

Helping Children Understand the Ten Commandments





A Trip to the Zoo

“God is the One who makes you and us strong in Christ. God . . . put his mark on us to show that we are his, and he put his Spirit in our hearts to be a guarantee for all he has promised” (2 Corinthians 21, 22, NCV).

The sun shining on Kaitlynn and Cameron was making them really hot!

“Mom, the lions are neat. But—” Kaitlynn began.

“It’s hot,” Cameron finished, running his hands through his hair. “Really hot. Can we please go somewhere where there is a little shade?”

Dad and Mom looked at the twins. They were having a wonderful time at the zoo. All morning they had been watching the animals that God had created. They had seen animals that they had not seen before, like the manta rays that swam in their own pool.

Cameron and Kaitlynn had been excited to get to go into the exhibit and touch them. They felt slippery and gooey and leathery. Of course, they had washed their hands well before and after petting the cool sea creatures.

But now it was afternoon, and the sun was turning everything hot. Taking a break in the shade sounded like a good idea.

“I think I know just the spot.” Dad had the zoo map out and was studying it. “I think it should be just around that bend.” Dad started walking and the others followed.

They turned the corner and there was the shade. Dad was right. The farmyard exhibit contained all kinds of things: goats, ponies,

llamas, a few ducks, a baby cow, and some chickens. There was also a lot of shade and a few benches scattered around.

"We can sit over there," Dad pointed at a nearby bench, "and rest a while. Then you two

can go in and see the baby animals. I think you even get to feed some of them if you want."

"The llamas first." Cameron plopped down by his father and looked at the hairy creatures before him. Their long necks and long eyelashes made them look funny.

"I want to feed the goats. Look at how they are bumping up against people, trying to get attention." Kaitlynn smiled at Mom who was pulling bottles of water from the small cooler bag Dad had been carrying.

"Here, drink one of these, and you'll feel better." Mom handed the bottles to the twins and then to Dad. "See, the animals have lots of water on these hot days too."

It was true. There were watering troughs all around for the goats and llamas. The baby cow was standing under a big tree near the pony, and even some of the hens were perched on the fence where the leafy shade protected them from the hot sun.

Suddenly, Kaitlynn giggled. "Look at the babies." She pointed as several fluffy chicks scattered out from under the protection of their mother's wings.

"I count six of them!" Cameron laughed. "How did she get them all under there like that?"

"Mothers can be very creative." Dad smiled at Mom, and Kaitlynn saw him wink at her.

Mom smiled too. "I guess we can be when we have to be. But mother hens often gather their babies under their wings like that. Then they stay so still that no one will know the chicks are hiding. It is a way to keep them safe. She peeps, and the little ones come right to her and she tucks them safely in."

"I know someone else that likes to do that," Dad said, looking at each of the twins.

"Who, Dad?" Kaitlynn looked puzzled.

"God."

"God? He doesn't have wings," Cameron said.

Dad laughed. "No, I guess He doesn't. But He does say that He wants to gather us under His wings."

"I don't get it," Kaitlynn spoke first.

"Me neither," Cameron added.

"It's in Mathew. When Jesus was looking over Jerusalem, the Bible says He was weeping. He said He longed to gather His people together as a hen gathers her chicks, but they were not willing," Mom explained

"Why was Jesus crying?" That made Kaitlynn feel pretty bad.

"Jesus was crying because He knew most of the people wouldn't listen to Him. They hadn't listened to the prophets He had sent. And they weren't going to listen to Him even though He was going to die to make them—and us—His again."

Cameron walked to the fence and looked at the chicks. They were running around peeping at each other and pecking the ground looking for something to eat. He was thinking about what Mom had just said.

"So, God is like our mother?" Cameron

looked at his dad. It was hard to see God as a mother. Cameron had always thought about Him as his heavenly Father.

Mom laughed out loud. So did Dad.

"Well, not like that. That is the picture Jesus used and He definitely was a man when He used it. He chose that picture because He wants to protect us like a hen does her chicks. He used pictures we can understand. You can see how the hen loves her chicks and wants to keep them near." Mom hugged Kaitlynn.

"Yeah, I get it. But I still don't know why He was crying. Why wouldn't the people listen to Him and the prophets? We love Jesus. Didn't they?"

"Some of the people did. But most didn't. Their picture of God

was confused by many rules about how to please Him. And they wanted to do things their own way just as the Israelites did.

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"Remember how God led the Israelites through the sea and was leading them to the Promised Land? He gave them the Ten Commandments to remind them of what He had done for them

and teach them how to live happy lives. The commandments were so important that God wrote them on stone with—"

"His own finger. I remember." Cameron said excitedly.

"Right. To remind them of His love and protection and promises. But almost before God's voice had stopped ringing in their ears, they got Aaron to

make them the golden calf to worship."

"But aren't the commandments just a list of things that we can't do? Like steal," Kaitlynn said.

"There is much more to them than that. Did you know they are a reflection of God's character?" Dad asked.

"So, when God tells us not to steal, it means

He gets mad at us if we do. Because He doesn't steal." Kaitlynn's brow wrinkled.

Mom and Dad looked at each other.

"No, honey. I mean, yes. God doesn't want us to steal. He doesn't steal. You're right about that. But the commandments aren't given to us to be a measuring stick to see if we are good enough for heaven. Nobody is that good. That's why Jesus had to die," Mom said, shaking her head.

"The commandments are not negative. They are promises. Like God is saying, 'If you let Me, I'll make you into someone who wouldn't think of stealing,' " Dad explained.

"Wow! That's really different. I never thought of them like that." Kaitlynn looked again at the hen who was calling out to her chicks. "So God loves us and wants us to be like Him. And the commandments are a promise that He will make us like Him, if we let Him."

"Exactly," Mom and Dad said together.

"But they are more than just words. Like when He says not to steal, He isn't just talking about stealing something like someone's money. It means things like time and talents." Mom stood up and stretched.



"I think I see what you mean. But—" Kaitlynn began.

"What honey?" Mom asked.

"Can you explain them again? I never thought of them as promises. And I never thought about them having another meaning besides just the words. I'd like to learn more."

"Sure honey. I think that's a great idea. Let's spend some time talking about them and learning about God's character. I think you'll see just how much God loves you." Dad stood and stretched too.

"But first, can we feed the llamas?" Cameron was already headed to the gate.

This time, everyone laughed together.



Teaching Tips

1. Talk about civil (governmental) laws that protect us. Why are the laws helpful? How do the laws help us live with one another? God wrote His commandments not only to protect us, but to show us that we are loved and to promise us something better. What are some of your family's rules? Do they take the needs of everyone into consideration? Why is that important? Make a poster out of your most important family rules. Post it where everyone can read it.
2. Have your children stand in front of a large mirror. Ask them what they see. Write down their responses. Have they compared themselves to others? Talk about how God didn't give the commandments to use as a measuring stick but as promises. Go back over their lists and ask, "What do you think God sees when He looks at you?"
3. Read one of the shorter of the Ten Commandments aloud to your children. Ask, "What do you think this commandment means?" If you read, "Do not steal," they probably will say things such as "Don't take a toy that doesn't belong to you," or "Don't steal things at a store." Remind them that the commandments have deeper meanings than just the literal. Explore the deeper meaning by asking questions, such as "How can gossiping about someone be a form of stealing?"
4. Begin memorizing the Ten Commandments by learning the preamble: "Then God spoke all these words: 'I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt where you were slaves.' " (Exodus 20:1–2, NCV).