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When you were growing up or when raising your own children, I imagine you had some rules in your home. What were some of them? ...

In addition to rules in one's home, through my years of camping, I've also come up with an informal list of tent rules.

1. Avoid pitching a tent on a hill, but if there's a slight incline, have the tent opening face downhill in case it rains. That helps to avoid water rolling into the tent during a rainstorm.
2. Take off your shoes before entering the tent, for I don't like getting mud or dirt in my sleeping bag.
3. When building a campfire to cook some smores, make sure the fire is far enough away from the tent.

These rules don't restrict my camping adventure, but they ensure that my experience goes as smoothly as possible.

Psalm 15 also includes a list of tent rules, not for camping, but for worshiping God. In the first portion of the Bible, sometimes called the Old

Testament, we hear stories about a time when God's people were nomads, traveling from one place to another, and in order to always have a place of worship, they had a mobile worship center—a tent. Even after they were settled and built a temple, they still used the image of a tent to refer to a place of worship. Psalm 15 asks, "Who may gather in your tent, God?" In other words, who can come to worship?

Listening to the response in the psalm, we might feel a bit uncomfortable, for did you hear the beginning of the reply: "Those who walk blamelessly." Oh my! That word *blamelessly*, תמים TA-mim in the Hebrew language of the original scriptures, can mean perfect, complete, whole. How many of us fit that description and could enter the tent for worship? Any perfect people here this morning in our tent of worship?

The list of requirements in the psalm for worshipers continues: those who do right and speak the truth from their heart. I imagine most of us try to do the right thing and be honest, but what

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happens if we mess up? Are we kicked out of the tent?

The list continues: those who don't say unkind or mean things about friends or neighbors, those who always keep their promises, and those who never charge interest on a loan.

We might find ourselves avoiding some of the tent rules on this list, but every one? Really? Who would be able to enter for worship? What if we've said an unkind word? What if we forget a promise?

Why do we have rules, anyway? I think most of us have an aversion to rules, for most of us like to do whatever we want, or sometimes we find a way around the rules, as one new college student tried to do:

During freshman orientation the college dean presented the rules to the new students.

"The male dormitory is off-limits to all female students, and the female dormitory is off-limits to the male students. Anyone caught breaking this rule will be fined \$20 the first time." He continued, "Anyone caught breaking this rule the second time will be fined \$60. Being caught a third time will cost you a fine of \$180. Are there any questions?"

At this point, a male student in the crowd inquired, "How much is it for a season pass?"<sup>1</sup>

Even though we don't like rules, the first portion of the Bible is filled with them, 613 to be exact. The most famous rules are the Ten Commandments. In addition to this list reminding us to honor God, they also offer good guidelines on how to get along with others: tell the truth, honor your parents, don't take someone else's stuff, and don't kill anyone. These rules were not considered restrictive, but they were viewed as a fence, as a boundary to keep us safe from the struggles of life. Honoring one's parents can make family life much smoother, unless of course, the parents are abusive. Telling the truth makes relationships better, unless, of course, someone asks you, "How do I look in these clothes?" Even though you don't like the color, offering a positive response could prevent an argument.

Sometimes I've heard people suggest that the first portion of the Bible had rules, but Jesus came to abolish all the rules. Since we have forgiveness, we don't need to worry about all those rules.

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If you look closely at the New Testament, you might discover it includes over one thousand rules, including having patience, being content with one's wages, being kind to one another, and offering hospitality, among many others.<sup>2</sup> In facing all these rules, we may get frustrated, as was the case with

four-year-old Jimmy [who] was on a family vacation...and he was given quarters for the video game machine by his older sister. Since Jimmy is not proficient in operating such games, the quarters went rapidly. Finally, he had to be told that there were no more quarters. He demanded, "But I want more."

His sister responded, "Jimmy, in life we don't always get what we want."

Jimmy paused and then shouted, "I hate that rule!"<sup>3</sup>

Even though it's true that we don't always get what we want, most of us don't like the idea, do we? The rules or teachings or guidelines that God has offered us in the Bible can help us get along better

in life, though we often find ourselves forgetting them or messing up our lives. In addition to the Tent Rules of life, God also offers us grace, forgiveness, and the chance to try again.

Rules or commandments are not meant to box us in or restrict us, but to offer us freedom to live safely. (*show picture*) A sign I gave my parents for Christmas one year expressed a different view of rules. Since they lived on a lake, the sign said, "Lake Rules: Relax and Sleep In; Laugh, Swim, Play; Make Memories; Enjoy Every Moment."

I think that's what God had in mind when teaching us how to live with Tent Rules: to center our lives on God, laugh and play, cherish each memory with family and friends, and rather than worrying about the past or the future, to learn to enjoy every moment. Those are tent rules worth living by.

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<sup>1</sup> Hodgkin, Michael. *1002 Humorous Illustrations for Public Speaking* (p. 799). Zondervan. Kindle Edition, #766.

<sup>2</sup> [www.abc.net.au/reslib/201407/r1308729\\_17984331.pdf](http://www.abc.net.au/reslib/201407/r1308729_17984331.pdf)

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<sup>3</sup> Hodgkin, Michael. *1002 Humorous Illustrations for Public Speaking* (p. 559). Zondervan. Kindle Edition, #528.