

**Victory of the Lamb – Top Ten – Ways to Live a Better Life – Exodus 20:1-6
February 20, 2022 - Pastor Bill Limmer**

Self-help books, articles, blogs, podcasts, are all the rage today as our culture seeks self-actualization and we seek to be “all that we can be,” and “to live our best life”. Conservative estimates are that over 300,000 self helps books are published each year. That is about 821 self-help books per day that are published. I don't doubt that many of them are good and helpful but which one do we choose. Here is a hint: inside the glove compartment of most of our cars is an owner's manual written by the manufacturer. It just makes sense to look at the book to determine how the car runs because they made the car. In the same and even more true way, it just makes sense that we would look to the one who made us and redeemed us to learn how to live a better life.

Today we are beginning a new series called *Top Ten Ways to Live a Better Life*. And we will answer the question: **Why did God give us the First Commandment?**

As we start this series, we need to remember that all these teachings are given in the framework of a loving relationship, like a father giving instructions to a child, things to do and not do for your good, and for the good of others. **Exodus 20:1-6 And God spoke all these words:** ²“I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. ³“You shall have no other gods before^[a] me. ⁴“You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. ⁵You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, ⁶but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.

When God says, **I am the Lord your God, who brought out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery**, He is identifying who he is. He says he is the LORD your God. He is the Almighty God who created all things. The Scriptures say, **“Every house is built by someone, but God is the builder of everything.”** So the world didn't just appear. God made it. God said, “Let there be light.” And ever since light has been cruising around the galaxies at 5.88 trillion miles per year.

That is not only kind of cool, but also kind of powerful. That same God made mankind from the dust of the ground and knit you and me together in our mother's wombs. He created us.

When God calls himself "LORD" He is identifying himself as the covenant God of grace, of surprising, shocking unconditional love and as the Savior and rescuer of people. He is the one who rescued them from slavery. He is assuring them and us of his love and that he is on their side.

This Creator and Savior God reveals more about himself too. He says in Exodus 20:5 **For, I am a jealous God.** Keep in mind God does not need our praise, but we need to praise him. He doesn't need us to glorify him, but we need to glorify him. God is jealous not because he is insecure but because he so adamantly wants the best for you and me. So, the creator and Savior God says, **You shall have no other gods before me.** I don't know about you, but to me that makes sense. There is no one like him. There is no one as glorious, loving, powerful, and wise. Why would we worship something less than the best? Why would we not give our whole heart to the One who is so intricately and exponentially involved in our day-to-day and eternal lives?

Yet people think when God says, "you shall have no other gods" that he is being mean and controlling and not loving. But let me give you an example of what is going on here. My son and his family just moved to Phoenix from Rochester. The weather is a little bit different, so they are already outside. His daughter Zoe loaded up the stroller with her dolls and was walking down the driveway. Andrew was very careful and clear to point out this is the sidewalk; this is the street. The street is black. You cannot go out into the black street. Was he being mean and controlling or loving to tell her she can't go in the street?

God gave us the first commandment because He loves us.

Do you know anyone who worships a different God than the God of the Bible? God gave us the first Commandment as a curb, mirror, and guide for us because our hearts are so quick to wander and make idols, which are counterfeit gods. In Athens 2,000 years ago, the people were very religious. There were shrines set up to all kinds of false gods. The people not wanting to offend a god they had forgotten even made an altar to the unknown God.

While some countries still have gods made of wood and stone, we really don't have that situation here. Tim Keller in his book *Counterfeit God* says, **"We think idols are bad things, but that is almost never the case. The greater the good, the more likely we are to expect that it can satisfy our deepest needs and hopes."**

This is what our heart does. It makes good things, ultimate things. And when that good thing becomes an ultimate thing, that is when it has replaced God and become an idol.

An idol or a god is anything or anyone that has first place in our lives. Whatever your hearts says as soon as I have this or that or them, I will be complete. I will be secure. I will have meaning and purpose. I will be full. That is an idol. It is anyone or anything in our life that if we lost it, we would feel that our life is hardly worth living. An idol is anyone or anything that monopolize our lives. We can never get enough. An idol has such control over our lives that we willingly, delightfully, spend our emotions, finances, and energy on without giving it a second thought.

Our hearts are polytheistic. We have a lot of gods. Our hearts keep reproducing one idol after another. Here are some good things that become idols when they become ultimate things: achievement, approval, body image, causes, comfortable circumstances, community, competence and skill, control, fitness, health, knowledge, being right, money, moral virtue, People, pets, purpose, relationships, self-discovery, success and work to name a few of our favorites., When we think these things will provide us with us safety, peace, and happiness if we have them, we have just made a counterfeit god. Do you know anyone who worship a false god or an idol?

The truth is we have constructed idols in our hearts. Exodus 14:3 **"These men have set up idols in their hearts."** We have so much invested in our counterfeit gods, so much time, so much money, passion, energy. Our hearts are idol factories and this is why so many of us struggle so much. We are struggling because we are using someone or something to be what or who they are not, God. We are depending on counterfeit gods.

When you go to the store and you purchase something with a hundred dollar bill the clerk will either hold it up to the light or use a special marker on it to determine if it is counterfeit or not. At best if your hundred-dollar bill is counterfeit, you are not buying what you came to purchase. At worst, you are

going to jail. If you go to a restaurant and try to pay your bill with monopoly money that is ridiculous and everyone knows it.

And when we build our lives on counterfeit gods, Satan is laughs because he knows those things or people will end up disappointing us and taking not only our lives but also risking our eternal lives as well.

God gave us the First Commandment so we would not be disappointed.

Are we doomed to running around creating and chasing after our own heart made idols that are leaving and will leave us empty?

No. Here is how I know.

In ancient times, all the hopes and dreams of a man and his family rested in the firstborn son. Big potential for an idol. Abraham longed for a son for years and years. But Abraham had no son. And he was passed age to conceive as was his wife. But God promised him a son anyway. In his centurion age Abraham and his wife gave birth to a son, Isaac. They loved Isaac. Isaac meant the world to Abraham. God tested Abraham's heart. Did Abraham love God more or Isaac more? God told Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac. So Abraham took his son on top of the mountain and was ready to sacrifice him. As the knife was pulled back and put into motion God stopped him. He was willing to sacrifice his first-born son Isaac out of love for God. God's response is, "Now I know that you love me, because you did not withhold your only son from me."

How much more can we look at the Jesus on the cross, and say to God, "Now we know that you love us. For you did not withhold your son, your only son, whom you love from us. **Romans 8:32 He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?** When we see this love in all of its sacrifice, greatness, and depth, it makes it possible for us to finally rest our hearts in him rather than in anyone or anything else.

No idol can do for you what God can, does and will. No idol created you with a vision for our life. No idol sacrificed himself for our sins. No idol took the punishment of your sins upon himself. No idol has risen from the dead and ascended into heaven to prepare a place for you for all eternity. No idol has

promised to return and take you to be with him. No idol could fill you with the Holy Spirit to inspire and direct your life to fill your life with the fruit of the Spirit, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness and self-control.

And that is why God in love said you shall have no other gods because there is no God like your Jehovah! **God gave us the First Commandment so we could live a better life.**

Don't look to yourself to keep this commandment look to Jesus who kept this commandment and all of them in your place. He is the giver of the law and the fulfiller of the law. And as you look to him something will start to happen you will start to be at peace with God more and more, and in love with God more and more, not because of you but because of him, the God who loves you. And you know what will happen then? God will become first place in your life and that is a the way to a better life!