

The Unchanging God

STEP 1 Life Need (5–10 minutes)

- Discuss change.
- Read and discuss an article in *Blueprint*.
- *Optional:* Demonstrate cultural changes with pictures from different decades.
 - ☐ “Future Shock” from *Blueprint*
 - ☐ “Then & Now” from *Blueprint*
 - ☐ Pencils or pens
 - ☒ (Optional) magazine pictures of events from the ‘70s, ‘80s, ‘90s, and 2000s

STEP 2 Bible Learning (15–20 minutes)

- Examine the characteristics of God as found in today’s Scripture passages.
 - ☐ Bibles ☐ Copies of *Blueprint*
 - ☐ Paper, pencils or pens

STEP 3 Bible Application (5–10 minutes)

- Identify Christian role models.
- *Optional:* Draw parallels between Bible-time and contemporary models of uncompromising faith.
 - ☐ Bibles

STEP 4 Life Response (about 5 minutes)

- Introduce idea of keeping a short journal of their devotional time and provide journals to students.
 - ☐ Copies of *Blueprint* ☐ Pencils or pens
 - ☒ Small journals or notebooks (one per student)

Memory Verse

Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.

—James 1:17

Bible Basis:

The unchanging, holy God (Mal. 3:6) and our undivided worship (Exod. 20:1-3; Ps. 99:2-5).

Bible Truth:

The unchanging God gives us His changeless standards.

Lesson Aim:

That your students deepen their appreciation for a God who does not change in the midst of a constantly changing world.

UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLE

In this unit on the Ten Commandments, this first lesson introduces the unchanging God and His unchanging standards.

Although our culture assumes many of the principles of the Ten Commandments and the basic roots of our society are found in these principles, the commandments didn’t come originally into our kind of society or culture. God gave His standards to a group of nomads who had just escaped the oppression of slavery in Egypt.

When God spoke these words, they were a covenant or treaty between God and His people. The Ten Commandments follow a structure similar in style to the ancient treaties made between a sovereign king and his people. According to the NIV text notes on Exodus 20:2, first came the preamble in which the king identified himself (“I am the LORD your God”); second, the historical prologue in which the king reminds the people of his gracious acts in the past (“who brought you out of Egypt”); and third, the treaty or covenant—in this case the commandments that follow. By following this pattern, the Lord God is formally acknowledged as Israel’s king, and Israel as God’s people.

However, by the time Malachi arrived, the prophet encountered disillusioned Israelites who had such calloused attitudes toward God, they no longer cared about the

Continued on next page

☒ indicates items you will need to prepare before class

UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLE —cont'd

standards He gave.

Malachi's message to the Israelites stands just as true for God's people today as it did then. God does not change, nor do His abiding standards. He requires faithfulness regardless of the changing times or circumstances. An ongoing relationship with Him can be maintained only through genuine worship, humble respect for, and obedience to His standards. Such reverence toward an unchanging God is the surest way of living up to His unchanging standards.

TIPS

CLASSROOM

To motivate all of your students to write in their journals, consider setting aside five minutes of class for journal writing. Also suggest other ways for keeping a journal, such as drawing pictures to illustrate one or two ideas.

Encourage students to use the Daily Faith suggestions provided each week in *Blueprint*. The object of the journal is to get students into the practice of spending daily time with God.

PRESESSION ACTIVITY



Objective: To provide students with an example of the way people change, unlike God who never changes.

☐ Digital camera and a Printer

You also might want to bring in an empty photo album. As students arrive, have them take pictures of each other and print. Students will enjoy passing the photos around and discussing them. Ask students to place the pictures in a photo album or make a bulletin board display. They may add their own personal comments as captions. Over the next few weeks, ask teens to bring in pictures of themselves as children. Display both sets of pictures, either in the album or on the bulletin board, for a few weeks. Afterward, students may take home their pictures. Use this activity as a springboard to discuss how they've changed through the years, changes they hope to make, etc. While they may experience several changes during their lifetime, God and His standards never change.

LES. 1

Understanding Your Students

Our world is an unsettling place. At any given time, countries can go to war, governments can topple from power, or major disasters can strike. While these relentless changes wear us all down, they can be doubly stressful for teens, who are in the process of establishing their identities and places in society.

Prejudice, unemployment, negative peer pressure, and the threat of violence add up to daily

struggle. The uncertainties of life can easily force some teens to look elsewhere for their security.

That's where you as a high school youth worker fit in. You have the honor of showing your students that the only permanent security is found in the unchanging, eternal God. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. His standards are eternal, and His guidance remains constant.



STEP 1

Life Need
(5–10 minutes)

Lesson Aim:

That your students deepen their appreciation for a God who does not change in the midst of a constantly changing world.

Objective: That your students compare changing things with the unchanging God.

Materials:

- “Future Shock” from *Blueprint*
- “Then & Now” from *Blueprint*
- Pencils or pens

Begin the class by asking students to compare this summer with last summer.

- ▶ **What were the most popular songs this time last year? What were the most popular looks, clothes, television shows, films, books? What were the big news stories?**
- ▶ **How many of these things are still popular?** *After students have suggested some things that are now out-of-date, begin tying in such changes to today’s lesson by saying something like this:*

Everything around us is changing. So are we. We aren’t the same people we were last year or last month or even last week. And everything in the universe—stars, planets, galaxies—is changing too. Yet in the middle of all this change, there is Someone who doesn’t change—God.

Distribute *Blueprint* at this time. Both features, “Future Shock” on page 8 and “Then & Now” on pages 9 and 10, talk about changes in the world and our unchanging God. Choose the article you think would best get the point across to your students and read it as a class. If you have time, you might want to read both articles. Give students a few minutes to come up with their own “then” and “now” comparisons, or to speculate and answer the questions about what life will be like in the next 100 years. When they have finished, follow up by asking:

- ▶ **Why does it matter whether God changes or not?**

In today’s lesson we’re going to discover what this unchanging God is like.

Optional Activity

Materials:

- Magazine pictures of events from the ‘70s, ‘80s, ‘90s, and 2000s

Bring in magazine pictures of events that happened in the ‘70s, ‘80s, ‘90s, and 2000s. Include pictures reflecting cultural changes benefiting teens. The students will probably find some of the cultural changes humorous. To prepare for the idea of God’s changeless standards, ask your students how society’s rules for living have changed.

- ▶ **What is readily accepted these days that was frowned upon in the past?**
- ▶ **How have attitudes changed concerning right and wrong?**



Free! Downloadable
Options for Steps 1 and 4.
ReallifeDownloaded.com

STEP 2

Bible Learning

(15–20 minutes)

Bible Basis:

The unchanging, holy God (Mal. 3:6) and our undivided worship (Exod. 20:1-3; Ps. 99:2-5).



Objective: That your students study characteristics of the unchanging God and His eternal standards.

Materials:

- ☐ Bibles
- ☐ Copies of *Blueprint*
- ☐ Paper
- ☐ Pencils or pens

For the next few weeks, we're going to look at the Ten Commandments and discover their significance for us.

Have students turn to “Carved in Stone,” the Bible study on page 7 of *Blueprint*. Call on someone to read the introduction.

■ FROM *Blueprint*—Carved in Stone

When God spoke the Ten Commandments directly to Moses, the commandments were literally carved in stone. They were also forever “carved in stone” as mirroring God’s character.

If you look carefully at the commandments, you’ll see that they hit all aspects of life—our relationship with God and with others.

- Read Exodus 20:1-3; Psalm 99:2-5; and Malachi 3:6 to discover more about the Ten Commandments and the God who gave them.

Call on a volunteer to reread Exodus 20:1-3.

- ▶ Read Exodus 20:1-3 again. How do you think this commandment sets the tone for the other nine? (*This commandment establishes who God is, what He has done for Israel, and what He wants from His people. Once you establish God’s complete authority, the rest of the commandments fall into place.*)
- ▶ Why is this commandment in Exodus 20:3 so important? (*Allow students to express their opinions. Emphasize that no god—real or imagined—is to take the place of the one true God in the hearts of His followers.*)

Use Exodus 20:1-3; Psalm 99:2-5; and Malachi 3:6 as the basis for a list of characteristics (attributes) that describe what God is like. Some characteristics will be obvious from the passages; others you can assume based on what the passage tells you about God.

When you’re finished, underline the attributes that were true back then and are still true of God today.

Your students might enjoy working through this Bible study together, sharing as they go with the whole group. Or they may prefer to work individually or in pairs. Don’t let your students rush through this question, finding only easy characteristics. Encourage them to dig a little.

God is personal. He is talking with people as He gives the commandments. He was personally involved in leading the Hebrews out of Egypt.

God is powerful. This shows His personal involvement in people’s lives for their good. He tells His people who He is, and then He lays down the law.

God loves His people. This is based upon the fact that He did good things for His people. It’s a conclusion from this passage that is confirmed in other passages.

God is involved in the events of history. God is engaged with people throughout time working in and through events for our good. He controls history.

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE

Exodus 20:1-3

¹And God spoke all these words:

²"I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. ³You shall have no other gods before me."

Psalms 99:2-5

²Great is the LORD in Zion; he is exalted over all the nations.

³Let them praise your great and awesome name—he is holy.

⁴The King is mighty, he loves justice—you have established equity; in Jacob you have done what is just and right. ⁵Exalt the LORD our God and worship at his footstool; he is holy.

Malachi 3:6

"I the LORD do not change. So you, the descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed."

God is demanding. God has established His concern and His protection of His people. We might think people make demands that over-step their rights, position, or authority. God never does. He is sovereign.

God is jealous. Again, this is a positive, rather than a negative, statement. God is the only God. He will not share His glory with any gods of human origin.

God is protective. The example of delivering the people out of slavery proves this, but we also see it in God's use of *your* in "the LORD your God." He is telling the Hebrews they belong to Him and He belongs to them.

Some possible answers for Psalm 99:2-5 are: (Look for the obvious characteristics. Make sure you call on students who may not have gotten involved in the earlier discussion.) *The Lord is great. The Lord is supreme. The Lord is holy. The Lord is just.* This can be drawn from the fact that He loves justice. *The Lord is righteous.* Don't let your students stop there. "Righteousness" is one of those Christian words we use all the time without stopping to think about its meaning. What does it mean? Encourage students to put it into words that are not clichés. Someone might say, "It means that God is totally without sin."

Some possible answers for Malachi 3:6 are: *God is powerful.* The word LORD assumes His leadership and absolute power. *God is unchanging.* Obviously this is a focus of today's lesson. It's easy to find in the text; be certain that students verbalize it as you are going over the Malachi passage. *God is merciful.* Although we can't tell from this single verse, we get the feeling that if He weren't, the sons of Jacob would be destroyed. *God has a relationship with people.* He is directly involved with the sons of Jacob. We can see here that God is personal.

Remind students to go back and underline attributes that were true back then and are still true. As your students will discover, all of the characteristics were true then, and all of them are true today.

▶ Based on the words you have underlined, make one observation about God. *(Students should have underlined everything, but their observations will be different.)*

▶ Now, write one observation about God's standard for His people. *(Again, encourage all students to write.)*

▶ **What are some of God's changeless standards?** *The Ten Commandments are a great place to start. Jesus also gave us several standards for living. Students may suggest others.*

▶ **Name some biblical characters who acted on God's standards even though they could have avoided physical harm by ignoring them.** *There is Daniel, Stephen, or Paul.*

Let's look at today's memory verse and see how it relates to what we've been talking about. Call on someone to look up and read James 1:17.

▶ **How can this verse reassure us that God's standards are good and they don't change?** *(Everything that God does for us is good for us. He gives us the moral law as He gives us other gifts—because He loves us. Furthermore, God "does not change like shifting shadows," so we can depend on Him to remain the same.)*

STEP 3

Bible Application

(5–10 minutes)

Objective: That your students share personal examples of people who are living according to God's unchanging standards.

Materials:

□ Bibles

The more we pattern our lives after Jesus Christ, the more God will be able to use us—to change our lives, our communities, our schools, and perhaps even portions of our world.

These next two questions are designed to get students thinking of other Christians they respect. These people become models of how Christianity can be lived in a constantly changing world. Although these models may be imperfect, God continues to expand people's abilities to serve Him when they are willing.

▶ **Tell us about someone you think consistently obeys God's commands. How is that person following God's changeless standards?** *You might share an example of someone you respect.*

▶ **How do you think knowing God is unchanging helps this person serve God better?** *God's unchanging love means He will always love and accept us. Whether we serve God well or not so well, He still loves us. God's unchanging presence means He is always with us to help us serve Him. This is a great help and encouragement to step out in service and do something. God's unchanging power is always available to us so we can always ask for His help and direction.*

Some of you might be thinking it's impossible to live up to standards set by an unchanging God. You're right; you can't. But don't be discouraged. You weren't meant to live up to them in your own power.

Remind students that God wants them to grow to be more and more like Christ. They don't need to feel burdened by the Ten Commandments when they have a loving, personal relationship with the One who gave them. And God the Holy Spirit is working in His children's lives right now, leading them to maturity (2 Cor. 3:18; Phil. 1:6).

Optional Activity

If you have time, draw parallels between Elijah's 7,000 people who would not bow down to a false god (1 Kings 19:18) and the role models students identified. Show them Paul's commentary in Romans 11:1-5.

Elijah thought he was the only one who had remained faithful to God in a society that placed its ultimate security in Baal (a false god). The Lord told the aging prophet of 7,000 others who did not compromise their faith. Paul's comments on the event say that this remnant was chosen by God's grace but they remained faithful. Therefore, they were truly God's people by their faith and not because of their own ability.

▶ **What do you think the remnant of faithful people did to remain faithful?** *(They trusted God for their security; they lived by His unchanging standards; they praised God, not a false god.)*

▶ **What can we do to remain faithful?** *(Live as people in that remnant.)*

STEP 4

Life Response
(5–10 minutes)

Bible Truth:

The unchanging God gives us His changeless standards.

Your teens will plan to keep a journal as a method of maintaining their dependence on an unchanging God.

Materials:

- ☐ Copies of *Blueprint*
- ☐ Pencils or pens
- ☒ Small journals or notebooks (one per student)

After looking at the unchanging nature of God, help teens realize the importance of depending on God and only God. Discuss:

- ▶ **Why are people whose character is consistently the same usually popular?** *(Others have security in knowing what to expect from them. They aren't seen as moody or wishy-washy.)*
- ▶ **Those who are unpredictable may be exciting. But when you really need something done right, who do you turn to?** *(Most of us turn to someone we know we can count on. They've gained our trust by consistently behaving in a certain way over time.)*
- ▶ **Why can you depend on God?** *(He is the same yesterday, today, tomorrow, and forever.)*
- ▶ **How can you depend on God?** *(Follow God's Word, pray for God's guidance, look for God's will.)*

One way to evaluate your dependence on God is to keep a journal of your experiences. Then you can look back and see how God has been a part of your life. Journaling is also another way that you can pray to God. Pour out your feelings on paper and read them aloud. God knows your thoughts, but writing them down will help you verbalize them to Him. For one, it will force you to take time to really think about what you want to say to Him.

Hand out pencils and small journals. Direct teens to the Daily Faith on page 8 of *Blueprint*. Explain that these devotionals are printed in each week of *Blueprint*, and encourage them to write down in their journal their answers and reactions to each day's information.

Remind your teens to bring their journal back next week. (Keep a few blank journals for new youth and those who may lose or forget their booklets.) Be sure to follow up with your teens next Sunday to find out how their first journaling experience went.

