

# Lesson 5: Life

## Introduction

This week we're talking about the fifth commandment. We're going to learn about this commandment in three ways.

1. We'll hear the story of Queen Esther, who was put into a position to save her people from being killed and used it.
2. We'll learn about what it means not to kill, and how that extends to helping others live full and whole lives.
3. We'll learn that the commandment not to kill means we change the world by promoting full and abundant life for everyone, everywhere.

## The story of Queen Esther

If you've never read the book of Esther, I definitely recommend it. It is a great story and, honestly, is a pretty easy read. The story centers on the main character, a girl named Esther, and how she finds herself in a position of power that she isn't sure she can use.

See, Esther was an orphan. She was cared for by her uncle, Mordecai, who worked in the palace of the king. One day, after some shenanigans in the court, the king decided to hold a nationwide beauty contest to find a wife. Esther was enrolled in the contest by her uncle Mordecai, and she did really well in all the things. She was beautiful and charming, and the king decided he wanted her to be his queen. So they got married.

Well, at the same time, there was a member of the king's court named Haman. Haman was a jealous and vain man, who wanted the praise of the crowds and the power of being buddies with the king. Part of his position in the government meant that, when he passed by, everyone was supposed to bow down. But Mordecai, who worked in the palace, refused to do so because, as a Jew, he only bowed to God. Remember how Haman was a vain and jealous man? Well, Mordecai not bowing to him really grated on his nerves. A lot.

So Haman figured out why Mordecai wasn't bowing to him. He found out that Mordecai was a Jew, so being the petty and cruel man that he was, Haman decided to punish all the Jews in Persia because Mordecai wouldn't bow to him. He set up a plot to have messages delivered across the kingdom that on a certain day, everyone would rise up and hurt or kill as many Jews as they could find. Cruel, right? The only thing that could stop it was the king's word.

So Mordecai found out about this plot, and he went to Esther. Remember that Esther was the queen, so she could go directly to the King and tell him what was happening. Mordecai told Esther all about how Haman had made plans and sent out messages across the kingdom to have all the Jews hurt or killed on a certain day. But there's one problem: Esther can only go to

the king if the king calls for her, and he hasn't called her for thirty days. She's worried she may not be able to tell him what's happening. But then Mordecai says this really important thing, and I highly recommend highlighting this (it's Ester 4:14), "Who knows? Perhaps you have been called for just such a time as this."

So Esther risks punishment and goes to the king without being asked. She knows that the only thing standing between her people and the evil Haman had planned is her own self. Luckily, the king is delighted to see her, and is happy to hear what she has to say. She has a plan. She asks to have dinner with the king and Haman. The king agrees to it, and they all get together for dinner.

It's during this dinner that the king basically asks Esther, "so what did you *really* want?" It's Esther's moment. She asks the king to spare her life! And when the king is confused, wondering why she would think he was going to have her killed, she reveals Haman's plot. Haman had tricked the king into signing the decree that called on everyone to hurt or kill any Jews they found, and Esther now revealed that she, too, is a Jew. If all Jews were threatened by this decree, then Esther was too. So it was either the King undid Haman's decree, or Esther would be killed too.

The big reveal worked, and the king reversed the decree, and punished Haman for trying to trick him into doing such an awful thing. The details are in the book, but the important lesson that comes out of it is that Esther used her position to save lives. The fact that she went to the king, using the resources and access that she had, is such an important part of the story. It's not enough to simply not kill; Esther had a moral obligation to save others from being killed.

## **What it means not to kill**

You shall not kill. It feels pretty straightforward, right? Don't kill. I hope that is a very easy commandment for all of us to follow, and if it isn't, please come talk to me soon. It covers more than just killing people, though. The commandment not to kill includes other ways that we harm our neighbors.

And we can harm people in a lot of ways besides just physically. We also harm people by hurting them emotionally or hurting them spiritually. Think about the kind of damage that can be done to someone if you spread a rumor about them at school. Or if you've ever experienced bullying, you know how that can harm.

Spiritually, attacking someone's faith or undermining their trust in God can do a lot of harm that just isn't covered if we think killing is limited to the physical act. Making someone doubt their faith, or doing things that make living their faith out impossible, are just as harmful as physically hurting them. Now, this commandment doesn't seem too difficult to fulfill on one

side, but as we're going to find with all the commandments, it's not just about what we're not supposed to do. It's also about what we're called to do.

Martin Luther in his *Small Catechism* explained the fifth commandment as meaning: "We are to fear and love God, so that we neither endanger nor harm the lives of our neighbors, but instead help and support them in all of life's needs." So it's not just a command to hold back from killing others, but a command to support and help our neighbors so that they can have full and productive lives. It means, as Christians, we are called to do more than passively avoid doing evil, but to actively do good.

Think about how you can help and support your neighbor in all of their life's needs. Helping your neighbor in their physical life might look like providing for their basic needs when they can't meet them. It looks like donating to the food shelf or the coat drive, or buying them lunch when their account is empty, or making sure they stay safe and healthy by wearing a mask.

Supporting your neighbor's emotional life might look like standing up to a bully on someone's behalf, or calling out a rumor that you know is not true.

And helping a neighbor's spiritual life might look like praying for them, or encouraging their faith by talking about it with them, or showing your neighbor who God is by the good that you do.

When Esther saved the Jews from being killed, she was following this commandment. It's not just about not killing, but about promoting life. God doesn't want us to do the bare minimum of simply not doing evil in the world. God wants us to do good, to make more goodness in the world, and that looks like following this commandment with its whole meaning.

### **How does it affect the real world?**

Obviously, not killing people has an effect on the real world. I think we can all agree on that. But it's not just a matter of not ending someone's life. Remember that the commandment covers a lot more than that! Imagine how different the world would be if we all took the whole meaning of the commandment seriously, and not just the black-and-white text of "you shall not kill."

If we took the parts seriously about not killing others emotionally, it would mean we were purposefully kind to each other. How easy is it to be cruel to people we don't like, or spread a rumor about someone you maybe don't know that well, or go along with the ways we exclude or bully others? Following the fifth commandment would mean we keep ourselves from doing that kind of harm to others.

And if we took the parts seriously about not killing others spiritually, it would mean we actively support and lift up each other's faith. Rather than judging people for worshipping

differently from us, or praying differently, or believing differently, we would embrace the fact that God is showing up in that. Jesus said that we are called to worship God in spirit and in truth, and it's important for us to recognize that the fifth commandment means we are called to let others worship in spirit and in truth, even when their particular spirit and truth doesn't look the same as ours.

And on top of it all, we should take it seriously that the fifth commandment isn't just about what we're not supposed to do, but more importantly, it's about what we're supposed to do. Think of how much of a difference Esther made by following that part of this commandment. She saved the Jews from being killed because she spoke up. Imagine if we all did that! Imagine if we all did all that we could to make sure everyone—no matter what—was able to live a full and fulfilling life.

It would look like making sure everyone has enough to eat, has a roof over their head, and has clothes on their backs. It would look like no one going without because we would take the positive part of this commandment seriously and actively work to help and support our neighbors in their life's needs. It would look like caring for each other and supporting each other even when we disagree, not excluding people because they're different or new, celebrating the ways we worship differently and constantly living with the reminder that we are all God's children.

The difference the fifth commandment could make if we took the whole thing seriously are so huge that the world would be unrecognizable. And that's a good thing, because it would be unrecognizably better if we considered the fullness of our neighbor's life a priority that God has given us.

Let's review what we learned tonight.

1. We heard the story of Queen Esther, who was put into a position to save her people from being killed and used it.
2. We learned about what it means not to kill, and how that extends to helping others live full and whole lives.
3. We learned that the commandment not to kill means we change the world by promoting full and abundant life for everyone, everywhere.