PREPARING

A. THE SOURCE

Matthew 5:17-20 (NIV) • “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.”

Matthew 5:21, 22 (NIV) • “You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, ‘Raca,’ is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell.”

Matthew 5:43-48 (NIV) • “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

Deuteronomy 6:5, 6 (NIV) • “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts.”

Deuteronomy 32:45-47 (NIV) • “When Moses finished reciting all these words to all Israel, he said to them, ‘Take to heart all the words I have solemnly declared to you this day, so that you may command your children to obey carefully all the words of this law. They are not just idle words for you—they are your life. By them you will live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to possess.’”

Psalm 37:31 (NIV) • “The law of their God is in their hearts; their feet do not slip.”

Psalm 40:8 (NIV) • “I desire to do your will, my God; your law is within my heart.”

Proverbs 3:1, 2 (NIV) • “My son, do not forget my teaching, but keep my commands in your heart, for they will prolong your life many years...
and bring you peace and prosperity.”

Isaiah 51:7 (NIV) • “Hear me, you who know what is right, you people who have taken my instruction to heart: Do not fear the reproach of mere mortals or be terrified by their insults.”

Jeremiah 31:33 (NIV) • “This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time,’ declares the Lord. ‘I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.”

2 Corinthians 3:2, 3 (NIV) • “You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everyone. You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.”

James 4:8 (NIV) • “Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.”

Titus 1:16 (NIV) • “They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him. They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good.”

B. WHAT’S TO BE SAID ABOUT “RULES FOR HEAVEN’S AGENTS”

When Jesus takes on the topic of the Law of God in the Sermon on the Mount, He touches the most sensitive nerve in the religion of the people. The writings, the stories, the Psalms as well as the word of the prophets were all considered to be sacred revelations from God. Some might think that when Jesus said, “You have heard that it was said long ago... but I say” He is going to upend the law of God and hand out some new law. Instead, Jesus shows the fulfillment of the law by coloring in what the law looks like in person. Instead of changing the law to make it easier to obey, He urges people to live the law from their heart. This lesson will be about how the rules of old are portrayed in the person of Christ. In addition to looking at the old law in a new way, we will focus on letting God get the law into our hearts, which is one of His deepest desires.

C. WHERE WE’RE GOING WITH “RULES FOR HEAVEN’S AGENTS”

As a result of this lesson, students will be able to:
1. Discuss the meaning and purpose of the law in Scripture.
2. Develop the idea of “fleshing out” God’s will.
3. Apply the principles of God’s law to real-life scenarios.

D. MATERIALS NEEDED

Beginning • (Activity A) paper, pencils, and scenic pictures (paintings or photographs).

Connecting • Student lessons, Bibles.

Applying • “Fleshing It Out” handout (p. 12).

A. WHERE WE’VE BEEN

Allow 10 minutes at the beginning of class for students to:
1. Share anything that was meaningful to them in this lesson.
2. Engage in a discussion about the topic of the lesson in connection to the belief highlighted this week.
3. Say the Bible memory text either individually or in a group.

Remember: Because the students now study their lesson prior to class, this review is for those sections in the current week’s lesson.

If you have a very large group, have adults available to process this section with smaller groups of students.
B. OTHER SABBATH SCHOOL COMPONENTS

>> Song service
>> Mission emphasis (find a link for Adventist Mission for youth and adults at www.realtimefaith.net)
>> Service project reports

3 BEGINNING

NOTE TO TEACHER: Put together your own program with options from the categories below—Beginning, Connecting, Applying, and Closing. Please keep in mind, however, that the students need to have an opportunity to be interactive (participate actively and with one another) and to study from the Word.

A. BEGINNING ACTIVITY

Get ready • The object of this exercise is to get students to try to capture the beauty of a picturesque scene in only a few words, developing the idea that a picture speaks volumes where words often run short. In a way, Christ coming to “flesh out” the law is like that. Before class, collect several attractive scenic pictures (paintings or photographs).

Get set • Each student (for a larger class, have students work in pairs) is given a picture or painting and a blank piece of paper and will be asked to describe the picture in as much detail as possible using no more than 35 words.

Go • Say: I’m giving each of you a picture, and I don’t want you to let anyone see it. I want you to describe on your piece of paper as best as you can what is on your picture. You can use up to 35 words. Please be as detailed and as careful as you can with your words. After allowing five to 10 minutes for students to write their descriptions, have them form groups of three or four and read their descriptions to the others in the group. Each person can take a turn describing and then showing their picture; discuss what they captured well and what was completely left out. An alternative that may work well with a smaller class is to collect all of the descriptions and display all of the pictures on the wall so everyone can see. Then read each description and see if the students can tell which picture it is. Again, debrief first about what was captured well and then about what was left out.

Debriefing • Ask: How is this exercise like life? What are some things in our lives that are hard to put into words? How is Jesus a picture for us?

B. BEGINNING ACTIVITY

Get ready • This exercise is an old one, but it fits well. It is about communication. Gather the group in a circle and instruct them to be absolutely quiet. They are to simply wait until someone communicates with them; then they are to communicate the message to the person directly on their left. Let them know they will have only one chance to hear the words and only one chance to share the words with the person next to them.

Get set • Gather the students in a circle and instruct them to be silent.

Go • Say: I’m going to give [student’s name] a brief message, and I want her to send it around the circle. One person at a time will be passing it on. You must listen carefully because you will have only one chance to hear it and one chance to say it. There will be no repeating. Please whisper—no one is to speak it out loud. Then whisper to (student’s name): Please lock your door before you go to church. Wait for the message to be whispered around the entire circle.

Debriefing • Ask: How did the communication process go? Where did it break down—if it did? What would be the most efficient way to pass along that message? How does God
communicate His messages to us? What is God’s most efficient means of communication? (the person of Jesus Christ)

C. BEGINNING ILLUSTRATION

In your own words, share the following ideas:

Only about 30 years ago a man in the United States had his horse stolen during the night. When the authorities caught the horse thief, the prosecuting attorney discovered a law still on the books in that particular county—the penalty for stealing a horse was to hang by the neck until dead. The man whose horse had been stolen (jokingly) cried for justice. In fact, the legal system of the United States would not hang a person for stealing a horse today. The law has since been overturned.

A website that lists “dumb laws” does not claim that the silly laws below have been verified, although some have been traced back hundreds of years. Here are a few laws (verified or unverified, you can decide):

In the United Kingdom all English males over age 14 are to carry out two or so hours of longbow practice a week supervised by the local clergy.

In Singapore the sale of gum is prohibited.

Bicycle riders in Mexico City may not lift either foot from the pedals, as it might result in a loss of control. Also, anyone whistling at or annoying a bicycle rider can be arrested.

In France, between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 8:00 p.m., 70 percent of music on the radio must be by French artists.

In Australia only licensed electricians may change a light bulb.

Alabama had a law stating that it is illegal to wear a fake mustache that causes laughter in church.

In Burlingame, California, it is illegal to spit, except on baseball diamonds.

In Florida, if an elephant is left tied to a parking meter, the parking fee has to be paid just as it would for a vehicle.

In Vermont, whistling underwater is illegal, and it is illegal to deny the existence of God. (See www.dumblaws.com.)

While these laws may seem outrageous in our time, if considered in their historical setting, some may seem more logical. In the case of the law about English males over the age of 14 being required to have longbow practice supervised by clergy, the only adults available for such an exercise were clergy, and during times of war all males over 14 were required to be ready to fight. For the time and place, the law made sense. In Singapore, you are not allowed to chew gum because they don’t want you spitting it out on the streets. If you have ever been to Singapore, you know that it is one of the cleanest and most pleasant places to visit.

Say: Today we are going to discuss what Jesus said about God’s law and how He wanted people to relate to it. It may seem as if Jesus is tearing down the law, or undermining it, but He was really trying to do something else.

Debriefing • Ask: What do you think Jesus is trying to say in Matthew 5 about God’s law? What rules (school, home, or community) grow out of widely held beliefs and what rules don’t really make much sense to you? Share why.

A. CONNECTING TO THE KINGDOM

Present the following ideas in your own words:

Agents in God’s kingdom desire to know the King and not simply observe the rules of the kingdom. Most people become part of the kingdom not because of the rules but because they have come to love the King. It’s not hard to see the marks of the King’s character in the rules of the kingdom—if you think about it. This is what Jesus was trying to demonstrate when He challenged the people to look into the law and see the marks of God’s personality in rules He has made.
Say: Think of a great leader that you know personally (at church, school, or in the community) and identify one rule of life they follow. (Example: My grandmother always gave people the benefit of the doubt. If a rumor made its way around town, she would dismiss it immediately as nonsense. She loved the truth!) As the students share qualities of people who lived by certain noticeable rules of life, comment on how the rules people make for themselves, and live by, usually have a lot to do with their personality and character.

While words such as “rules” or “laws” don’t tend to give us the good feelings that “compassion” or “mercy” or “acceptance” gives us, rules do help define relationships. Rules make relationships work. Whether you notice it or not, your friendships have rules, spoken or unspoken. If you betray your friend by telling a confidential secret, you break a rule of trust. If you physically hurt a friend, you break the rule of respect. Rules are part of what makes our relationships work. Think about the rules of some of your relationships. It is when those rules are held deeply in your heart that they become a blessing instead of a burden. That’s what Jesus was trying to show the people while He was on earth. Look at some of the rules in Friday’s “Applying” section of the student lesson and ask, “How can these rules be a burden to someone? How would they be a blessing?”

B. CONNECTING TO THE LESSON ILLUSTRATION

Ask someone beforehand to read or tell the story from Sabbath’s section of the lesson.

Ask: Have you ever seen an X-ray of your bones? What was it like? What difference do you think it made that Christ came in the flesh, as one of us, in order to “show us the Father”?

C. CONNECTING TO LIFE

Pose the following scenario:

A group of young people went door-to-door throughout their community taking a survey of what people thought about Seventh-day Adventists. They discovered that many people believed that Adventists were mainly people who tried to obey a bunch of rules as a way to practice their religion.

Ask: How would you respond to this at the door during an encounter with a community member? What could you do in the community to balance out the perspective of others by your actions? What kinds of service projects might you do to change the perception?

Have the students discuss in groups of two or three how they might respond right there at the door and what they might try to do in that community throughout the year. Then have each group share their ideas with the whole class.

A. APPLICATION ACTIVITY

Either this activity or the activity in the Friday section of the student lesson is appropriate here. The exercises are similar; the principal objective is the same. Divide the students into groups of two to four and give them the handout “Fleshing It Out” (p. 12) to work on in teams. Have each group read Matthew 5:17-20, the verses from the Sermon on the Mount about the law and its new interpretation, and follow the instructions on the handout.

B. APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. If you were to make a list of three rules that were essential to a growing, vibrant church, what would they be?
2. Which Old Testament laws do you think need to be emphasized more today, given how Jesus lived and what He said when He was on earth?
3. How do you think rules lose their importance to people?
4. When have you seen a renewed devotion to God’s Word because of the actions of people?
5. What are some things you can do to better see the person of Christ in the principles of God’s law—both in the Old and New Testament?
6. Agree or Disagree: Most of the rules in the Old Testament are about how to be nice to people. Why or why not? Think of some examples.

**CLOSING**

**SUMMARY**

In your own words, conclude with the following ideas:

God has been trying for centuries to communicate to people what He is like. We have stories of miracles, answered prayers, divine conversations, prophecies come true, and promises about a hopeful future. But in reality, they are just words on a page without a Person to back them up. Whether carved in stone or scribbled on leather skins dating back thousands of years, the words have always been about the person of God. “Don’t have other gods,” “don’t kill,” “don’t steal,” and “don’t lie” are rules, but in Christ we see more. We understand that it is more than the act of doing something wrong—it is also what is in the heart. God wants us to be more like Him: loving, caring, and forgiving. In a way, the more we get to know Christ as a friend, the more the rules actually make sense.

Think about what John said in 1 John 5:3: “This is love for God: to keep his commands. And his commands are not burdensome” (NIV).
## Fleshing It Out

**Directions:** The following passages are straight from the mouth of Jesus Himself. The goal is to answer the questions below for each of the Bible passages. Answer the questions as a group and be prepared to share your responses with your class.

**Matthew 5:21, 22 (NIV)**—“You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, ‘Raca,’ is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell.”

**Matthew 5:27, 28 (NIV)**—“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”

**Matthew 5:31, 32 (NIV)**—“It has been said, ‘Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.’ But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, makes her the victim of adultery, and anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.”

**Matthew 5:33-37 (NIV)**—“Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not break your oath, but fulfill to the Lord the vows you have made.’ But I tell you, do not swear an oath at all: either by heaven, for it is God’s throne; or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. All you need to say is simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.”

**Matthew 5:38, 39 (NIV)**—“You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’ But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also.”

**Matthew 5:43-45 (NIV)**—“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven.”

### Questions

1. What is the old rule Jesus refers to?

2. Does Jesus make the rule harder or easier to follow with His new interpretation? Why or why not?

3. Rank this rule (the new one) on a scale of one to five, with one being easy, and five being extremely difficult.

4. How do you think the people who heard Jesus say this reacted? How do you think they would react today?

Which of the older rules, in your opinion, need to be fleshed out most today?
Sabbath
FOR STUDY

» **Memory Text:** “I delight to do Your will, O my God, And Your law is within my heart” (Psalm 40:8, NKJV).

» **Our Beliefs, no. 19, The Law of God:** “[The Ten Commandments] express God’s love, will, and purposes concerning human conduct and relationships and are binding upon all people in every age. These precepts are the basis of God’s covenant with His people and the standard in God’s judgment.”

» Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, pp. 48-52

FLESHING IT OUT

Some very interesting things often happen at camp. While there is no scientific evidence or statistical data to support this, it still appears to be true.

At the very beginning of an evening meal, junior campers were packed into the cafeteria, filling the hall with a roar of busy noise. At one table eight boys pressed in together, too hungry and ready to devour their meals. One boy named Brendon tore into his food, stopping only long enough to see if they were serving seconds. He was eating so fast that it seemed impossible that he was able to take any breaths.

Leaving his vegetables to the end, he picked up a knife and a fork to reduce the size of his carrots down to more manageable pieces. His right hand gripping the knife, he pressed forcefully on a stubborn carrot.

   It didn’t give. He lunged even harder at the carrot, but his hands, greasy from the French fries, slipped. The carrot flipped, the knife slipped, and the bottom of Brendon’s forearm hit the edge of the table with an awful crack.

   Everyone, stunned by the loud cracking sound, stopped eating, and someone rushed out to get the nurse and a car to take him to the hospital. Time did not seem to be easing the pain. Finally, after what seemed like hours, the doctor began examining the X-rays of Brendon’s arm. The lighted board was filled with the skeleton pictures of his arm. The doctor pointed to the break in the bone and said, “That’s a good one, partner. Did you get bucked off a horse?”

   The fierce encounter with the helpless carrot brought laughter every time it was told and retold.

   All X-rays look similar—a 12-year old boy, a 16-year-old girl, an 8-year old child. Their bones may be different sizes, but they all look the same. Without skin, bones are bones. That’s the thing about skeletons—they have no personality, no individuality, no character.

   Until Christ came in the flesh, we had only a skeletal view of what God was like—The Ten Commandments. After Jesus came, lived, and died, the ancient words of the Old Testament came to life with flesh, muscle, and beauty in the person of Christ.
Sunday

RESPONDING

» Read Matthew 5:17-20.

» Kim loved her sister, but her sister had changed quite a bit as she grew older and went away to college. She once heard her sister’s roommates talking about religion, God, and how they were raised in the church to be loving and caring.

» Kim had listened as these college students questioned the way they were raised. Kim’s sister was quiet—too quiet for Kim. It was clear to Kim that her sister was confused about a lot of things, including her faith in God and the way she had been raised. What do you think Kim could say or do to encourage her sister? What should she focus on?

Monday

BIBLE ANSWERS ON THE LAW OF GOD

» Read Exodus 20:1-17; Romans 8:3, 4; Ephesians 2:8-10.

» In all creation—in every detail of nature—we can see God’s laws at work. He did not set the universe in motion and then walk away and hope everything would figure out how to work. God’s laws will help us know how to get along with each other, with nature, and with Him. If we look closely, we will discover the character of God in everything around us, and in doing so, we will come to see and know God.

» How do God’s laws help you discover who He is and what is in His heart?

Tuesday

REFLECTING

» Read 1 John 3:2.

» It’s pretty clear when you read the Bible that God is interested in finding “law-abiding citizens” for His kingdom. When Jesus came to this earth and walked with His Father in an intimate relationship, He created a bridge for all believers. He showed us how to love God by connecting the dots. You remember the connect-the-dots exercises you did when you were little children? You can’t see the picture—really—until you connect the dots together.

» Every page of Scripture, whether written on a stone or in a book, has had one purpose: To reveal our loving, amazing God to you. Every rule, such as “Don’t steal” or “Respect your parents,” can either be an empty law that becomes irrelevant or it can remind us of the personality of God. God is fair. God is faithful. God loves unconditionally. These traits are visible in the person of Christ and anyone else who practices them. The choice is up to...
you. There is more to the rules than meets the eye. In order to get beyond the rule, you need to discover the heart of the God behind the rule.

**Wednesday**

**BIBLE INSIGHTS**

» Look up the texts below in the New King James Version, then match them with a phrase.

A. Matthew 5:17-20
B. Deuteronomy 6:5, 6
C. Psalm 40:8
D. Proverbs 7:2, 3
E. Jeremiah 31:33
F. 2 Corinthians 3:2, 3
G. Deuteronomy 32:45-47

1. “Set your hearts on all the words which I testify among you today . . .” ____
2. “Till heaven and earth pass away . . .” ____
3. “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart . . .” ____
4. “I delight to do Your will, O my God . . .” ____
5. “You are our epistle . . .” ____
6. “I will put My law in their minds . . .” ____
7. “Keep my commands and live . . .” ____

**Thursday**

**CONNECTING**

» Read 1 John 4:16.

» Review the memory text.

» Before the commandments were ever written on stone, in what form were they visible? Only in one form—the Person of God. The law was summed up in one word: love. That is why the Bible says, “God is love” (1 John 4:16). The rules of the kingdom were simply stated in the amazing personality of the King. God’s greatest desire is for you to know Him, and we know people only by being with them, walking with them, living and learning and experiencing life with them.

» If you find that all you can really see are the rules and all you really feel are the impossible expectations of obedience, then step back for a minute and think about this. What do you suppose God wants? He wants you! He wants you to know Him. Have you failed before? Join the club of every other believer who fails miserably but knows that the King’s kingdom is about mercy and that only in Him is the power to do what He asks. He’d rather have us come to Him with our many mistakes than stay away and miss out on the friendship of a lifetime.

**Friday**

**APPLYING**

» Read 2 Corinthians 3:2, 3.

» The following verses are short, lawlike statements that can be seen as either rules or pictures of what God is like. You decide. Choose one or two of the rules below that you think would make the most difference in your life. Ask Him to help you flesh it out in your life this week.

» How would your church be different if it chose one of these verses and looked to Jesus to find the greater meaning of God’s laws? Which would make the greatest difference for your church?

» Luke 6:31 (NIV)

> “Do to others as you would have them do to you.”

» Matthew 22:37 (NIV)

> “Love the Lord your God with all your heart.”

» Matthew 22:39 (NIV)

> “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

» Zechariah 7:9 (NIV)
“Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another.”

“Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the foreigner or the poor.”

» Zechariah 7:10 (NIV)

“Do not plot evil against each other.”

» Mark 10:9 (NIV)

“Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”

» Zechariah 7:10 (NIV)