

GATHERING...

3

We Follow God's Law

“If you love me, you will keep my commandments.”

(John 14:15)

+ Leader: Let us pray some verses from Psalm 119.

Group 1: “Blessed are you, O LORD; teach me your laws. With all my heart I seek you; do not let me stray from your commands.”

(Psalm 119:12, 10)

Group 2: “LORD, teach me the way of your laws; I shall observe them with care. Give me insight to observe your teaching, to keep it with all my heart.”

(Psalm 119:33–34)

Group 1: “I keep my steps from every evil path, that I may obey your word. From your edicts I do not turn, for you have taught them to me.”

(Psalm 119:101–102)

Group 2: “Your decrees are my heritage forever; they are the joy of my heart. My heart is set on fulfilling your laws; they are my reward forever.”

(Psalm 119:111–112)

Leader: Thank you, Lord, for your laws. Guide us so that we may follow them with all our hearts.

All: Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit: as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be for ever. Amen.



Visit www.weliveourfaith.com to find appropriate music and songs.

GATHERING...

The Big Question:

Why do I need to follow laws?



Discover some unusual laws. Believe it or not, the following are actual laws that were made!

- 1 It is unlawful to lend your vacuum cleaner to your next-door neighbor in Denver, Colorado.
- 2 No one may catch fish with bare hands in the state of Kansas.
- 3 It is unlawful to walk backwards after sunset in Devon, Connecticut.
- 4 The state law of Pennsylvania prohibits singing in the bathtub.

Now write four city or state laws that seem more logical than these do.

1. Laws against murder and killing people.
2. Cars must stop when school bus lights are flashing.
3. Cars pull to side of road when emergency vehicles pass.
4. Laws against driving while intoxicated or texting.

Look back at the laws you wrote. Which one do you think would be the most important to follow? Why?

In this chapter

we learn that true happiness is found in turning to God and in following God's law. Through this chapter, we hope



to know that by following Jesus we can be faithful to God's law and find true happiness



to accept the commandments as the law of God's covenant



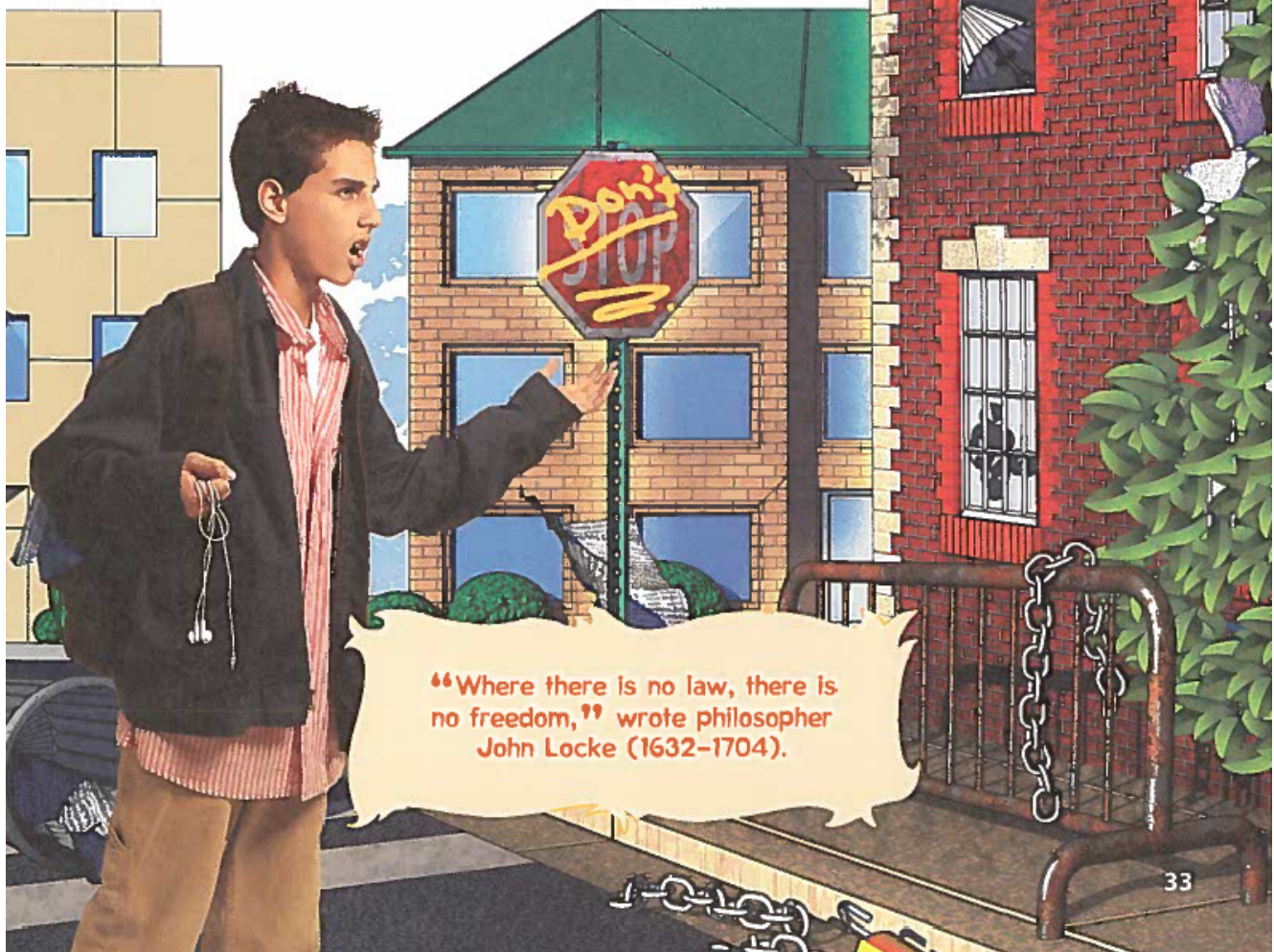
to love God, others, and ourselves by keeping the commandments and living as disciples of Jesus.

No more laws! Michael thought. He was expecting a fun day ahead now that there were no more laws in his hometown in the county of Lawless. Just the night before, the town council had voted to do away with all the laws in town. Michael laughed to himself, thinking that he didn't even have to take the bus to school if he didn't feel like it. Maybe he would even skip school altogether and go break some laws—wait, there were no laws to break! Michael laughed again as he went to grab his bike . . .

But when he got to the bike rack, he found that his bike chain was cut and his bike had been stolen! That wasn't cool. *I guess I'll have to walk*, he thought. So, he put on his headphones to listen to music as he walked. But within minutes someone walked by, grabbed his music player, and took off with it. "Hey!" he shouted. "Get back here!" But it was no use. There were no laws to protect him anymore or to guide anyone else . . .

Activity Imagine the rest of Michael's day in Lawless County and write about it here.

In what ways do the laws that you follow each day help to make life better or happier for you?



BELIEVING...

Following God's law leads to peace, love, and joy.

It might seem that life would be more fun without laws. But, **in reality, each day many of the rules or laws that we encounter help to make things safer or better for us.** And, ideally, all the laws and rules that we follow should help us to live up to our best potential as human beings. That's what God, above all, wants—what's best for us. God loves us and wants us to be able to live in his image, with peace, love, and joy in our lives.

As we can read in the Book of Exodus, when God gave his law to Moses on Mount Sinai, God made a covenant, or agreement, with Moses and the Israelites. God promised Moses that he would be their God, and they would be his people. He told Moses that to keep this covenant relationship the people had to live by the Ten Commandments. And, after Moses shared God's laws with the people, they agreed to follow these laws.

The Ten Commandments are the law of God's covenant. Even Jesus Christ, God's only Son, who became one of us, accepted this law as his guide. By the way he lived his earthly life Jesus showed his disciples how to live their covenant relationship with

The Ten Commandments	
I	I am the LORD your God: you shall not have strange gods before me.
II	You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain.
III	Remember to keep holy the LORD's Day.
IV	Honor your father and your mother.
V	You shall not kill.
VI	You shall not commit adultery.
VII	You shall not steal.
VIII	You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.
IX	You shall not covet your neighbor's wife.
X	You shall not covet your neighbor's goods.

love God with entire being

love your neighbor as yourself

God, how to act justly, and how to love God, themselves, and others. And, when Jesus shared God's love, it was always within the context of living by God's law. Jesus told his followers, **"Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have come not to abolish but to fulfill"** (Matthew 5:17).

The Ten Commandments explain the ways in which we can be faithful to the loving, covenant relationship into which God has called humankind throughout the ages. And as Jesus' disciples today we are called to follow the Ten Commandments, living out our covenant with God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.



The law within us

The natural law, the law of God, within us, enables us to sense what is good and what is evil. The commandments express in words the natural law that God has already placed within us. And "the natural law is a participation in God's wisdom and goodness. . . . It expresses the dignity of the human person and forms the basis of his fundamental rights and duties" (CCC, 1978). **Society is called to base its laws on the natural law, found in the commandments, for this law comes from God, helps us to know right from wrong, and expresses our dignity.**

CATHOLIC IDENTITY

What is an example of how following God's law can help people to live up to their full potential as human beings?

Activity Imagine that a new community is being established. What would be your top five laws to help the people of this new community live in peace and happiness? How do your laws reflect the Ten Commandments?

Jesus calls us to conversion.

Many of us may think that happiness is just something that “happens” to us if and when we get the things that we want. Possessions, pleasure, luxury, power, or fame can bring us happiness, but is that the happiness that brings us lasting joy?

In one of his parables, Jesus told his disciples about a man who had two sons. In the story the younger son asked his father for his share of the family’s fortune. Maybe this young man was looking for happiness. But certainly he wanted something more from life than what he had. And when his father gave him his inheritance he set off to live life on his own. Would it be a happy, carefree life? Maybe for a while, but after the young man spent all his money, he realized that the things that had brought him happiness were gone. He was hungry and alone. He wanted to go home, even if it was only to be treated as a hired worker.

So, the young man decided that he would journey back and tell his father, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you” (Luke 15:18). When the father saw his son coming, he ran to him and greeted him. The father was full of love and forgiveness. The son admitted that he had sinned against his father, but the father quickly embraced him. The father made a feast and invited all to celebrate the return of his son, saying, “This son of mine was dead, and has come to life again; he was lost, and has been found” (Luke 15:24).

In this parable, the younger son’s actions show his conversion. He turned back to his father. He was sorry and was forgiven. He again had the opportunity to share in his father’s life and love. And, in this parable, the father’s actions remind us of God’s mercy. God waits for us to come back to him. God wants us to experience the lasting joy of his presence. And he rejoices when we decide to turn back to him and accept his love.

The Parable of the Prodigal Son

parable = short story Jesus used with his disciples to explain his message



The Return of the Prodigal Son, Lionello Spada (1576-1622)

Jesus called his first disciples to conversion, turning back to God with all one’s heart. And

Faith Word
conversion

he calls us, his disciples today, to continual conversion, too. Jesus leads us to God our Father, inviting us to change our lives and turn to God completely. Our lifelong conversion involves a constant change of heart, since “the heart is the

place of decision . . . the place of truth, where we choose life or death” (CCC, 2563). And through God the Holy Spirit we are given the desire to change and grow. We are given the grace to begin again. We can find a new life of happiness, sharing in God’s life and love each day. We can look forward to the lasting joy of eternal salvation.

Activity Rewrite the parable about the younger son as if it were taking place in today’s world. Take turns reading or performing your modern-day versions of the parable. Discuss the way conversion is shown in each parable.

BELIEVING...

Following Jesus' teachings leads to true happiness.

How does God's law lead us to happiness?

As Catholics, knowing the laws and teachings of our faith helps us to love the good things of the world properly. That is the whole point of our moral life as followers of Jesus Christ—learning to love all good things in all the right ways. For each of us, the greatest challenge of the moral life is in discovering how to do this, because by doing this we can find *true* happiness.

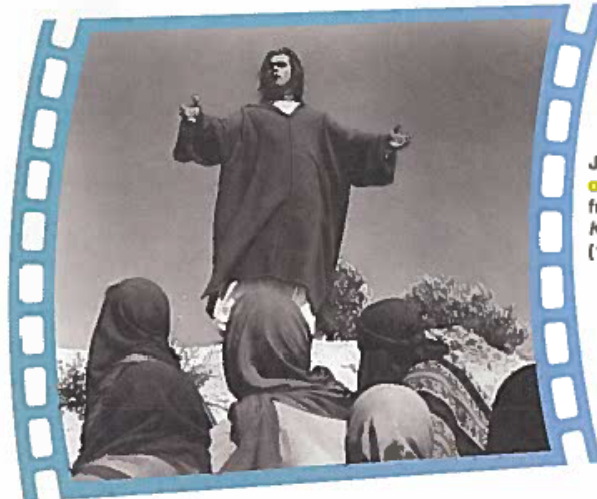
One day, while teaching on a mountainside, Jesus told us what true happiness is and what we must do to find it. He said:

"Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are they who mourn,
for they will be comforted.
Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the land.
Blessed are they who hunger and thirst
for righteousness,
for they will be satisfied.
Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.
Blessed are the clean of heart,
for they will see God.
Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God.
Blessed are they who are persecuted for
the sake of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."
(Matthew 5:3–10)

Jesus taught about the blessings, the fulfillment of promises, that come to those who follow his example of living and trusting in God's care. Jesus' teaching is called the *Beatitudes*. In the Old Testament when people were faithful to God they were called *blessed*. Each of the Beatitudes expresses the message that we will be blessed, or happy, when we are faithful to God. And when we are patient, kind, respectful, and forgiving, when we recognize our dependence on God and live as he wants us to live, when we do not desire material possessions but fill our hearts with love for God and others, we are living out that faithfulness. We are following Jesus' example of living and trusting in God's care.

When we live out the message of the Beatitudes, we can find true happiness in God. This happiness is not just something for the future, for after we die, but something for today. By living as Jesus' disciples, we experience God's friendship and love each day, as we work to spread God's Kingdom here on earth and look forward to lasting joy—the happiness of the kingdom in heaven. As it is explained in the Catechism, happiness is found "in God alone, the source of every good and of all love" (1723).

Activity Discuss how Jesus' message is the same or different from media messages you hear about finding happiness in your daily life.



Jesus' Sermon on the Mount from the movie *King of Kings* (1961)

A perfect world?

Media and popular culture seem to be obsessed with the idea of a "perfect world." There are movies and books with plots about perfect worlds. There are even video games where entire realities and characters can be created according to one's idea of perfection. Can you name some? Why do you think so much time and effort are dedicated to creating these imaginary perfect worlds? How can following the Ten Commandments and the Beatitudes help you to make our world a more perfect place?

Following Jesus means loving as he did.

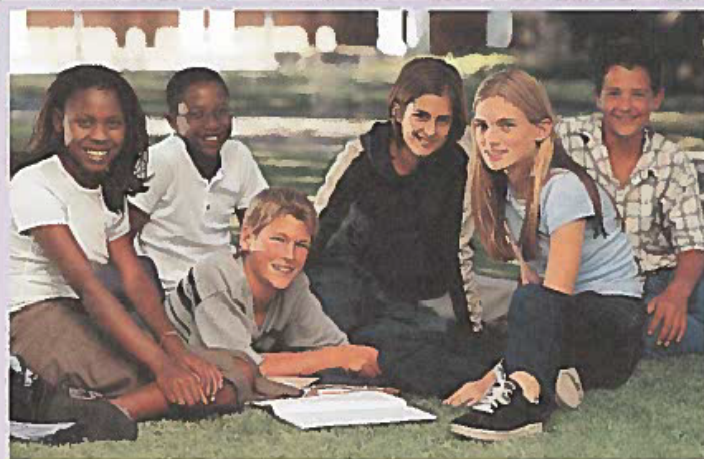
In Jesus Christ, the second Person of the Blessed Trinity, God fully revealed himself. Jesus treated all people equally and respected the dignity of each person. He cared about the human rights of all people. **He protected people who could not protect themselves. He spoke out for the freedom of all people and especially for those who were treated unjustly. He listened to those who were lonely and went out of his way to help people in need.** And through Jesus we learn of the great love God the Father has for all people. Jesus was a perfect example of God's unconditional love—offered even when people did not respond to it.

So, it is not surprising that on the night before he died, Jesus told his disciples, **"I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another. This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another"** (John 13:34–35). This command from Jesus to his disciples is known as the **New Commandment**. Jesus wanted his disciples to love as he loved and to act as they knew he would act so that everyone they met would know him through them. And, in living out this commandment, they would be recognizable as his disciples.

Through the **New Commandment** Jesus called his disciples to live by the Ten Commandments, not just out of obedience, but out of love. Thus, Jesus taught his disciples that God's love and the call to respond to God's love are the bases for truly being able to live out God's law. He taught that all the laws and teachings he had given were to be lived in love—the kind of love with which he had loved them. And this is a very challenging kind of love—one that respects the human rights of others and values everyone's human dignity unconditionally.

Faith Word

New Commandment



Jesus calls each of us as his disciples today to live the New Commandment, loving as he loved us. **For "the entire Law of the Gospel is contained in the 'new commandment' of Jesus, to love one another as he has loved us"** (CCC, 1970). And it is through the example of Jesus' life that we find the way he wants us to love: praying and worshiping God, valuing each person's life, seeking peace and justice, living with honesty and integrity, appreciating God's creation, cherishing family and friends, caring about the good of the community, defending people's rights, and including everyone

without exception. By the way we live, we too must be recognizable as Jesus' disciples.

“The entire Law of the Gospel is contained in the ‘new commandment’ of Jesus, to love one another as he has loved us.”
(CCC, 1970)

Activity Discuss what the world would be like if everyone truly followed Jesus' New Commandment. What is one thing your group can do today to bring about this kind of world?

RESPONDING...

Recognizing Our Faith

Recall the question at the beginning of this chapter: *Why do I need to follow laws?* Design a screensaver that uses a catchy slogan to express the importance of following God's law.

Living Our Faith

What is one way you can show your love for God and others by following the commandments and the teachings of Jesus? Make a commitment to do so this week.

Saint Ignatius of Loyola



Saint Ignatius of Loyola was **born into a wealthy, noble Spanish family**. He **was not very religious**. But his life changed when he received a severe leg injury as a soldier battling the French army in 1521. Unable to walk, he spent time reading while he recovered from his injury. **One of the books that**

Partners in FAITH

he read was about Christ and the saints. Ignatius began to reflect upon the role of Christ in his life. He decided to make some changes in his life, making an effort to follow God's law.

After recovering from his injury, Ignatius made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem where **he spent time in a spiritual retreat**. While on this pilgrimage **he developed a method of prayer known as the Spiritual Exercises**. He studied theology and was ordained a priest in 1537. In 1540 **he founded the Society of Jesus, or Jesuits, men who live in service to God and God's greater glory.**

The Church remembers Saint Ignatius of Loyola, **the patron saint of spiritual retreats**, on July 31.

What changes might you make in order to more fully follow God's law?



For additional ideas and activities, visit www.weliveourfaith.com.

Putting Faith to Work

Talk about what you have learned in this chapter:



We know that by following Jesus we can be faithful to God's law and find true happiness.



We accept the commandments as the law of God's covenant.



We love God, others, and ourselves by keeping the commandments and living as disciples of Jesus.

Decide on ways to live out what you have learned.



ENCOUNTERING GOD'S WORD



“If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love.”
(John 15:10)

- ➔ **READ** the quotation from Scripture.
- ➔ **REFLECT** on the following question:
How can keeping God's commandments bring about love in the world?
- ➔ **SHARE** your reflections with a partner.
- ➔ **DECIDE** on one way you can truly live out God's commandments this week.

Underline the correct answer.

1. Jesus called his first disciples to (covenant/conversion/community), which is turning back to God with all one's heart.
2. Each of the (Beatitudes/Ten Commandments/parables) expresses this message: We will be blessed, or happy, when we are faithful to God.
3. God made a (covet/conversion/covenant) with Moses and the Israelites.
4. The teaching "Love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another" (John 13:34) is known as the (Beatitudes/New Commandment/Ten Commandments).

Short Answers

5. How can we live out the New Commandment? We can live out the New Commandment by loving and acting as Jesus did (see page 37).
6. Name the teaching of Jesus that tells us what true happiness is and what we must do to find it.
To find true happiness we need to live out the Beatitudes.
7. What do we call the law of God's covenant? _____
The law of God's covenant is called the Ten Commandments.
8. In Jesus' parable about the man with two sons, whose actions remind us of God's mercy?
The father's actions in Jesus' parable about the Prodigal Son remind us of God's mercy.

9-10. ESSAY: Based upon what you have learned in this chapter, explain how true happiness is found. Each of the Beatitudes expresses the message that we will be blessed, or happy, when we are faithful to God. And when we are patient, kind, respectful, and forgiving, when we recognize our dependance on God and live as He wants us to live, when we do not desire material possessions but fill our hearts with love for God and others, we are living out that faithfulness. We are following Jesus' example of living and trusting in God's care. When we live out the message of the Beatitudes, we can find true happiness in God (p.36).