

LET THERE BE LIFE
Ten Values That Build Strong Families - Part 6
Exodus 20:13
Rick Warren

We're in part 6 in the series I'm calling Ten Values That Build Strong Families, the Ten Commandments.

Exodus 20:13 is very simple, just four words: "You shall not murder."

I know some of you are saying, we can skip this one. Probably your urge to murder doesn't happen very often, except when you're on the freeway. My guess is within our church we don't have 15, 20 at the max, professional hit men. So not a whole lot of you need this message -- you think.

Clarence Darrow once said, "I haven't killed anybody, but I've read a whole lot of obituaries with glee." By the time the average American child has hit 6th grade they have already witnessed over 8,000 murders on television. They have watched over 100,000 acts of violence on television. We live in a violent society. Every 22 minutes in America somebody is stabbed, shot or beaten or strangled to death. That is the highest homicide rate in the world. More kids die from violence than they do from illness.

When you look at this verse, "Thou shalt not murder" that seems like a very straightforward command but actually it's often misunderstood, misapplied, misappropriated, misinterpreted and so we want to talk about what does this mean and what does it not mean.

I. WHAT DOES THIS COMMAND NOT MEAN?

1. It is not prohibiting killing animals.

The Bible is very clear about the difference between human life and animal life. In the Bible, many times, God commanded that animals be sacrificed. One of the things you need to know is that God never contradicts Himself. He wouldn't say one thing one place and something differently another place. You interpret an unclear passage with a clear one. Many places in Scripture, it's very clear, He says it's OK to kill animals.

Genesis 9:3 "Everything that lives and moves will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you

everything." You don't have to be a vegetarian unless you just want to be. It's not commanded in the Bible. It's OK to eat animals for meat.

2. It is not prohibiting capital punishment.

Many times in Scripture God commands capital punishment. For certain crimes He says this is worthy of the death penalty. Lev. 24 "Anyone who commits murder shall be put to death...the principle is a life for a life." That is very clear. God says, there are some things, like murder, that demand the death penalty.

To maintain order in our society, God has delegated His authority to the government. The Bible says that God has allowed human governments to be set up to maintain law and order and punish wrong doers, including capital punishment. "The government is there to serve God for you benefit ... they carry out God's revenge by punishing wrongdoers." God says, I've set these governments up, I allow them, there is no perfect government, no one that is right in everything they do, but they do keep law and order. The New International Version calls the government an agent of justice.

God wants justice in this world. But He demands swift justice which our system of appeals has made a mockery of. When President William McKinley was assassinated his assassin was caught, convicted, and executed 53 days later. Do you think that would happen today? Not a chance. When Theodore Bundy was finally executed a couple of years ago after killing all of those women, it was 11 years after the crime. Who paid for all those 11 years? You did, the taxpayers. That's not justice. Oliver Wendall Holmes said, "Justice postponed is justice denied."

Some will say "I don't think capital punishment really deters criminals." It does the one executed. He's not going to rape anybody anymore, or murder anybody anymore. By the way, the average life sentence is now eight years.

3. It's not prohibiting going to war.

Eccl. 3:8 "There is a time for war". God says there are some things that are worth fighting for. There are some things that are worth dying for. It's right to fight in order to preserve freedom. It's right to fight in order to defend innocent people. It's right to fight to stop the spread of evil. All that is

necessary for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing. So He's not talking about that.

So what is He talking about when He talks about "You shall not murder," and what does this have to do with my family? There's no murders taking place in my family. Probably not. But the very first murder happened in a family. Cain killed his brother.

In fact, today, most violent crimes and most murders occur between family members. Maybe you think murder is something that happens in Chicago or the inner city, but a couple days ago in the Orange County Register the headlines said, "Domestic Violence in Orange County surges, Nine people killed last month by ones they loved." Nine members here in Orange County were murdered by members of their own family.

II. HOW THIS COMMAND APPLIES TO THE FAMILY

So what is God saying? Why is this a value that relates to my family? Because Life is of value.

1. God says NO to suicide

God says Don't do it. Suicide is now the number two killer among college students. It is the number three killer among high school students. More kids are killed by suicide than by traffic. God says Don't do it.

People say, "It's my life and I have a right to live it and to take it." God says, "No, you don't. I gave you your life and only I have the right to take it away." You don't own your life and you don't own the right to take it.

"We are not our own bosses to live and die as we ourselves might choose." Scripture says, you're not your own, you're bought with a price. The Bible says, that even before you were born, God predetermined the exact number of days you were to live. Job 14:5 "The length of a man's life is decided beforehand -- the number of months he will live. You, God, have settled it." God says I've decided the number of days you're going to live and I don't want you short-circuiting it.

Most of us at different times have felt despair enough to think "Is life worth living?" If you have considered or are considering suicide, I say to you, There is hope. You matter to God. God made you for a purpose. He cares about you. He can help you out of your despair.

When you go down to Laguna Beach you can watch the tide go out. I've learned that when it goes out it always comes back. The tide may be out in your life right now. When the tide's out, if you've noticed the beach -- it's ugly. There's driftwood and junk all over the place and it doesn't look too good. But hang on because the tide always come back. If you've been thinking "My life is not worth living" know that you matter to God and there are people at this church who care about you and are willing to help you and talk with you if you will just let us know and help you through that time of trouble, help you through the darkness so the sun can shine again in your life. God says NO to suicide.

2. God says NO to mercy killing

The technical term is euthanasia. This is causing the death of someone because of deformity, or old age, or an incurable disease. I'm not talking about allowing natural causes and not artificially supporting life. I'm talking about causing the death of someone either because of inconvenience or because you don't think that there life is worth living any more. God says you do not have a right to do that.

Job 12:10, "It is God who directs the lives of his creatures; every man's life is in his power." Only God has a right to determine when I should stop living. He's chosen it for me and He's chosen it for you.

This is a very relevant issue. The euthanasia issue would authorize and legalize doctors to put people to death. God says doctors or nobody else has the right to put people to death. It's not talking about just pulling the plug or allowing natural causes.

There was a guy a number of years ago who thought that he should have the right to determine who was fit to live and who wasn't. His name was Hitler.

3. God says NO to abortion

Psalms 139 "You, God, created every part of me, You put me together in my mother's womb. When my bones were being formed when I was growing there in secret, You knew I was there. You saw me before I was born. The days allotted to me were all recorded in Your book before any of them ever began." Circle each "I", "me" and "my" in the verse. He's talking about a baby in it's mother. He says, You created me, You saw me.... God is

saying that's a person inside the mother, not a blob of tissue. He says, I've even planned every day before you were born. Other passages of Scripture say that God even knows your personality before you are born. God says that is a person in there.

From a human viewpoint we may have unplanned pregnancies. But there are no accidental conceptions. Maybe we didn't plan it and maybe it even came as a result of some evil, but there are no accidental conceptions. God says, "I planned it. I numbered the days of that child before it was even born. I know what it was like. I put it together with its genetic capabilities." God has a purpose in every one of them even though we don't have a purpose for every one of them. God says a fetus is not a tissue; it's a life I planned.

He says, "All my days were numbered before I was even both." If all our days were numbered before we were even born, abortion is the ultimate short-circuiting of God's will. You know how shocking the facts of abortion are: 26% of all pregnancies in America now end in abortion, one out of four; 30 million Americans have been killed through abortion, that's more than all of the wars put together. Did you know that every year between 400-500 aborted babies live after they are aborted -- they continue to live? Ninety-seven percent of abortions are not because of rape or incest or not because the life of the mother is threatened, which would be a legitimate issue, but simply because the mother said it's inconvenient. "I chose not to have it because it's not in my lifestyle at this time."

I think it's ironic that the feminists who have been so active in promoting abortion and the right to choose abortion are now complaining because more baby girls are being aborted than boys now that you can find out the sex. More babies are being aborted if they are not boys. Bumper sticker: "Support unborn women's rights."

God says abortion is killing. If you don't want to believe that then you'd better cut that verse out of the Bible because God said it.

There's the argument, "No child should be brought into this world unwanted." I say the fallacy of that is maybe the parents don't want the child, but God does. There is no unwanted child. God wants that child born. That's why He allowed that conception.

The good news is, you can repent of this like any other sin and God will forgive you. Did you know that most of the Bible was written by three men who were murderers: Paul, David, Moses --

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all took the life of another person. Yet they came to God, were forgiven, and God used them in a great way. That's the message of grace. It doesn't matter so much where you've been but in what direction your feet are headed today. Where are you going to stand from now on.

Some of you are saying, "But you've never had an unwanted pregnancy." You're right, I haven't. But I have talked to dozens of women in this church who did and who've struggled with that issue and struggled to make the right decision and came up and did the right thing.

I've asked Lee Ezell to give his testimony this morning:

Lee: I never imagined knowing that one commandment "Thou shalt not murder" would be to me. Even as a teenager I was born and raised in the inner city of Philadelphia in a very difficult neighborhood. They don't call it a ghetto anymore; it's a socio-economically deprived geographical area. In that difficult way in which I was born and raised both my mother and father were alcoholics. I was one of their five unwanted daughters. My father wanted a boy, that's why I'm Lee, I was finally going to be the boy. Even today it confuses me how every man I meet seems to want a son to pass on whatever he thinks he's got to pass on. Nevertheless, in that difficult way of growing up I was told by my father that he didn't want me. I never grew up with any feeling of self-image or self-worth and I guess by today's standards I could have been one of those who would have been very justified getting rid of because I certainly wasn't wanted or needed at the time.

Growing up in that atmosphere my family never became very close. Actually even today, we're scattered all over the country from the east to west coast, but we did make the decision that once a year we would have an annual family picnic and so we all agreed that wherever we are on that day we'll eat outside. I'm not talking real close here.

Before I would graduate from high school as a teenager I would stumble into my first religious meeting and the preacher's name was Billy Graham. I went there for a few laughs with some friends because we didn't have a fourth for Penuckle. In that atmosphere I heard for the first time a man talk about the truth about God. I walked down the aisle, I received Christ into my heart. I guess I had the feeling that God was going to be kind of a fairy god-father in the sky and bad things wouldn't happen to me any more. But now I'm grown up and I know that bad things happen to good people and bad

things happen to Christian people who aren't warned about it and aren't prepared.

I would after high school get on a bus and come out here to California. I got my first job in San Francisco as a typist.

There a salesman whom I would meet at work that morning would rape me that night. As a virgin teenager and a brand new Christian I was a very traumatized girl. It's strange to me how victims feel guilty but that always seems to be the scenario. I felt that if I told anybody this happened it would be the confirmation of "You're a loser Lee. You shouldn't have been born in the first place. Be quiet and not tell anybody." So I swallowed hard and went to work the next day never to see the man again, very sick emotionally and physically. When I went to the doctor I realized I was pregnant from that experience.

The only connection that I had with God was my life of Christ and the sketchy knowledge of the Ten Commandments I had. A friend talked to me about having an abortion. I am no hero, I honestly don't know what decision I would have made if there had been available to me 30 years ago a Planned Parenthood Clinic, county funded. Any friend would have taken me and felt very noble for helping me get rid of this thing that I didn't deserve. Yet for me that wasn't available. It would mean a trip across the border to Tiajuana. A friend had had one and she said it wasn't too bad.

Today it is so easy for a teenager to have an abortion, even without the consent of their parents. I don't understand how anyone could think a teenager could be qualified to make that decision when they can hardly decide what to wear to school in the morning, let alone make this life changing decision.

For me, I would decide, even though I was an unwanted child, and pregnant with an unwanted child, maybe God wanted that child as much as He wanted me for some strange purpose. I would simply come to the conclusion, going through the Scriptures and desperately trying to find God, that abortion must not be particularly a religious issue, it's more an issue of human rights. I would decide I was more like a delivery girl with a baby inside of me I had not volunteered for, yet I was responsible to keep this baby to term.

I decided abortion would be too permanent an answer for a temporary problem, because I had not been tempted by the easy out during that traumatic decisive period. I would bite the bullet come down here to Los Angeles in my car with \$50 in my pocket and find a church a lot like this one. I not only

found a couple who not only would say, "Don't have an abortion" but they said, "What can we do to help you?" I moved in with those people and began my growth in God. It's ironic because what begun as the worst thing that ever had happened to me in my life was becoming the best thing that ever happened to me. I was coming to love this child and bond with the child and wanting the best for the child as any birth mother.

For me, I decided it would be adoption. I signed with the Los Angeles County Adoptions and relinquished my child at birth. I remember the night before I would sign my final papers I felt I had confirmation from God. I watched again the beautiful old classic movie "The Ten Commandments" on TV and remember watching, so intently, the mother of Moses put the little baby Charlton Heston in the basket. If any of her neighbors had seen her do that they would have said "She's throwing away her child. She doesn't love her child." The mother of Moses had direction from God -- some other mother was supposed to raise her child, but she couldn't choose that mother. I thought I'm going to do the same thing. I'm going to place my child on the river of LA County Processing and trust God for whatever person would fish my baby out.

I gave birth to a baby girl in a county hospital. Thirty years ago birth mothers had little or no rights. I was told "You had a healthy baby girl and you'll be gone at 10:30". I never saw her, I never held her, I really felt cheated. I cried. I thought "You're going to have plenty of other children." I never imagined she would be the only child I would ever give birth to. LA County records are sealed for adoption and I knew that was the end of a chapter in my life and for that missing piece of my life I would have to find God's peace.

As the weeks, months and years added up that pain is inevitable but misery is optional for people who have a connection with God. I would wait until I was 29 because I wasn't very trustful of men and then marry my prince. I knew my marriage was made in heaven -- but so is thunder and lightning.

I would begin marriage with a man who already had two children so I would find myself setting in a LA county adoption court swearing in, adopting his two daughters and wondering "Who set there for me many years before?" Many thoughts crossed my mind as I would become an adoptive mom. Having been a relinquishing mom and an adopting mom I know that it only takes nine months to be a birth mother but it takes years to

be a parent, crying and loving and caring and sharing. I wanted my children to call me mom and my birth child's adoptive parents to call her daughter and she call them mom and dad. I made the decision that I wouldn't ever interfere or intervene. My husband would often say, "It seems like on Phil Donahue and all those programs they always have adoptees, it seems like every adoptee in the world is searching." Less than 10% of adoptees ever do try to search for their birth parents. Hearing all those reports I would pray, God, I have to believe that You are able to keep that which I've committed to you and decided to never interfere or intervene.

I never imagined that a few years ago I'd be setting at home and pick up the telephone and a voice on the other end said "Hello, you've never met me but you're my mother." That voice very methodically said "I have two motivations for trying to find you." One to let met know that I am a grandmother and the second to me personally was even sweeter, because that child tried to do what she always dreamed someday she would do and that was to lead me to Christ on the telephone. She was quoting from the Bible. (I let her go for a while to see if she was any good at it.)

She would tell me that her search had taken her through adoption records, hospitals and lawyers and search firms until they had given her a lot of information I was not privy to. We would skirt the issue of how it all had come about. Before we would meet the first time, my husband would say, "I want you to tell her that she's the result of rape. I don't want her to think anything else of you." I'm not telling any child that "You are a mistake, you are an accident." I couldn't reconcile that with what I knew of God and life. So my husband wisely got my daughter, Julie's, husband on the phone one night before we would meet and the two men would privately talk and my husband would tell him what the situation was. It was very real to me because I was listening in on the extension in the bedroom. I remember as my husband told her husband "You tell her if you think she can take it. We don't know her." Julie's husband said, "Wow! To think that that happened more than 20 years ago just to bring me Julie!" We thought we had something special on our hands.

Through the door of the hotel room came a girl who look strikingly like me. She held a baby in her arms. The first thing she ever said to me was "Now, go to your grandma." And her husband stood behind her. He stretched out his hand "I would like to shake your hand. I've been waiting to say, thank you for not aborting Julie. I don't know what my life would be like without her and my children."

From our initial meeting and having already written my first book, I knew that surely would be the topic of my second book, My Missing Piece. Since the release of the book so many things have changed. Her mom came to Los Angeles on Mother's Day and we two mothers held a press conference with one daughter and we talked about how God can put together missing pieces in a life. God can make sense out of nonsense. I never felt like I was the real mother and she was the unreal, that I was the natural and she was the unnatural. We all were pieces of the puzzle of the life of that child.

Since then we have had so many exciting media opportunities to share our story both in the secular and Christian field. I can remember on the Michael Jackson show. He listened to our story, "Oh, wonderful, then it's all God. God sent a man to rape you so you could have this baby. Right?" I said, No, He doesn't cause evil but He's the only One who can make good out of it. We were on the Sally Jesse Raphael show twice. She seemed really nice before the show. We were on Brother Heraldo's show. He looked at my daughter and said, "You're not the product of love; you're the product of rape." She said, "How many of us know we are THE product of love even if our parents were married. Besides that, I believe God wanted me born so I believe I am the product of love." That's my kid! She said "Children who are born of sexual assault have inherited no evil genes. I'm not an emotionally warped Ted Bundy person at all. It doesn't matter how you begin but what you become."

This is true. If God said, "Thou shalt not kill" every child deserves a birth day. Because kids are God's idea. If we're honest, as women we can say, children come through us but not from us! Children are God's idea. The conception of each one of us and our children was God's idea. He didn't consult with us. He didn't leave it up to a couple of teenagers in the back seat of a car. He doesn't leave the decision of life up to a lab technician in a white jacket. My Bible says the keys to life and death are in the hands of Jesus Christ. If the Bible is true, even though a couple may decide when to make love, God decides when to make life. If that is true there are no illegitimate children.

If you are adopted you can know that you were loved. The hard way was chosen for you and for each one of us. We cannot imagine that because our parents were married that we have a more verified, bonified reason for life. Or do we secretly imagine that we are the wanted child. "My parents really wanted me. I came at the right time. I didn't interfere with

their career. They had plenty of space and a lot of money. Everything was just fine." I don't think so. Many mothers will say I cried when I found out I was pregnant, because it is a surprise to us but not to God. Or do you imagine your father looking at your mother with a gleam in his eye, "Let's make us a little Linda tonight!" No the dude was not thinking about Linda! Get real! But somebody was thinking about Linda. With the power and the clout to bring her about in spite of us. God wanted each one of us. I am so grateful that the decision for life is in God's hands. He just expects us, because of the Ten Commandments, to agree with His decision of life and go through with that.

The only good thing I know that could have come out of my rape experience is the beautiful child that I gave birth to who is now a beautiful living example that God is able to make all things work together for good for people who love the Lord. For the God of missing pieces I am grateful we have a connection to Him through Jesus Christ. Because of that I can encourage you this morning even the pitfalls of your past can become fertilizer for your future when you place your hands in the hand of the Prince of Peace.

You matter to God and your conception and your birth were not by accident. God planned you. He made you and He planned you. He wants you to know Him and He wants you to know that He loves you. He wants you in His family. When you get in touch with God and get to know your heavenly Father, life takes on new meaning and new significance.

We've all made mistakes, everyone of us. The Bible says, "All have sinned." That means me, that means you, everybody. We've all done things we've regretted. The good news is that God can bring good even out of bad, even out of bad choices, dumb decisions. As Lee said, God does not cause evil, a lot of it we bring on ourselves, a lot of it other people cause in our lives. God does not cause evil but He is the only one who can bring good out of it. If you will give Him the pieces of your life He will take those pieces, put them together and bring inner peace in your life. He is a great God.

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I. WHAT THIS COMMAND IS NOT ABOUT:

- It is not prohibiting killing animals

"Everything that lives and moves will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything."

Gen. 9:3

- It is not prohibiting capital punishment.

"Anyone who commits murder shall be put to death ... the principle is a life for a life."

Lev. 24:17-18 (GN)

"The government is there to serve God for your benefit...they carry out God's revenge by punishing wrongdoers."

Rom. 13:4 (JB)

- It is not prohibiting going to war.

"...There is a time for war..."

Eccl. 3:8

II. HOW THIS COMMAND APPLIES TO THE FAMILY

- God says NO to _____.

"We are not our own bosses to live and die as we ourselves might choose."

Rom 14:7 _____ (LB)

"The length of a man's life is decided beforehand - the number of months he will live. You (God) have settled it..."

Job 14:5 (GN)

- God says NO to _____.

"It is God who directs the lives of His creatures; everyman's life is in His power."

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"You (God) created every part of me; You put me together in my mother's womb... When my bones were being formed ... when I was growing there in secret, You knew I was there - You saw me before I was born. The days allotted to me were all recorded in Your book before any of them ever began."

Ps. 139:13-16 (GN)