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If you've ever been unemployed and looking for work, when an interview finally turns into a well-paying job, you might proclaim, "It's about time I get a break and find a decent job."

When my last child was potty trained, I sighed and exclaimed, "No more diapers! It's about time!"

A child looking forward to getting a driver's license may celebrate and announce to nervous parents, "It's about time I get some freedom and independence."

When you retire and begin dreaming about the future, you might say, "It's about time I get to travel and relax."

Sometimes waiting for certain events in life seems so hard to do, and I imagine those who had been living in slavery under the Pharaoh were ready to leave Egypt and escape to freedom. On the way out of town they probably muttered, "It's about time we get away from making bricks for the Pharaoh's pyramids. I'm ready to relax. Have some free time. Do whatever I want."

With their newfound freedom, however, God provided a set of instructions for living, often

It's About Time!
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known as the Ten Commandments. Interestingly, the word *commandment* never appears in the original listing in the Hebrew language of the Bible. When we first encounter this list in Exodus 20, the narrator simply refers to them as "all these words." Later in Exodus they are referred to as the "ten words" (34:28). The first English translation to call them Ten Commandments was the Geneva Bible in 1560, and 51 years later the King James Bible echoed this way of naming them the "Ten Commandments."

These words form the foundation of laws for most societies, outlining the basics of how to get along with one another. Even in other world religions, we see a similar list of teachings in, for example, the Ten Precepts of Buddhism and in the Quran for Muslims. God seems to have planted these basic ways of living into all humanity.

Last Sunday I invited you to recall as many of the Ten Commandments as you could, promising to see how we did over the next several weeks. Some of you may have arrived this morning thinking, "I

Exodus 20:3-11

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wonder how we did? Did we recall all ten? It's about time we find out!" So, let's begin.

The first commandment speaks about our relationship with God by proclaiming "you shall have no other gods besides me." In other words, God said, "worship only Me." The descendants of Abraham and Sarah had lived under the rule of the Egyptians for 400 years, so it's likely they picked up a few of their ideas and practices. The ancient Egyptians had a god for everything:

- Ra, the sun god;
- Geb, the earth god and his wife Nut, the goddess of the sky;
- Nut's father, Shu, the god of the air, who would blow winds to keep Geb and Nut apart;
- Osiris (oh SIRE is), the first son of Geb and Nut, who was a wise pharaoh and taught humans about farming and created the first cities in Egypt;
- Osiris' wife, Isis (EYE sis), the goddess of magic who tricked many of the other gods.¹

This list is only the beginning of the gods the Egyptians worshiped. Although the rulers of Egypt were human, the Pharaohs even proclaimed

themselves to be gods. The God of Abraham and Sarah confronted this idea by proclaiming there is only one God: the God of all creation, who made humans, the earth, the rain, the crops and everything else.

Some Christians today try to turn this first commandment into a fence to exclude other religions by suggesting, for example, that Muslims don't worship the same God as Christians since Muslims use the word *Allah*. The word *Allah* is just the Arabic translation for the word *God*. Even Christians in Arab-speaking countries pray by calling on Allah, just as Christians in Spanish speaking countries use the word *Dios*. The word does not indicate the name of another god, just the translation of the word *God* into another language.

Whether we call God Adonai or Elohim as do the Jews, or Allah or Dios, it's the same God. The commandment to not have any other gods places an emphasis on the fact that only one God exists, the one God that humanity worships. In recognizing that we all worship the same God, maybe we can also affirm that we're all part of one family.

Now to the next commandment. Some lists consider the next set of words as part of the first commandment, while others see it as the second: Do not make idols. Statues of wood or stone were often created as a representation of god, as an object that reminded people of god. But sometimes that reminder turned into the object of worship. Although we may not place wooden statues of a god in our homes today, I think we are tempted to still worship idols today. When our lives focus on how much money we can make to buy more stuff we don't need, we've turned consumerism into an idol. When football or baseball players receive millions of dollars while children continue to go hungry in our country, we've turned sports into idols. When we spend more time watching TV and movies than exercising and caring for our bodies, we've turned entertainment into an idol.

Worshipping idols can turn into bad habits, which our children often learn from us and pass onto their children. God warned the people that their actions could affect the following three or four generations, but then God reminded them: "It's about time you

understand that no matter how much you mess up your lives and the following generations, when you strive to follow my commandments you will discover that my steadfast love endures to the thousandth generation."

Thirdly, God asks for respect when speaking to God. "Don't use my name disrespectfully. Use kind words when naming me." In other words, set a good example when speaking about God. Don't throw all your insults and blame at God, for keep in mind that little ears are listening to you. When bad things happen in life, it's not God's fault, so don't swear at God. It's ok to be angry and complain to God when life falls apart, but don't curse at God.

Finally, I'm glad we remembered the next commandment to keep one day a week holy, the Sabbath, a Hebrew word meaning "stop, rest." Many times, people see this word as limiting their lives, placing a restriction of their freedom, but that's not what God had in mind.

When I examined this commandment with students while teaching a religion class in a university, I asked the students what happened

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when they worked, played, and studied 24/7 and had too many all-nighters. They often replied, “We collapse or get sick.” I suggested that’s why God included this idea of Sabbath—taking time to rest. Our bodies are not designed for 24/7 operation, and we need time for relaxation. When we become too busy, we forget about caring for ourselves, we don’t take time to love our families and friends, and we cut corners by not immersing ourselves in our community of faith that gives us hope. God called this day *holy*, a word meaning sacred, special, set apart from all other days. Gathering together for worship is not a duty or obligation—this fellowship is a gift from God to sustain us when life becomes difficult, and it is a place to celebrate the goodness of life. This is a place of rest when life becomes too stressful, for often our lives are filled with too much

chaos. As the author and minister Norman Vincent Peale once said, “Americans are so tense and keyed up that it’s impossible even to put them to sleep with a sermon.”

A young girl recognized the importance of rest at her church that served coffee after worship. The pastor asked the little girl if she knew why they served the coffee. “I think,” said the girl, “it’s to get the people awake before they drive home.”²

God offers these commandments, these words of hope to remind us it’s about our time: time to worship only God rather than the attractive idols that try to distract us; time to use kind words to God and one another; and time to rest and keep this day holy. Make time to celebrate the gifts that God has given us in these words of life.

¹ <http://rickriordan.com/extra/meet-the-egyptian-gods/>

² Hodgins, Michael. *1001 More Humorous Illustrations for Public Speaking: Fresh, Timely, and Compelling Illustrations for Preachers, Teachers, and Speakers* (Kindle Locations 3795-3797). Zondervan. Kindle Edition, #731, adapted.