

26 A

COMMANDMENT FOR LIFE

She was getting in over her head. She could still remember the first time she got high. It seemed like a fun game then. But it wasn't fun anymore. It was no game. It was getting deadly serious.

When she wasn't high, all she could think about was getting high again. Her mom told her she was starting to look sick . . . nervous.

She *was* nervous and for good reason. Her drugs had run out and so had her money. The person she got them from was not about to take credit.

Then a friend of hers had an idea. They could hit an all-night grocery store for money. It sounded great to her. Easy money. Soon she'd be high again!

On the way to the store her friend handed her a gun.

She stopped dead in her tracks.

"C'mon," her friend called.

She couldn't move. "Has it come to this?" she wondered. Deep inside she knew she was killing herself with drugs, but could she threaten someone else's life? She needed to get high. The gun felt cold in her hand.

"Dear God," she cried. "Dear God, help me."

3 STATEMENTS

- God commands us not to destroy life, not even to damage it.
- Suicide is *never* the answer.
- It isn't enough that we do *not* kill; we must be our brothers' and sisters' keepers.

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Source

MY BROTHER'S KEEPER

The Bible tells us that Adam and Eve had two sons, Cain and Abel. Cain ended up killing his brother because of jealousy. The first child born into this world was a murderer.

After the murder, God asked Cain where his brother was. Cain lied, "I don't know; am I my brother's keeper?"

God commands us not to destroy life, not even to damage it.

(Genesis 4:9). With that question, Cain tried to rid himself of the responsibility of caring for his brother.

In the Fifth Commandment, "You shall not kill," *God commands us not to destroy life, not even to damage it.* It is wrong to hurt others. But God also makes it clear that caring for our brothers and sisters is our responsibility.

Movies and television bombard us with violence and murder. Sometimes the media even glamorizes killing and makes heroes out of the most violent people. Computer software stores are filled with programming that is violent. Some rock albums and lyrics rely on suggestions of death and violence. Wars ravage our globe. One of the largest United States exports is weaponry. The possible threat of nuclear annihilation clouds over our days.

And we think we are civilized! We shake our heads at Cain, but we are easily able to match Cain's violence. We become dangerous people ourselves. So God seeks to protect us with the Fifth Commandment. God protects you from your neighbor. God protects your neighbor from you.

And with this Commandment, God even protects you from you. Suicide is not an option. It is despair.

To despair is to turn your back on God. When you give up on life, you are giving up on God. We all have pain and sometimes it seems unbearable. But *suicide is never the answer.* The Bible has promised that there will be no problem in life that you and God can't handle (1 Corinthians 10:13). If your pain is extreme, hold on. God hasn't forgotten you. God will get you through.

Sometimes the way to get through a difficult time is to rely on God's help that can come through other people. Don't be afraid to talk to a pastor, counselor, or an adult who you trust.

Suicide is never the answer. You shall not kill yourself! This is God's command, because God loves you. God gave you life, and God will help you keep it.

And as God commands us not to destroy life, not even to damage it, so God commands you not to damage *your* life. Overeating, undereating, smoking cigarettes, lack of exercise, and doing drugs are slow suicides. They don't kill

you all at once; they do it gradually. Your life is precious to God. In fact, the Bible tells us "that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you" (1 Corinthians 6:19). Don't pollute it! Don't hurt your own body. Take care of it and keep it as healthy as you can.



RICHARD WEST

THE HEART OF THE MATTER

You know that killing is terribly wrong. Any kind of violence is wrong. You are not to physically hurt anyone in any way. But the Fifth Commandment does more than keep your actions nonviolent. It goes to the very heart of the matter.

Remember that sin is anything that separates us from God. And when we are separated from others, it causes a break in our relationship with God. Thoughts and words can break relationships just as much as actions can.

This is a kind of emotional violence. Jesus tells us that anger without cause, insults, and name-calling are just as bad as murder (Matthew 5:21-22).

"Okay, but I'm sure not going to love my enemies." If you want to obey God, you will. Jesus said, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matthew 5:44).

Be careful. If you obey this Commandment, you may lose something. You may lose your enemy! God works miracles on relationships. God can help you love your enemies.

A LESSER OF TWO EVILS

The Fourth Commandment tells how God has appointed authorities to protect us. Parents, police, the military, our government—are all there to protect us from violence. It's another way that God the Creator keeps on providing for and protecting you.

Like all the Commandments, the Fifth Commandment wants to enable and to protect relationships. You think this world is uncaring and violent now? How would it be without this Commandment? How would it be if no one had the clear message in their hearts from God that violence is wrong?

It is always wrong to be violent. But this life doesn't always give us clear choices between right and wrong. Very often we must choose the lesser of two or more evils. Following is a list of violent situations. On a scale of 1 to 10 (right or wrong), where would you put each of the following violent responses? Circle your answer.

1. A parent slaps a toddler's hand to teach the toddler not to play with an electrical outlet.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
right wrong

2. A parent hits a child with a belt because the child's crying makes it hard to hear TV.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
right wrong

3. A man and a woman are on a date. They start to kiss. Soon one is forcing the other to do things that person doesn't want to do.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
right wrong

4. A soldier fought in World War II.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
right wrong

5. A soldier fought in the Vietnam war.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
right wrong

6. The U.S. and Canada ordered all Japanese in those countries to be in special camps during World War II.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
right wrong

7. Person "A" mugs and kills person "B."

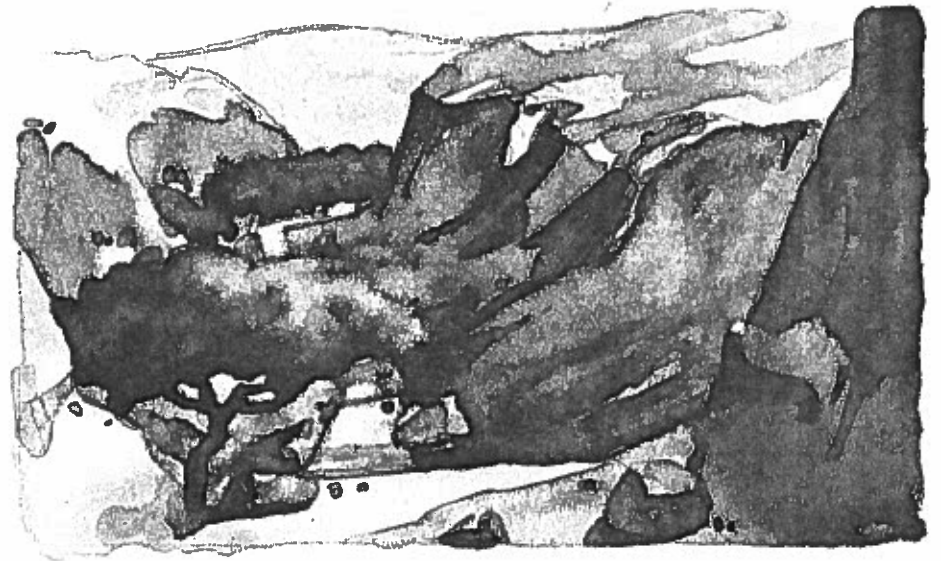
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
right wrong

8. Person "A" pulls a knife on person "B" and says, "No one will get hurt if you give me your money." Person "B" pulls out a gun and shoots person "A."

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
right wrong

THE LORD IS YOUR KEEPER

Long ago a person was on a journey by foot through a valley. The hills were scary. There could be robbers or wolves up there. On the hills, the traveler might also have seen idols to false gods who were, of course, no help at all.



"I lift my eyes to the hills," the traveler said, "from where will my help come? My help comes from the Lord."

Then someone told the traveler, "The Lord is your keeper . . . the Lord will keep your life" (Psalm 121:1-2, 5, 7).

What a difference between Cain and the Lord! Cain killed his brother, *refusing* to be his keeper. God protects you, *promising* to be your keeper.

Knowing that God is your keeper, you don't have to worry. You are free to enter relationships. You are free to be caring. You are free to be your brothers' and sisters' keeper!

Read Psalm 121 and answer the following questions.

1. How many times do the words *keep* or *keeper* appear in the psalm?

2. Does God ever take a break from the job of being your keeper? Explain your answer.

3. How long will God keep your life?

4. What happens to your life when you die?

It isn't enough that we do not kill; we must be our brothers' and sisters' keepers.

I THINK

Governments make laws about right and wrong. That's their job. Governments have said that killing is wrong, abusing children is wrong, stealing is wrong. But some of the issues of life are terribly complex. Governments thoughtfully consider many sides to such issues as abortion, capital punishment, and "right to die" issues.

If you were to write *your* government's laws, what moral decisions would you make law? What moral decisions would you leave up to the individual citizen?

Shaping
life

DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.

Black people in North America have been abused. Unfairness, ridicule, threats, and violence have too often been a part of Black people's lives.

God raised up a modern prophet who, in the name of Jesus, demanded that his black brothers and sisters be treated with dignity. He refused to answer hatred with hatred. He would not strike against violence with more violence.

The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. courageously spoke the word of the Lord to Whites: injustice must end. And he spoke the word of the Lord to Blacks: whatever action needed to be taken would be nonviolent action.

While in prison in Birmingham, Alabama in 1963, he wrote to other clergy in the area and called them to action—to support civil rights for Blacks.

Too often the church quietly allows wrong to continue. Too often the church actually tries to keep things just the way they are, even if that way is wrong!

It isn't enough for the church not to kill. The church must also preserve life. It isn't enough for the church to be quietly for justice. The church must also actively work against injustice. We sin not only by what we do, but also by the things we leave undone.

In his explanation to the Fifth Commandment, Martin Luther wrote, "We are to fear and love God so that we

FURTHER

opportunities

Bible Reading

In Galatians 5:22, the apostle Paul lists the fruits of the spirit. As you read each one, write about how real that "fruit" is in your life. Then make these "fruits" the center of your prayer requests.

Memory

Memorize the Fifth Commandment and its meaning. As an additional challenge, memorize one or more of the following: Psalm 121; Matthew 5:21-22; Matthew 25:37-40; Romans 12:14-21; 1 Corinthians 6:19; Galatians 5:22; Ephesians 4:26; Ephesians 4:32.

Activity 1

Go to the library and read about Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. You might also see if your library has anything written by him. You may want to give a report to the class or write

do not hurt our neighbor in any way." But he didn't stop there! If we are to obey this Commandment, we are to "help him (our neighbor) in all his physical needs." *It isn't enough that we do not kill; we must be our brothers' and sisters' keepers.*

Make a list of your physical needs. (You may want to look at Matthew 25:31-46 for help.)

Jesus said that you are to love your neighbor as yourself. Now write down what you can do to help your neighbor who also has physical needs.

an article for your church newsletter about this servant of Jesus Christ. The church commemorates King's life and work on January 15.

Activity 2

Lutheran Peace Fellowship is an independent group working within the Lutheran community on issues of war and peace and how they relate to our Christian faith. If you have any questions about these issues, or if you want to know more about how you can work for peace, write for more information: Lutheran Peace Fellowship, 2481 Como Avenue West, St. Paul, MN 55108.

Activity 3

Think about ways that you neglect your health. Could you eat more nutritious foods? Sleep more? Get more exercise? Pick one area where you could improve and make an effort to practice better health habits.



FOCUS

ON "JUST WAR"

That one war might be justifiable and another not, is not a new idea. Augustine (A.D. 345-430) said that a war is justified only if it served the good of society and if its purpose is peace.

Luther, in his book *Whether Soldiers Too May Be Saved* said that a Christian may not fight in a war if the war is not a just one.

Lutherans have long believed that some wars are just and others not just. Materials from Lutheran Peace Fellowship explain, "The just/unjust war teaching of the church, which has been adopted by and incorporated in international law, includes rules for deciding about going to war, and rules for limiting the conduct of the war" (*Lutherans and Military Service: Twenty Questions and Answers*).

Here are some of those rules:

1. The war must be a last resort.
2. The war must have a just cause (for instance, self-defense).
3. The war must be declared properly by legitimate political leadership.
4. There must be a reasonable prospect of achieving the just goals.
5. War must not cause unnecessary destruction which outweighs the final good which is sought.
6. No harm must be done to civilians and prisoners of war.
7. The defeated are to be shown mercy, including assistance after the war.

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