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I imagine most of us have heard of the Ten Commandments, so taking the next four weeks to talk about them may seem a bit unnecessary, but I wonder how many of the ten we can recall. Let's try naming them.... (*write on easel*). Over the next few weeks we'll see how many we remembered.

According to one research study done back in 2007, Americans know the ingredients of a Big Mac better than they know the Commandments.

80 percent of 1,000 respondents could name the burger's primary ingredient — two all-beef patties — but less than six in 10 knew the commandment "thou shalt not kill."

Less than half of respondents — 45 percent — could recall the commandment "honor thy father and mother" but 62 percent knew the Big Mac has pickle.<sup>1</sup>

Maybe a reminder of the Ten Commandments is not such a bad idea, which was something a minister learned after giving a sermon on the Ten Commandments. As a member exited the sanctuary and shook the pastor's hand, he thanked the pastor for the review of the Commandments and said,

"Reverend, you sure preached a good sermon. In fact, I've made up my mind that for the next ten weeks, I'm gonna keep one of them Ten Commandments each week until I get through all ten of 'em."<sup>2</sup>

I think God had something different in mind when giving these ten teachings. Rather than occasional ideas to try every once in a while, the laws were to form the basis of society, helping people get along with one another. God's people had escaped from the forced labor of the Pharaoh, so the Commandments begin with this reminder: "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery." When God reminded the people, "I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself," you can almost feel the breeze of the eagles' wings as we fly through the chaos of life to safety.

After escaping from slavery, it was probably tempting to have a free-for-all, a do-whatever-you-want kind of living. But God knew that even with freedom, basic laws needed to be followed to keep

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everyone safe. Rather than offering these laws as restrictions, God offered the teachings as a safety net, helping to protect the rights of everyone.

Throughout history God had been making promises, what the Bible calls covenants. First, God made a promise to Noah after the flood, that waters would never destroy the entire earth, a covenant made with humans and animals. Later, God made a covenant with Abraham and Sarah, that through their lives all people of the earth would be blessed. And here in the book of Exodus, God made a covenant that includes our responsibilities to treat one another justly and fairly. God made a promise with David that his kingdom would never end. To Jeremiah God promised a new covenant written on the hearts of people, and through Jesus, God made another promise. When one says “promises, promise,” it’s often a sarcastic way of indicating the promises probably won’t be kept, but in the case of God, “promises, promises” refers to the many times God has entered our history to remind us that God loves us.

This Memorial Day weekend we especially remember the promises of those who have kept us safe, for even though we have laws to follow, we humans continue to get into conflicts with other nations, and sometimes our loved ones may die while striving to protect us. In the late 1860s after the Civil War, Americans began decorating graves on May 30 with flowers and reciting prayers to remember those who had died. The day was known as Decoration Day. In 1971 the day evolved into Memorial Day on the last Monday of May.<sup>3</sup>

Diana tells about a Memorial Day promise she made to her father:

I promised my dad before he died that I’d put flowers on his parents’ grave, as well as his, every Memorial Day. Although he knew my mom would, he wanted reassurance that someone would continue the tradition after she was gone. My mom’s still here, but I’ve made a point of visiting the graves every year.

It has sometimes been a challenge. My daughter was six and my son was five-months-old when my dad died. Through the years, I’ve worked in my cemetery visits around dance

recitals, baseball games, and end-of-school picnics and award programs.

I've sandwiched the 200-mile round-trip between dropping the kids off at school in the morning and arriving in time for the afternoon pickup. When possible, I've brought my children along to share in the family stories.<sup>4</sup>

As Diana discovered, keeping promises is not always easy. Sometimes we may even find ourselves unable or unwilling to follow the promises we have made. Some may feel a bit disillusioned, feeling the pain of broken promises, muttering to oneself, "Promises, promises. I know they will be broken again."

We humans try to make promises to our children, our spouses, our friends, or our co-workers, but sometimes we forget them. We break them. We ignore them. We aren't perfect, we make mistakes, and that's why God established the Ten Commandments to guide us in our treatment of one another.

Sometimes we think we need to follow the Ten Commandments in order for God to love us and save us, as was the case with

two men who were adrift on a raft in the open sea. It looked bad for them. Finally, one of them, frightened, began to pray: "O Lord, I've broken most of the commandments. I've got some pretty bad habits—I drink, I curse, I steal, I treat people like dirt. But if my life is spared now, I promise you that I'll change, that I'll never again curse, that I..." Suddenly his friend cried out to him: "Wait a minute. Don't go too far. I think I see another ship."<sup>5</sup>

These teachings were designed to help us get along, not win God's favor. As one writer stated,

God does not give the law as a means to salvation. To use the law to earn salvation, to win your soul's way into heaven, is like trying to build a faster-than-the-speed-of-light spaceship or a time-travel machine out of plywood. It's not possible. And neither is it possible to earn salvation through the law. God does not give the law as a way to establish relationship with the people. God establishes the relationship and then gives the law.<sup>6</sup>

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Even when we mess up, God continues to keep promises to love us and to lift us up on eagles' wings, which is something I recall as I watch an eagle flying overhead who nests in our neighborhood. This eagle can't literally pick me up, but it feels as though the eagle is watching over the neighborhood, for an eagle's eyesight is four to five times better than a human's. Their eyes make up about 50 of their heads and weigh about the same as a human eye. Eagles have a better field of view, and although we humans can see the three primary colors of red, yellow, and blue, an eagle can see five primary colors and can detect ultraviolet light. Per millimeter, we humans have in our eyes some 200,000 light-detecting cells, called cones, while eagles have one million.<sup>7</sup>

It's comforting to know that the one who will bear us up on eagles' wings has even greater vision than humans or eagles, for God's teachings guide us and help us see better. Even when we forget or can't see our way and go astray, God's vision continues to see a way for us, for God always makes promises, promises to love us and guide us.

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<sup>1</sup> "Americans know Big Macs better than Ten Commandments," 10/12/07, [www.reuters.com/article/us-bible-commandments-idUSN1223894020071012](http://www.reuters.com/article/us-bible-commandments-idUSN1223894020071012)

<sup>2</sup> Hodgins, Michael. *1001 Humorous Illustrations for Public Speaking: Fresh, Timely, and Compelling Illustrations for Preachers, Teachers, and Speakers* (Kindle Locations 5019-5021). Zondervan. Kindle Edition, #925.

<sup>3</sup> [www.history.com/topics/holidays/memorial-day-history](http://www.history.com/topics/holidays/memorial-day-history)

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<sup>4</sup> Diana Reese, "A Memorial Day Promise to My Family," 5-27-16, [www.nextavenue.org/memorial-day-promise-my-family/](http://www.nextavenue.org/memorial-day-promise-my-family/)

<sup>5</sup> Hodgins, Michael, #437.

<sup>6</sup> [www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=3671](http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=3671)

<sup>7</sup> <https://onekindplanet.org/animal/eagle/>