

Series: God's Guide to Good Living
Ten Dance Steps to Love:
An Introduction to the Ten Commandments
By Tim Cosby

Main idea: The Ten Commandments are ten dance steps to love for worshippers of God.

Desired outcome: I want everyone to come away with a better view of the God who gave the Ten Commandments, and to view the Ten Commandments as friends, not enemies.

THE CONTEXT: We know the commands but not the context. The context is perhaps the most important thing to note as we try to get at the meaning and significance of the commands.

Ex 20:1 And God spoke all these words: "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

*** Celebration of praise and thanksgiving for God's faithful care** *18:9 Jethro was delighted to hear about all the good things the LORD had done for Israel in rescuing them from the hand of the Egyptians. 10 He said, "Praise be to the LORD, who rescued you from the hand of the Egyptians and of Pharaoh, and who rescued the people from the hand of the Egyptians. 11 Now I know that the LORD is greater than all other gods, for he did this to those who had treated Israel arrogantly." Ex. 19: 3-6 Then Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain and said, "This is what you are to say to the house of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel: 4 'You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself*

Illustration of being carried on eagles wings.

Deuteronomy 32:11 *"As an eagle stirreth up her nest -- so shall the Lord lead you"* When young eagles are old enough to fly, they do not realize they are capable of flight. In fact they are still terrified of falling out of the nest (their comfort zones). Mama eagle must physically push them out of the nest while Daddy eagle circles nearby waiting to catch them if they are so paralyzed by fear they forget to open their wings and start gliding. The good news is if they can't get the hang of gliding quickly, Daddy eagle will catch them before they hit the ground, and then take them high and drop them, etc. until they learn to catch the currents and glide. *19:4...how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself.*

The context is one of tender father not a tyrant. What does the context tell us about the giver of the c? *He is a God of compassion, power, tenderness, care, pursuit.* He is a personal God. A God of action. A God who has chosen a people to bless and rescue. A God who loves.

Ex. 1:7 The LORD said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. 8 So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey-...9 And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them. 10 So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt."

God is a kind and compassionate God who cares about suffering and injustice and oppression and tears of slavery. The kind of God who would redeem people out of their suffering and graciously bring them into a good land. Why? Because he loved them.

Why did God wait so long to give these commandments to Israel? Why not 400 years earlier after he appeared to Abraham?

The rabbis answered, "Suppose a man entered a city and said, 'I shall rule over you.' The inhabitants would say, 'Who are you and what have you done for us lately that we should live under your rule?' What did the man do? He built a city wall, aqueducts, led them in battles, healed them, showed them justice and mercy. Then he declared, 'My desire is to rule over you because I love you,' and the people gladly answered, 'Yes, come and rule over us.'" God established a relationship with Israel, delivered them from Egypt and provided for them before he ever asked them to enter into a covenant with him.

Observations

1. God gave the Ten Words **after** he had delivered Israel.
2. He gave them directly to Israel for a specific purpose
3. God proposed to Israel. What did he say to the people before he gave his words to them? He proposed to them. Ex. 19:5-7 *Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, 6 you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. 7 These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites.*"

Israel willingly chose to accept God's proposal.

So Moses went back and summoned the elders of the people and set before them all the words the LORD had commanded him to speak. 8 The people all responded together, "We will do everything the LORD has said." So Moses brought their answer back to the LORD.

Did they receive God's proposal? Yes. The 10 C. were God's personal love notes chiseled in stone. The people obeyed voluntarily because God had already established a relationship with them and had shown them his love and care. **God wants relationships with lovers, not robots.** The commandments were not foisted upon an unwilling party.

But the story shows that they are participants, not merely recipients. They were voluntarily received **and in doing so Israel participated in the dance. The scene is a marriage ceremony, not a courtroom.**

What difference would it make to your understanding of the Ten Commandments if you were to think of them in the context of wedding vows instead of courtroom pronouncements?

THE PURPOSE OF THE COMMANDMENTS

- **A guide for what it meant to be God's image bearers in the world.** To lay out the parameters of the relationship of God to his people and of their relationships to one another and to other nations. Who would trust a God who said, "I love you but I don't care at all what you do or who you become?"
- **A picture of what it meant to worship God.** They do not appear to be abstract ethical principles to be obeyed universally by those who do not worship God.
- **Proof that we've already been accepted.** Another misconception is that the people of Israel were One of the greatest misunderstandings about the 10 commandments is that they are viewed merely as an abstract set of moral laws to be obeyed as a way to gain God's acceptance through performance.

Why did God give the 10 words? As a way to gain God's acceptance or to demonstrate that we've already been accepted? Did he just want people to live by a set of abstract ethical rules? Remember, God wants lovers, not ethical robots.

We were made for a loving, reciprocal relationship with God. Human relationships, even the best of human relationships are characterized by spontaneity, passion, serendipitous moments, failures, repentance, forgiveness, making up, laughter, tears, sunshine and dark shadows. Our relationship with God is no different. God doesn't expect us to be perfect in our relationship with him. In fact, he knows we are not able. We couldn't keep the Ten Commandments perfectly, even for one day, much less a lifetime. **We don't obey the 10 commandments to get to God, we obey them out of gratitude because he got to us and set us free.**

God's logic

"I brought you out of Egypt (I triumphed over the world's most powerful gods)

I redeemed you from the house of slavery. (I freed you from those gods).

Therefore, I am your God (because I am the powerful loving ONE who brought you out and freed you.)

And now, you shall have no other gods before me (since this is why I freed you.) Dance with me. Learn my dance steps. Dance where I send you and invite others into the dance of the triune God. I loved you into existence and this is how your love for me will take shape in the real world."

He intends for his worshippers to glorify his name. How? Glorify means to put his love on display. When we put love on display, we replicate to the world the love of the triune God.

Love comes in surprising packages. Maybe you've never seen God's love in the Ten Commandments.

APPLICATIONS

Choose how you are going to live your life before God and the world.

There are two fundamental ways to respond to God's commands.

Way #1 - to live out of love which **produces** good results.

Way #2 - to live out of goodness as **an ethical goal** in and of itself.

Way #1 – as a gift to guide us **after** we have already received life.

Way #2 – as ethical principles to obey in order to **get** life

Way #1 – As **lovers** who relate to God

Way #2 – Ethical **robots** who relate to a set of laws.

God is wooing participants into a loving union with Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

God's first concern, and only concern, is to have a people who are united with him in love; to have a people who participate in the same love that the Trinity enjoys eternally. God wants a loving union, not just an ethical union. He wants us to participate in his love, not just receive his commands. *"Only love knows how to live in the actual world."* Bonhoeffer

We can't keep the Ten Commandments in a way that gains righteousness before God. We must receive the righteousness of Jesus Christ who fulfilled our righteous requirements and then gave us his righteousness. We need to repent of all the ways we try to gain God's acceptance by our performance. That means admitting that we cannot keep the Ten Commandments the way they were meant to be kept. We must let these dance steps lead us to Christ.

Gal. 3:10 *All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law." 11 Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because, "The righteous will live by faith."*

24 So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith.

Gal. 2:22 *"...we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified, "for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!"*

It's Paul who makes it clear that a person doesn't get to heaven by obeying the Ten Commandments, for that was never their purpose in the first place.

What is the function of these ten dance steps?

- To produce a people who are, in their daily lives, a sign, a signal, a pointer and a witness that God has not left the planet.
- When we join this dance we become the translators of God's heart to the world. We are to translate the covenant into caring for one another.
- To woo us into the dance of the Triune God. Join the dance if you haven't joined the dance yet. This is the real purpose of the Ten Commandments, to woo us into the dance.