

**“The Game of Life”**  
**Exodus 20:1–4, 7–9, 12–20**  
**October 5, 2008**

This past week, as I was preparing to write this sermon, I was thinking about the children of Israel and the Ten Commandments, and why it was that God found it necessary to give his children these tablets of stone. And that made me think of “*The Game of Life*.” How many of you remember it?

A couple of years ago, on one rainy afternoon, the kids were running around in the house, bugging each other and driving me crazy, so I suggested that we play “*The Game of Life*.” I thought about how I had played the game since I was a kid, and I thought about all of the fond memories that I have of playing with my brother and my friends—endlessly spinning that crazy little “*wheel of fortune*” and fighting over who got to be the blue car.

And so harkening back to those nostalgic days, I thought that this might be a fun way to calm them down and spend the afternoon. So we went downstairs to the storage closet and retrieved the game. We brought it back upstairs and carefully unpacked all the parts on the kitchen table. We set up the board, we picked out our little plastic cars, and Nick, Addison, and I fought over who got to be the blue one. (I did, of course—I’m the biggest.)

We got out the money and the house cards, the career cards, and the little plastic stick people that you put in your car. Then we sat down to start the game. And I asked the kids, “*Who’s got the directions?*” And you know what happened? No one had them. They were lost, and nobody knew where they were. And so back downstairs we went to the closet to search for them. We looked in the shelf. We looked behind the cabinet. We looked inside of other game boxes, but alas, they were long gone.

We had a game. We had all the pieces, but we had no directions. And no one could agree on what we were supposed to do. We didn’t know how much money we were supposed to pass out, we didn’t know whether you were allowed to choose your job or if it was chosen for you. We couldn’t even get the game started because we didn’t know how to determine what order we were supposed to spin the wheel in.

And that’s what made me think of God’s children standing at the foot of Mount Sinai. At this point in the story they had been wandering in the

wilderness for quite some time, and God had provided them with everything that they needed. God had given them freedom. God had given them safety. God had given them food. And God had given them water. Yet there was still one thing that God's people lacked. And it's the same thing that the kids and I were missing that afternoon: directions.

For you see, while we frequently talk about God's children wandering in the desert, what we don't so often consider is the fact that they were obviously lacking a set of directions to the Promised Land. (*It's too bad that Moses couldn't have tapped his magic stick on a rock and produced a GPS unit.*) But in addition to the location of God's Promised Land, there were other directions that they lacked. And those were the directions to God's will.

You see, at this point in their history, the children of Israel were not necessarily "*one people*." They were a collection of tribes, loosely, and perhaps even tentatively, gathered around the leadership of Moses and Aaron. They were people, but they weren't "*A people*." They had no identity; they were not a community in the sense that a community is a unified group of people who gather around a shared sense of purpose and meaning. And God gave them—and us—that purpose and meaning with the gift of the Ten Commandments.

When you look at the Ten Commandments, what you'll find is that they are broken down into two basic categories or planes. The first is the vertical plane that gives direction to our relationship with God. The second is the horizontal plane that gives us an understanding of the way in which God expects us to deal and live with one another.

First, concerning our relationship with God, verses 2–3 read, "*I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before me.*" And that pretty much covers it. No one, and no thing, is to be more important to us than God.

And then there are verses 12–17, that famous, fabulous list of "*Thou shall nots*" that talk about our relationships with one another—a list that has sometimes given folks outside the church the idea that Christian people are a pretty sour lot. "*Honor your father and your mother.*" Hey, I like that one. But then there's, "*Thou shall not kill, commit adultery, steal, bear false witness, covet your neighbor's house, your neighbor's wife, or his*

*manservant, or his maid servant, or his ox or his... ” Well, pretty much just don’t covet your neighbor’s anything.*

And when we look at God’s design along both the vertical axis of our totally committed relationship with our creator, as well as the horizontal axis that defines God’s will for how we should treat one another with love, generosity, and respect, you begin to realize what is missing from God’s design for your life. And that something is me. Well, not so much me, as it is a lack of focus on me and what I want and what I need and what I demand and what I desire. Jesus put it best in Mark 12:29–31, “*Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.*”

One guy who obviously missed this lesson in Sunday School is named Kevin Baugh. For it seems that Mr. Baugh *has his own country—the Republic of Molossia—and if you don’t mind, he’d prefer you call him “His Excellency Kevin Baugh.” After all, he has an impressive khaki uniform with six big medals, a gold braid, epaulets at the shoulders, and a blue, white, and green sash. Oh—and a general’s cap with a gold starburst over the bill.*

*Never heard of The Republic of Molossia? That’s understandable, because it consists of Baugh’s three-bedroom house and 1.3-acre yard outside of Dayton, Nevada. According to an article in the Chicago Tribune, “He has a space program (a model rocket), a currency (pegged to the value of chocolate-chip cookie dough), a railroad (model size), a national sport (broomball), and—in his landlocked desert region—a navy (an inflatable boat).”*

*The newspaper goes on to say, “Baugh, a 45-year-old father of two, is a micronationalist, one of a wacky band of do-it-yourself nation builders who raise flags over their front yards and declare their property to be, as Baugh puts it ‘the kingdom of me.’”*

*For Baugh, it’s a fun joke, but he’s joking about what all humans want to do—build a “kingdom of me.” But as God’s Ten Commandments teach us, it’s not about me, it’s about God and us. It’s about community.*

Sometimes life can feel like that “*Game of Life*” that the kids and I were playing, or attempting to play, that afternoon. Sometimes things get complicated. Sometimes we become confused. Sometimes we get selfish. Sometimes it seems like we’ve forgotten the rules of the game and we don’t even know where to start. But if we start with these ten simple rules, if we love God with all our heart and our neighbor as ourselves, then we find peace of mind, we grasp the meaning of life, and everyone’s a winner.

Amen.