply put, don’t lie *to* anyone or *about* anyone.

Lying may show up in three ways:

1. *Exaggerating* \_\_\_\_\_.

For some reason, many pastors feel a need to make their churches look bigger than they are. As a result, they may exaggerate the numbers, whether attendance, giving, baptisms, or some other metric they feel demonstrates success.

2. *Portraying a false* \_\_\_\_\_.

Rather than trying to be somebody else, become comfortable in your own skin. God is not interested in blessing a facade.

3. *Manipulating* \_\_\_\_\_.

“We who teach will be judged more strictly” (James 3:1).

### Apply

Lies often emerge from insecurities and selfish desires. Regardless of the source, lying dishonors the Lord. Ask your team to hold you accountable when they see you exaggerate the numbers, portray an inauthentic image of yourself, or communicate Scripture in a way that’s not true to the text.

## Overcoming Covetousness

## Team Review

How are you doing at being truthful with metrics, your image, and the teaching of Scripture?

## Assess

What are leaders most tempted to covet in others?

## Insights and Ideas

The last of the Ten Commandments deals with coveting: “You shall not covet your neighbor’s house. You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor” (Exodus 20:17).

Jesus also warned about coveting when He said, “Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions” (Luke 12:15, ESV).

When we covet, our sinful appetites get the best of us. For ministry leaders, coveting often shows up in four ways:

1. ***We covet resources.*** How often do we look at the resources of another church and think, *I wish I had that? That* could be anything — a building, a budget, a staff member, a volunteer base, the latest technology, or dozens of other resources.

If you are coveting resources, begin thanking God for all He has already entrusted to you. God will trust grateful leaders with more than He will covetous leaders.

2. ***We covet success.*** It’s easy to look at the fastest growing church and ask, “Why can’t we be like that?” We secretly covet success, often defining it as explosive growth and public acclaim. When we focus on what God is doing in others, it usually leads to jealousy or pride.

If this is a struggle for you, ask God to help you rethink your definition of success. Then trust Him to work in your life and ministry according to His plan.

3. ***We covet roles.*** Some leaders slip into covetous behavior when somebody they know gets the promotion they secretly wanted. Sometimes our coveting for roles is really a mask for coveting more power.

Rather than criticizing or coveting, learn to celebrate what God has given others.

4. ***We covet recognition.*** When leaders covet recognition, they become trapped in a cycle of performance for the sake of praise. They secretly try to outdo other leaders so they can be seen, heard, and celebrated. We may need to remind ourselves, “He must become greater; I must become less” (John 3:30).

Pastor Mark Batterson said, “We count our *neighbors’* blessings rather than our own, and we wonder why we can’t get no satisfaction!” If we want to defeat coveting in our lives and leadership, we must be content and learn to cheer on others.

## Reflect and Discuss

1. Why is coveting such a big issue among leaders today?
2. With which of the four coveting behaviors do you most struggle?
3. What other strategies can leaders employ to defeat coveting?

## Apply

What are you coveting right now? Take some time to repent and ask the Lord to help you grow in contentment. Then write a note to the leader you’re most jealous of, telling that person how proud you are of his or her success. Commit to pray for and cheer on this leader.

# 10 | THE TEN COMMANDMENTS AND LEADERSHIP

## Overcoming Covetousness

“You shall not covet your neighbor’s house. You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor” (Exodus 20:17).

“Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions” (Luke 12:15, ESV).

Four common ways ministry leaders covet:

1. *We covet* \_\_\_\_\_.

If you are coveting resources, begin thanking God for all He has already entrusted to you. God will trust grateful leaders with more than He will covetous leaders.

2. *We covet* \_\_\_\_\_.

Ask God to help you rethink your definition of success. Then trust Him to work in your life and ministry according to His plan.

3. *We covet* \_\_\_\_\_.

Rather than criticizing or coveting, learn to celebrate what God has given others.

4. *We covet* \_\_\_\_\_.

“We count our *neighbors’* blessings rather than our own, and we wonder why we can’t get no satisfaction!” — Mark Batterson

### Apply

What are you coveting right now? Take some time to repent and ask the Lord to help you grow in contentment. Then write a note to the leader you’re most jealous of, telling that person how proud you are of his or her success. Commit to pray for and cheer on this leader.