

When Your First Impression is Wrong
The Big Story
Exodus 20-34
Small Group Guide

Opening Icebreaker Question:

- Have you ever had a wrong first impression or been the recipient of a wrong first impression? What was that like?

OPTIONAL SERIES RE-CAP: In case you've been away, we're walking through the Bible in an extended sermon series called, "The Big Story," to see how all the stories in the Bible make more sense as part of one big story, and how that makes more sense of our story too. We've seen how God created the world as our perfect home, and human beings as his prized creation, and how the first human beings made a mess of life and the world, which we've inherited. We've seen God's promises reiterated many times, to restore the world and to rescue humanity from the mess we've made. God promised to execute this rescue plan through Abraham's family, and eventually, through one specific descendant of Abraham.

We saw how Abraham's great-grandchildren came to Egypt to escape a famine, and eventually became enslaved there for 400+ years. Two weeks ago, before we broke for Missions Weekend, Andy took us through the Passover event, and how God used that event to rescue his people from slavery. Where we drop into the story today, it's been about two months since the people left Egypt, and they're wandering in a desert, waiting for God's to lead them into the Promised Land of Canaan.

TAKE TURNS READING Exodus 20:1-21 that contains the 10 Commandments

1. As you listen, try to outline this passage.¹
2. God has just set free a people who have only known slavery their whole lives. What problems might this cause?² How might the 10 Commandments be a solution to these problems?
3. What is the significance of v2 and v18-21 to the 10 Commandments?
4. The first command is "You shall have no other gods before me." Why do you think God put this first? Does it affect our ability to obey the other commandments? Explain.
5. In the NT passages below, we see two roles of the law. What light does this shed on the purpose of the 10 commandments and God's other laws?

Gal. 3:23-24.

23 Before the coming of this faith, we were held in custody under the law, locked up until the faith that was to come would be revealed. **24** So the law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith.

Romans 5:20-21.

²⁰ The law was brought in so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more, ²¹ so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

¹ For example, is there a prologue? An epilogue? Can the 10 commandments be split into separate groupings?

² One way to relate is to think about the first time you left home. Without your parents' discipline, did you have any trouble with self-disciplining your new found freedom?

6. Pastor Josh says that “the heart of your problem is the problem of your heart.” What does this mean in light of these two passages? How was the law only a temporary, insufficient solution to this problem?
7. Moses goes back up the mountain. And it’s taking longer than the people expect, so in Ch. 32, this is what we read: “When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said, “Come, make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don’t know what has happened to him.” Aaron makes a golden calf, which the people worship.
 - a. Why is this action such an egregious sin?
 - b. **When you get impatient in waiting for God, what idols/things do you turn to in order to find identity or satisfaction or comfort or thrills?**
8. Moses intercedes for the people and this pleases God. Moses then asks to see God’s glory. Read what happens next, in Exodus 34:5-7.
 - a. **What do you learn about God from this passage? What is your emotional reaction to this?**
9. Josh pointed out from this passage that God is compassionate, gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in unfailing love (*hesed*)³. Discuss and define any or all of these. Why is it important that God is this way? Which of these characteristics touches you most deeply at present? Why?
10. What tension is created by the above description, and what God says in 34:7b about punishing the wicked?
 - a. We see that God is both just and loving. God’s standard is perfection and spiritual death results from sin, so how does God solve the problem of being both just and loving? Discuss. (Hint: How does this tension find resolution in Jesus?)
11. God punishes to the third or fourth generation, but rewards to the thousandth. How does it make you feel that God is biased towards mercy over judgment? (cf James 2:13)
12. Prayer: Among our usual prayer requests, let’s thank God specifically for being our God, solving our problem through Christ, and for being compassionate, gracious, slow to anger, and unfailingly loving (*hesed*).

³ *Hesed* is a rich concept beautifully portrayed in the OT book of Hosea. This is *hesed*: You love someone so much that you marry them, even though you know they have a tendency to be unfaithful. Sure enough they commit adultery and do so repeatedly. So, you decide to try a different type of marriage covenant. You divorce them to wake them up to their sin, then you remarry them. However, in the second marriage ceremony you say both sides of the vows because you know that your spouse is incapable of keeping his or her vows. This means that you agree to endure the consequences if your spouse breaks their vows. That’s love, that’s *hesed*.