A Law for God’s People

Summary and Goal
God had delivered His people out of bondage in Egypt. In this session, we will see another act of God’s grace that was easy for the Israelites to miss and easy for us to miss today as well: the giving of the law. The Israelites had been slaves in Egypt, following their masters and their masters’ laws. But now they were free, and the people needed to know how to live as a people to bring God glory and get along with one another. This was God’s intention with the law, evidenced in the Ten Commandments. In this session, we will see God’s purpose for giving the law and our inability to keep the law, even a single commandment. But we will also see that God had a different plan—a better plan—for our obedience.

Session Outline
1. God’s law reveals His love for His people (Ex. 19:3-6; 20:1-2).
2. God’s law reveals how to worship and honor Him (Ex. 20:3-8).
3. God’s law reveals how to love one another (Ex. 20:12-17).

Session in a Sentence
God gave the law to reveal how we are to live rightly with Him and others.

Christ Connection
The law reveals how we are to live properly in relationship with God and others, but because of sin, it is impossible to keep. Jesus, the sinless Savior, is the only One who has kept the law of God perfectly, and we are credited with His righteousness when we trust in Him.

Missional Application
Because Jesus has fulfilled the law in our place, we are now free to please God and display His redemptive purpose in our relationships with others.
Group Time

Introduction

SAY: Have you ever seen a “Do Not Touch” sign? When many of us see a sign like this, we have the same reaction: We want to do the very thing the sign forbids. We want to reach out and touch this forbidden object! If the sign were not there, we probably would feel no draw to do so, but when we read the sign, something deep within us stirs and we almost cannot help ourselves.

INTERACT: Ask your group the opening questions on page 93 in the DDG.

What are some signs or rules that are difficult to follow? Why?
(be prepared to give answers of your own to jump-start the conversation)

EXPLAIN: Reference the paragraph in the DDG (p. 93) as you explain why we have the inclination to break rules that are set before us. Identify the bad news and the good news associated with the law God has given us.

Why do we struggle with something as simple as a “Do Not Touch” sign? What does this reveal about us? It means that we are all wired to want to do what is forbidden. It is part of the human condition. We are geared toward disobedience because we are all sinners. Our inclination to break rules doesn’t reveal a flaw with the rules, although some may indeed be flawed. Rather, our inclination to break rules reveals the flaw within each of us because of the sinful nature we inherited from our first parents, Adam and Eve.

• Our inherited sinful nature is the very reason we need the law of God. The law is a standard set before us that reveals how to live in a way that pleases God. But at the same time, it reveals our inability to keep the law in our own strength. That’s the bad news.

• The good news: When we repent of our sin and trust in Christ, the law goes from being our enemy to being our friend. The gospel helps us see the law for what it truly is—a constant reminder showing our need for Jesus and a guidebook for how we can please God and live at peace with others.

SUMMARIZE: In this session, we will see God’s purpose for giving the law and our inability to keep the law, even a single commandment. But we will also see that God had a different plan—a better plan—for our obedience.

For additional teaching options and other resources, please visit www.GospelProject.com/additional-resources.
**Point 1: God’s law reveals His love for His people (Ex. 19:3-6; 20:1-2).**

**READ:** Ask a volunteer to read Exodus 19:3-6; 20:1-2 (DDG p. 94).

3 Moses went up the mountain to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain: “This is what you must say to the house of Jacob and explain to the Israelites: 4 ‘You have seen what I did to the Egyptians and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. 5 Now if you will carefully listen to me and keep my covenant, you will be my own possession out of all the peoples, although the whole earth is mine, 6 and you will be my kingdom of priests and my holy nation.’ These are the words that you are to say to the Israelites.”

1 Then God spoke all these words: 2 I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the place of slavery.

**EXPLAIN:** Compare God’s law to parents’ rules, how both are for our good.

- It can be difficult for children to see how their parents’ rules are for their good. Children lack the ability to understand that eating vegetables, going to bed early, and doing homework are all good for them. Sure, they aren’t nearly as fun as the alternatives, but neither are being sick, tired, and doing poorly in school. As we entered into adulthood, we began to understand the bigger picture of our parents’ rules. We began to see how their rules were for our good.

- God’s law is the same way. God gave the law to Israel as a gift of grace. It was for their own good, whether or not they realized that. God stepped in to show His people how they were to live. He gave them the law so they would understand how to operate as His people with one another and so that they would be set apart from the pagan nations around them.

**READ** the following paragraph in the DDG (p. 94).

As we read through the law of Moses—the Ten Commandments and the other hundreds of commands given in the first few books of the Old Testament—we see how exhaustive it is. God’s law can be overwhelming. This is why God was careful to establish the context for His law: His love in action (Ex. 19:4; 20:2). God was not a distant god, as the Egyptian gods were. Instead, God was in relationship with His people. The law was part of the gracious provision He had been showering upon them.

**INTERACT:** Ask your group the following question.

What are some ways you have seen that God’s law is for our good? (be prepared to give an answer of your own to jump-start the conversation)
FILL IN THE BLANKS: Provide group members with the answers for the call-outs in their DDG (p. 94) as you explain the distinction between **general revelation** and **special revelation**, noting that God’s law falls into the category of special revelation.

- The nations around the Israelites had access to God’s **general revelation**—God revealing Himself to all people through His creation. Everyone, even the Egyptians behind them, could see God’s fingerprints all around them. You can know *of* God from general revelation, but you cannot *know* Him. As such, general revelation provides us with enough knowledge to be condemned for rebelling against our Creator (Rom. 1:20) but not enough to save us, to know how we can be in relationship with Him.

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**General Revelation:** Refers to God revealing Himself through His **creation** and through the human **conscience**. It provides enough knowledge about God for us to be held **accountable** for suppressing God’s truth in unrighteousness.

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**Essential Doctrine “General Revelation”:** General revelation refers to God revealing Himself through His **creation** (Ps. 19) and through the human **conscience** (Rom. 2). Knowledge about God through general revelation is limited because it only communicates general knowledge about God and His character. We can look at the vastness and fine-tuning of the universe and recognize that God is all-powerful and wise, or look inward to our innate sense of right and wrong and know there is a moral lawgiver in the universe. General revelation is not sufficient for understanding how to know God or be saved, but it provides enough knowledge about God for us to be held **accountable** for suppressing God’s truth in unrighteousness (Rom. 1–2).

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- God’s law was an example of **special revelation**—God revealing Himself directly to people through His Word. God’s law was given for our good, telling us how to live, but we also need to understand that it tells us more: It tells us about the lawgiver Himself and how we can be in a right relationship with Him. God chose to reveal Himself in this special way to His people because He loved them (Deut. 7:7-8).

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**Special Revelation:** Refers to God revealing Himself to humanity through **historical events**, **His Word**, and through **Jesus Christ**. Because God has revealed Himself in this way, we can know Him—through a saving relationship with Him in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

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**Essential Doctrine “Special Revelation”:** Special revelation refers to God revealing Himself to humanity through **historical events**, **His Word**, and through **Jesus Christ**. Through special revelation, human beings learn about God’s character, His will, His purpose for creation, and His plan of redemption. Special revelation shows us the nature and character of God, and because God has revealed Himself in this way, we can know Him—through a saving relationship with Him in the person and work of Jesus Christ.
Point 2: God’s law reveals how to worship and honor Him (Ex. 20:3-8).

SAY: During their time in Egypt, the Israelites learned about worship from the wrong people—the Egyptians. If God was going to have a special people for Himself, they had to learn how to worship Him. This is why the first four of the Ten Commandments concern the worship of the one true God.

READ Exodus 20:3-8 (DDG p. 95).

3 Do not have other gods besides me.
4 Do not make an idol for yourself, whether in the shape of anything in the heavens above or on the earth below or in the waters under the earth. 5 Do not bow in worship to them, and do not serve them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the fathers’ iniquity, to the third and fourth generations of those who hate me, 6 but showing faithful love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commands.
7 Do not misuse the name of the Lord your God, because the Lord will not leave anyone unpunished who misuses his name.
8 Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy:

PACK ITEM 10: THE TEN COMMANDMENTS: Pass out copies of this handout to group members, and explain what the first four commandments meant for the worship of God’s people.

• First Commandment: God wanted to make clear to His people that He wasn’t going to share His glory with a host of other deities, as the Egyptian gods did. The Israelites needed to understand that God was to be the exclusive recipient of their worship.

• Second Commandment: God was not going to be portrayed by any image the people could make, as the Egyptian gods were. God is higher than anything humans can create and mold. Instead, He is to be worshiped as He is, not as an image of what people can create.

• Third Commandment: God’s name was to be revered, not used flippantly. The very name of God revealed in Exodus 3 was to strike the people with a deep sense of reverence and awe.

• Fourth Commandment: Following the pattern of God in the creation, the people were to set aside one day of the week—the Sabbath—as an act of devotion and worship to God.
The people of Israel needed God to reveal to them His expectations for worship because they would not have known them any other way. In fact, the human instinct is to do the opposite of what God commanded. We are idolaters; it is our nature to worship other gods—pretty much everything except God Himself. But God is a unique God deserving of worship unique to Him.

INTERACT: Ask your group the following question.

What are some of the wrong ways we can worship God today? (worship in ways that please us and seem right to us without consideration of God's expressed will; neglecting the gathering of the church; trying to worship with unconfessed sin; worshiping a god who resembles us instead of the God of the Bible)

EXPLAIN: Use the second paragraph in the DDG (p. 95) to show that worship goes beyond what we do in corporate gatherings. We need to consider our worship of God in every moment of our lives.

When we think of worship, we most often think of our worship gatherings, and that is good, but worship is not just something we choose to participate in. We are, at our core, worshipers, for that is who God created us to be—His worshipers. The problem is that far too often we find ourselves worshiping the wrong things with our lives instead of worshiping God. With the first four commandments He gave, God wanted Israel, and us, to understand that He is our good God deserving of our worship and honor as our Creator and as our Savior, ultimately because of His provision of His Son.

Commentary: We are not to make any idols, even if those objects are intended to aid in the worship of God; this means we must put to death our own need to understand God fully. We create idols because we want to grasp God, both literally and figuratively. We want to understand Him. We want to know all of who He is and what He does. Having unanswered questions troubles and frustrates us. But God is infinite. He is beyond our understanding. We will never be able to put Him in a box and close the lid. Instead, we must sacrifice our need to know all we want to know, all we feel we need to know, and instead live by faith as we follow and worship the one true God.
Point 3: God’s law reveals how to love one another (Ex. 20:12-17).

PACK ITEM 11: LOVE GOD, LOVE NEIGHBOR: Use this poster to explain how the Ten Commandments are often thought of in two sections, or “tables” as they are often called. The first table is composed of four laws on how we are to love God and worship Him. These are also commonly called the vertical commands, addressing our relationship with God. The second table has the horizontal commands, which are concerned with how we relate with one another.

READ Exodus 20:12-17 (DDG p. 96).

12 Honor your father and your mother so that you may have a long life in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.
13 Do not murder.
14 Do not commit adultery.
15 Do not steal.
16 Do not give false testimony against your neighbor.
17 Do not covet your neighbor’s house. Do not covet your neighbor’s wife, his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

PACK ITEM 10: THE TEN COMMANDMENTS: Use this handout to explain the horizontal commands. Note that our relationship with God is paramount, but we also need to know how to live with one another.

- **Fifth Commandment:** If we love our parents, we will give them the honor they are due. This doesn’t mean we will always agree with them, but it means we will always respect and revere them as the ones God appointed as stewards of our souls.
- **Sixth Commandment:** If we love our neighbor, we will not seek to harm or kill them.
- **Seventh Commandment:** If we love our neighbor, we will not seek to violate their trust or do harm to their marriage by pursuing an adulterous relationship with their spouse.
- **Eighth Commandment:** If we love our neighbor, we will respect what God has given them. We will not take the property that God has blessed them with.
- **Ninth Commandment:** If we love our neighbor, we will not lie about them to get them in trouble or to take advantage of them.
- **Tenth Commandment:** If we love our neighbor, we will not be envious of their relationships or their property because we love them and are glad to see God provide for them.
EXPLAIN: Use the first paragraph in the DDG (p. 96) to show how love is the fulfillment of the law.

God has created us not for isolation but to be in a community that reflects His triune nature. This is why God needed to tell Israel, and us, what it looks like to honor Him in our relationships with one another. And because our God is love, both Jesus and Paul told us that the fulfillment of the law is found in love (Matt. 22:37-39; Gal. 5:13-14). If we have a brotherly love for others, the horizontal commands given will not feel like a burden; they will be the natural actions of our hearts.

INTERACT: Ask group members the following question.

How do we see God’s character in the Ten Commandments? (God is concerned with holiness in our worship and character; God wants His image bearers to love one another as He is love; God does not want His people to lie because He is a God of truth)

EXPLAIN: Use the content in the DDG (p. 96) to highlight the progression of God’s love given to us in Christ and through us to the world with the gospel.

Obeying the Ten Commandments out of love would be a way for the children of Israel to live counterculturally in their day (Ex. 19:5-6); similarly, we are to be known as followers of Christ by our love for others (John 13:34-35).

• **God loves us.** As recipients of God’s love in Christ, we are both compelled and empowered to love Him (1 John 4:19).

• Because we love God, **we also love those whom He loves.** We love the bride of Christ because He loves and accepts us as His own.

• As the church, **we are to love the people of the world.** We are here for this very purpose—to go into the nations and proclaim the gospel to all who will hear. Just as the works of Christ gave power to the message He proclaimed, our love for others helps to amplify our gospel message so that it might be heard in every last corner of the globe.

INTERACT: Ask your group the following question.

What are some ways we as the people of God can love our unbelieving friends, family, and neighbors while standing resolute on the gospel? (we can be explicit about loving others in the name of Jesus; we can help them when they are in need and weep with them when they are in pain, pointing them to the God of all comfort; we can pray for God to open their hearts to His love in Christ; we can love our fellow church members with the sacrificial love of Jesus)
EXPLAIN: When most people hear the word *law*, their first impression is rarely positive. But the Bible’s view of the law tells a different story. By giving the law to His people, God showed them how they were to live as His people, but Israel failed to live up to God’s standard, just as we do everyday. We all stand condemned in our disobedience. But this is where Jesus comes in. Jesus is the perfect law-keeper. He did what we could never do by fulfilling the law. We are justified by faith alone in the perfect law-keeper, Jesus Christ. When we profess faith in Him, all of His obedience becomes credited to our account. So let us understand the purpose and the need for God’s law while putting our faith in Jesus Christ as the fulfillment of the law.

READ the following missional application statement in the DDG (p. 97), and encourage group members to choose at least one of the options below as a way to respond to the truth of God’s Word.

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Because Jesus has fulfilled the law in our place, we are now free to please God and display His redemptive purpose in our relationships with others.

- How do you tend to see yourself—as a good person in need of a little help from God or as a sinner in desperate need of Him? How does the gospel inform this view?
- What are some specific ways we can exhibit Christ’s love for one another in light of the Ten Commandments?
- How will you love others in the name of Jesus this week so as to point them to Him as the fulfillment of the law for us?

CLOSE IN PRAYER: God, Your law reveals Your righteousness, wisdom, and love. Help us to cherish the law for the light it provides and for its convicting power to illuminate our sin and point us to our need for Jesus. May the law form us as saints, humble us as sinners, and equip us to proclaim Your holiness in our mission to reach the world with the good news of Your Son, the perfect law-keeper and revelation of Your character. Amen.

INSTRUCT: As your group departs, encourage group members to read and respond to the Daily Study devotions in their DDG (pp. 98-100), which build and expand upon the group study. Also advocate for small groups or families to use Encourage One Another (p. 101) for mutual accountability and fellowship grounded upon the foundation of God’s Word.
Daily Discipleship

Throughout the week following the session, use the ideas below to remind and encourage your group members to live as disciples of Jesus Christ. The Daily Study devotions in the DDG (pp. 98-100) will help group members get into God’s Word and study it for themselves. Encourage One Another (p. 101) will help group members and families fellowship with one another with purpose.

Daily Study

Brief daily devotions in the DDG (pp. 98-100) will help group members take initiative in their own discipleship.

- Make sure all group members have access to a Bible to read. Have some Bibles available to give to guests who may need one, or offer to get one and arrange a time to meet to give it and show how to navigate it for the devotions.

- Share the following idea from the devotion for Day 1 as a part of point 2 in the session: Our obedience is tested in the crucible of daily life, when God is not as apparent to us. It is in these moments that the strength of our faith will be revealed, both to ourselves and to the watching world around us.

Consider leading by example and reading the daily devotions yourself with your own DDG. Based on your study, use brief messages throughout the week (group text, email, social media) to encourage your group to keep up with their daily time in God’s Word and to live it out. Here are a couple of examples you can use:

- Day 2: “We do not obey God for His acceptance and love but rather from His acceptance and love bestowed upon us in Christ.”

- Day 3: “If we hold to a proper view of God, we will come to see the commandments not as burdens but as natural expressions of our worship.”

Visit www.GospelProject.com/Blog for additional content and resources you can use to help group members gain more insight into their daily studies. Send group members a link or a portion of a blog post or other content that you believe will be helpful and encouraging for their time in God’s Word.

Encourage One Another

This brief plan for fellowship and accountability in the group member’s DDG (p. 101) will help groups of 2-4 people to meet sometime during the week to reflect on the session and to share how God is working and they are responding. It could also be used for family discipleship with students and children who are using The Gospel Project in their groups.

- Encourage group members to affirm their fellow believers for how they see their lives embodying the righteousness and wisdom of God’s law.

- See yourself as a member of the group who also needs encouragement in the faith, and participate in such a group this week.
Additional Commentary

Point 1: God’s law reveals His love for His people (Ex. 19:3-6; 20:1-2).

“The Lord wanted Israel to be known by what he had done as well as by what they would do. My own possession uses a word that is sometimes translated ‘treasure.’ David used it to speak of his ‘personal treasures of gold and silver’ that he had set aside for building the Lord’s temple (1 Chron. 29:3). In extrabiblical literature a king sometimes used a closely related word to speak positively of a vassal with whom he had a good relationship and where a king advertised himself on his royal seal as the treasured possession of a certain god.”

“The Lord reveals his agenda and plan for the people. His covenant with Abraham was unconditional, but the covenant the Lord will make with Abraham’s descendants is conditional on their obedience to the commands he will give them (19:5a). He demands their obedience and undivided loyalty. All the nations are under the Lord’s control, but he has chosen the descendants of Jacob for a particular purpose: to be distinct and unique from the rest of the nations and testify about the Lord to the world. The historical origin of Israel was unique due to the calling of Abraham and deliverance of the people from slavery in Egypt. The covenant the Lord will make with them at Sinai and the gift of the land will also make them distinct (see Deut. 4:32-34).”

Point 2: God’s law reveals how to worship and honor Him (Ex. 20:3-8).

“To understand this commandment, it helps to see it in its parts. First, the focus is on ‘the name of the Lord your God’ (v. 7). This does not simply mean the name, ‘Lord’ or ‘Yahweh.’ Rather, it has to do with all that is connected to that name. The focus is on God’s essence. God is to be highly valued. He is worthy of the highest honor. This is understood in the fact that God names Himself. We all were given names, whether we like them or not. Only God names Himself, revealing His supreme authority, dominion, and power. Understand what it means to ‘take’ His name in vain. It does not mean to simply speak God’s name; it means to carry or bear God’s name. People who have publicly declared themselves to be followers of God are to exalt God’s reputation by living in a way that honors Him. This command also has the idea of not taking God’s name falsely or using it meaninglessly. This might happen in corporate worship, as people mouth songs without actually thinking about God. As Christians, we bear His name (Acts 4:12; Rom. 10:13; 1 John 5:13). In this way, His reputation is attached to us; as a result, we ought to live for Him and His glory.”
“God’s people are to remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy (20:8). This commandment is connected to the creation story in which the Lord God blesses the seventh day and rests from all his acts of creation (20:9-11; Gen. 2:2-3). The principle here is that God is our fundamental model for behaviour, and we are to follow the patterns he establishes. He rested after his work in creation, and so should his people. This commandment also creates a new order in the community and a new ethics of labour. Every person and working animal is to have one day off a week to rest.”

**Point 3: God’s law reveals how to love one another (Ex. 20:12-17).**

“The first four commandments emphasize our obligations towards God. The six others highlight relationships within the community. Even if all (except the fifth commandment) of the commandments tell us what we should not do, they are far from being negative. Those commandments show us how to truly express love—love for God and love towards others (Leviticus 19:18,34; Deuteronomy 6:5) … [W]hen we love our neighbour, we respect our neighbour’s family, life, and property. The Ten Commandments highlight essential values such as respecting parents. We can understand why it is important because it implies mutual obligations between parents and children and emphasizes the central importance of family in human society. Respecting all men and women as being created in God’s image is reflected in the unity of husband and wife and the sacred bond of sex within marriage. Respecting other people’s property, our neighbour’s name, and his or her rights helps us establish order in society. These laws involve being a true witness before God, the just Judge. These are values on which our societies can build solid foundations.”

“The word translated murder is not a general word for ‘killing,’ and it is not used for killing animals or for killing humans in war or legal execution. Cities of refuge were designated so that anyone who killed another person could run to these cities to avoid being killed in revenge. This also meant that a case of homicide could be properly investigated to determine whether the killing was accidental or premeditated (21:12-14; Num. 35; Deut. 19; Josh. 20).”

**References**


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The Books of Genesis and Exodus are meant to be read together, providing an important clue for our approach to the rest of Scripture. The story begins in Genesis and unfolds with breathtaking speed, but then the pace slows as the rest of the book tells us the story of four generations of the one family through which God promised to bring blessing to the world.

As Genesis winds down, we encounter Joseph, one of Abraham’s great grandsons, and see that God’s promises are not always easy for His people. But through Joseph’s difficulties, we encounter the vital concept of redemption. His life was one of setbacks, frustration, and disappointment. But all the while, we see that God was at work through Joseph’s adversity, not despite it. God brought about redemption for Joseph and his family: God is always bringing glory to Himself and good to His people through their hardships, even by overriding their sins.

Then as we move from Genesis to Exodus, we pass over nearly four hundred years to a time when God’s people are enslaved. The stage is set for an even greater display of God’s desire and ability to redeem His people. When they cry out to God for deliverance from their slavery in Egypt, He provides a rescuer in Moses to free His people and to provide for them.

God’s deliverance of Joseph and the nation of Israel were the early stages of a beautiful crescendo of God’s plan to redeem His people that culminated in Christ Jesus. In Him we have experienced redemption from the slavery of sin and death. As we study these sessions, let us pray that the Holy Spirit stirs our hearts anew so that we are captivated by the love, grace, and mercy of God made known to us in our redemption through Christ so we can share Him with others.
About the Writers

**Matt Chandler** (unit 4, sessions 4-6; unit 5, session 1) is a Lead Pastor at The Village Church, president of Acts 29, and author of several books, including *Take Heart: Christian Courage in the Age of Unbelief*. Matt and his wife, Lauren, have three children: Audrey, Reid, and Norah.

**Jennifer Grisham** (unit 6, sessions 1-2) serves as managing editor and administrator at Doxology & Theology. She’s a graduate of Baylor University and is currently pursuing a masters degree at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

**Andrew Hall** (unit 6, session 3) is the Lead Pastor of Community Bible Church, located in Ilderton, Ontario, Canada. He is a graduate from Southern Seminary. He and his wife, Melanie, have four children: Noelle, Ava, Calvin, and Brita.

**Pat Hood** (unit 5, sessions 2-3) is the Senior Pastor at LifePoint Church in Tennessee. He and his wife, Amy, have five children. Pat is the author of *The Sending Church*, which challenges every church to send and every Christian to live sent.

**Sung Jin Park** (Christmas session) and his wife, Alice, have three kids. He is Associate Professor of Biblical Studies at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and earned a PhD from Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion.

**David Roark** (unit 4, sessions 4-6; unit 5, session 1) is the Communications and Resources Director at The Village Church and writes on faith and culture in notable publications. He and his wife, Taylor, have two daughters: Leigh and Lainey.

**Robert Smith Jr.** (unit 4, sessions 1-3), PhD, is the Charles T. Carter Baptist Chair of Divinity at Beeson Divinity School. He is the author of *Doctrine That Dances* and *The Oasis of God*. He is married to Wanda Taylor-Smith (PhD), and they have four adult children with one in heaven.