

Small Group Discussion Guide

Exodus 20:13

“The Pro-life Life”

Based on Sunday's
Sermon 3/8/2026

Background

The sixth commandment is one of the shortest. It is just two words in the original: *lo ratzach*, or “Don’t kill.” But what kind of killing does the Bible have in mind? The Hebrew language has at least eight different words for killing, and the one used here has been chosen carefully. The word *ratzach* is never used in the legal system or in the military. There are other Hebrew words for the execution of a death sentence or for the kind of killing that a soldier does in mortal combat. Nor is the word *ratzach* ever used for hunting and killing animals. So the King James Version, which says, “Thou shalt not kill” (Exod. 20:13), is somewhat imprecise. What the commandment forbids is not killing, but the *unlawful* killing of a human being.¹

It should be noted that the verb does not specify any particular person(s) as its direct object. The form is thus not qualified in that way. Consequently, it is likely that suicide is included in the prohibition.² Though suicide would break this commandment and is therefore sin, it is important to note that suicide is *not* an unforgiveable sin. That would go against the teaching of the Bible that all sin is forgiven through Christ for those who love Him, and that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:38-39)

Discussion Questions

Getting Started

1. If you had to write a slogan for valuing life, what would it be?

Observation

2. What common assumptions do people bring to this verse? Another way of looking at it would be to ask the question, “What is *not* said in this verse that we assume is said?”

¹ Philip Graham Ryken and R. Kent Hughes, *Exodus: Saved for God's Glory* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2005), 614–616.

² John D. Currid, *A Study Commentary on Exodus: Exodus 19–40*, vol. 2, EP Study Commentary (Darlington, England; Carlisle, PA: Evangelical Press, 2001), 45–46.

3. How does this command fit within the flow of the Ten Commandments?
4. This command is a negative. What not to do. How can you express it in a positive way?

Interpretation

5. What difference does it make that the Hebrew word *ratsach* refers specifically to unlawful killing rather than all killing?
6. Why does God forbid murder? What does this reveal about His view of human life?
7. Read Matthew 5:21-22. How does Jesus expand our understanding of this commandment?
8. What does this command teach about the value of the vulnerable, the oppressed, and the marginalized?

Application

9. What forms of “heart-level murder” (anger, contempt, dehumanization) are most common in our culture?
10. How can we cultivate a heart that values life the way God does?

Prayer List: