



10 Commandments E17: How We Made the 10 Commandments Video Series

Official Transcript

Speakers:

Hosts: Jon Collins

Guests: Bot, Everett, Rose, Nyssa, Josh, and Greg

[The Story Sprint With Bot and Everett (0:00-15:01)]

[BibleProject theme]

Jon: Welcome to BibleProject podcast. We just finished an exploration of the 10 Commandments, or, as we were reintroduced to them as the 10 Words. Now we've been reading the 10 Words in community. Tim and I have been dialoguing, but we've also gotten to hear your questions. And together, we're attempting to hear God's voice and wisdom for our lives. This communal reading approach is really beautiful, and it also extends to how we make videos at BibleProject. When we're done with our conversations, we write a script, and then we bring it to our animation studio. And they collaborate with us, asking questions, thinking about how to visualize these ideas in a compelling way. Today, I want to introduce you to some of the animation team and the process of going from podcast to script to video. As we do, we're going to continue to meditate on the wisdom of the 10 Commandments and dive deep into the making of the 10 Commandment videos. Thanks for joining us. Here we go.

[Musical break (1:04-1:08)]

Jon: So after Tim and I have the podcast conversations, we write a script from scratch, trying to recreate the journey the podcast went on. But you know, the script is rewritten, and we have to read it like actors. So this time we did something different.

[BibleProject theme fades out]

Jon: We took the script directly from the podcast conversations, and so we didn't deliver the animation studio just a script on a page, but we delivered them a short audio conversation to listen to. And that's what I want to talk about first.

[Transition sound effect and a page turning sound effect]

Jon: Okay, so I've got two people here with me in the studio. Bot, you're the creative director of the animation studio, and Everett, the director of the 10 Commandments series. And we're here to talk about the first part of production, what you call the story sprint process. All right, Bot, how are you doing?

Bot: I'm doing well.

Jon: Thanks for being here.

Bot: Yeah, thanks for having me.

Jon: Hi, Everett.

Everett: Hey, Jon. Good morning.

Jon: Good morning. How are you doing?

Everett: I'm doing great. I had a sunny, cold bike ride in.

Jon: Yeah?

Everett: My face is still cold.

Jon: It's one of those rare, sunny Portland winter days.

Everett: Mhm.

Jon: So let's go back in time to—I guess it was May of 2025. You guys were delivered some scripts for 10 Commandments, and then you go away to do what has now been known as the story sprint. Tell me: What is a story sprint?

Bot: So story sprints are a time where we could gather certain select people, stakeholders for the video, that can speak to: *“Hey, these are the most important parts of this video. What are we going to want to carry throughout this project?”* Essentially, it's like a week of deep diving into what this is going to be.

Jon: Yeah. And what do you want to have by the end of a story sprint?

Bot: After a story sprint, we will have teased out any of the tone, the mood, or any main symbols that we need to kind of really thread throughout the video—enough information, that I feel confident being able to run into production, and I can guide it—if I'm a director on the video—because I don't want to continuously have to check in with the writers to see, like, *“Oh, is this what you mean?”* By the end of the story sprint, I will have such a great idea of what that vision is that I can carry it through the rest.

Everett: Yeah. So many of the specifics can change along the way in terms of: *“Oh,”* you know, *“What's the color palette?”*

Bot: Yeah.

Everett: [Bot backchanneling throughout] *“What's the character design? What happens in what moments of the video?”* But I think you landed on it. You have to figure out the tone because the videos can go so many directions. It can be like: This is going to be very grandiose and kind of awe-inspiring. Or: This is going to be very, kind of, gritty and down-to-earth. This is going to be a little more lighthearted, a little more fanciful. And you really don't want to mess that up at the starting line. And also, I think you're figuring out kind of storytelling mode. Is this going to be something that focuses on, like, individual characters doing stuff, and we're going to kind of see them going through scenes? Or is it going to be more abstract, and we're going to be kind of moving with maybe geometric images or images from nature, maybe without a lot of human characters doing things? Or maybe it's going to be more like a series of informational presentations rather than like a story. Like, something like Sermon on the Mount is driven by these characters and their emotional storylines, but have something else that's more like looking at words and analyzing poetry and patterns and metaphor.

Jon: One of my experiences of the story sprint is: We'll come in, and we'll say, *“This is what we think this video is about,”* or *“this series is about.”* And we'll kind of pitch the big idea. And then we'll walk away and come back, and you guys will re-pitch that big idea but showing how it really is a through line through the script, and also where it's not

working. And you'll point out, like, you know: *"This part of the script actually isn't serving the main idea anymore, and here's an idea for how to fix that."* And sometimes, giving even better language to us, sometimes in words, but often in visuals. And I've found I come back, and I'm just like, *"Oh man, this is a cooler project than I thought."*

[Bot, Everett, and Jon laugh]

Jon: And sometimes, we have to rewrite the script a little bit after that.

Everett: Mhm.

Bot: Mhm.

Jon: For 10 Commandments, we didn't because the script was pretty locked. It was pulled from the podcast. But tell me some of the things that you guys discovered during story sprint for 10 Commandments that then became marching orders.

Everett: [Jon backchanneling throughout] Yeah. So very early on, you guys outlined for us: The way we want to look at the 10 Commandments is not as this checklist of rules that you have to make sure you do all of them to be on God's good side, but the idea that each commandment is an entryway into a broader understanding of wisdom, that you can get wisdom by studying the commands that extends into all kinds of unexpected parts of life. And we were like, *"Okay, I think wisdom is going to be the core for this thing. We need to show how wisdom is inside a command."* And so we looked over your script and the sort of the physical metaphors used to describe it—Tim will talk about the wisdom underneath the commands or the wisdom inside the commands or behind the commands. I was thinking, *"Okay, so there's this kind of treasure chest quality—this kind of, like—you open a box or an envelope, and there's wisdom inside."* And where we landed at the end of the second week of the story sprint was this idea that the icon—which is really just a Post-it note with a drawing on it—that represents the simple, stated form of the command could move aside like a sliding door and beneath it would be like a portal that would take you into this graphical world of swirling colors that was God's wisdom.

Jon: Mhm. Tell me the process of finding the mood and the art for this. You guys pitched it as kind of the sketchbook or the art book, the collaborative art book.

Bot: Mhm.

Everett: Mhm.

Jon: Yeah.

Everett: Yeah. It was an attempt to capture a lot of drawing energy that the folks in the studio already have. You know, if you have a friend who's an artist and you're talking to

them, and they start doodling in their sketchbook, like, there's a temptation to think they're being rude or they're ignoring you, but a lot of times it's the opposite. They're actually moving their hands in the sketchbook as a way to keep their mind engaged.

Bot: Mhm.

Jon: Yeah.

Everett: And so you know, if you have an artist in your life, eventually, you'll learn, "*Oh yeah, they're listening. They're just also drawing.*"

Bot: Yeah. Mhm.

Everett: You know? So all through meetings and all the stuff we have to do throughout the week at BibleProject, everyone's grabbing index cards and Post-it notes or whatever scrap piece of paper and, like: "*I'm going to draw a cool dog. I'm going to draw a Godzilla on a skateboard.*"

Jon: Yeah. [chuckles]

Everett: You know?

Jon: Yeah. [laughs]

Everett: [Jon agreeing throughout] And so we've just got these stacks and stacks of just scrappy fragments of art that we kind of put together. And we think, like: This is cool-looking, but this is also kind of the—this is the detritus of our thought process. Like, this is what accumulates as we're thinking and working and thinking through things. So I think we started to glomp onto that as this idea of, like, while Jon and Tim are talking, they're thinking, we're listening to them as like the third participant in the conversation, and we're just kind of working out our thoughts through art in the process. So I liked this idea of, like, discovery, kind of like—almost like an exploratory approach. You're just like, "*Oh yeah, and here's another cool thing to think about.*" Or: "*What if you took this commandment and inverted it and thought about it this way instead?*" And then, "*Let me grab another scrap piece of paper, actually, to explain this idea.*"

Jon: Yeah.

Everett: So when you're watching the video, you know, pieces of paper are being torn off. New pieces of paper are being brought on. And that's always to indicate like, "*Oh, I had another idea. Here's another thing I wanted to talk about.*" So it follows that kind of stumbling dialogue format, you know?

Bot: These conversations, these podcasts, are allowing so much time to really meditate. And I love that downtime that we get to have. And rather than being like, "*Hey*"—you know, grab the audience's arm or ear and just be like, "*Hey, and here's the next thing*"—

Everett: That's actually an artifact of the way the audio is recorded as well.

Bot: Yeah.

Everett: In a traditional BibleProject video that has a pre-written script and recorded, the information does move at a pretty brisk pace.

Bot: [chuckles] Yeah.

Everett: We move from one topic to another really quickly. What's nice about taking directly from the podcast conversation is you do have these moments of just going, *"Mmm. Yeah."*

[Jon laughs]

Bot: Yeah. You get to hang out with your thought.

Jon: Yeah.

Bot: [Jon backchanneling throughout] And I think that that feels very unique because our previous videos are, like, just jumping very smoothly through one idea to the next to the next. But this one, like, really created those pauses, and Everett fought for, like, *"Hey, I don't want to just, like, fill that with a ton of visuals during that downtime. What if we actually really capture that—that feeling with these doodles?"*

Jon: Yeah. Mhm.

Everett: Mhm. And so it actually was a discipline to think like, *"Oh, if this is meditation literature and if we're looking for wisdom, there needs to be a more cautious pace."*

Jon: Hmm.

Everett: How far can you push a person's attention span in the other direction?

Bot: Yeah.

Everett: The question is no longer, like: How much can a person take in and still all understand it? The question is more like: How calm will a person allow themselves to be to really take it all in?

Jon: Hmm. I think the music also underscores that a bit. And this is one of the first times we've really leaned into a soundtrack that accompanies the entire series.

Everett: Mhm. Yeah, I mean, in the same way that it would have been unfitting to kind of pair this dialogue with really grandiose art, sunbeams breaking through the clouds above Mount Sinai and Moses's coat billowing in the wind and everything, it wouldn't have suited the tone of the discussion, in a similar way, like, orchestral score or blaring brass or something like that wouldn't fit with this very chill kind of conversation that

you're having. I think lo-fi hip hop has kind of established itself as one of the big, like—it's almost the quintessential studying music.

Jon: Mhm.

Bot: Mhm.

Everett: You know, people put it on when they need to read and write an essay or get through some homework or just really get into that zone and focus. And I don't know by what alchemy it accomplishes that, but it does, you know?

[Jon laughs]

Everett: You can get into the zone just listening to that stuff. So yeah, we already had this kind of partnership with Lofi Sunday for them letting us use their music on the podcast. So I was just kind of pulling from their library and saying, "*Oh, we could pair this song with this video. We could pair this song with this video.*" But it didn't always line up. Sometimes the music would be staying in one place while the topic was going off in another, and it felt less like the music was there to accompany the discussion and more like somebody forgot to turn the music off [chuckles] while they were having the discussion. [chuckles]

[Jon laughs]

Everett: And they were just kind of—yeah, they were disjointed. So we went back to Lofi Sunday directly and said, "Would you guys like to compose new tracks for us?" And they were down for it. So Cassidy Godwin, Wes Harris, and Logan Russell kind of basically took turns. So one of them would do one commandment, then the next. And they go in a three-person cycle writing new tracks, and each one has ended up kind of complementing the theme of the video, you know? I love what Wes did on the soundtrack for word four. You know, word four is "Remember the Sabbath." And parts of that video are so calm and relaxed, you know, and have just, like, an absolutely chill vibe. But at other times, in the same video, you're talking about: "*Yeah, God was laboring for six days, and we're joining him in that labor when we work.*" You know? So there's other parts of the video where it needs to be more lively. And he just did it with the rhythms. So it's [beatboxes to imitate and contrast slow and fast rhythms]—you know? He's able to just slow it down again.

Jon: Hmm. Another key visual idea that you came out of the story sprint with was the idea of having an icon for a command and then being able to flip it over.

Everett: Absolutely.

Jon: And that—there's that illusion technique where if you look at something in one orientation, it's telling you one story. You flip it over, all of a sudden, you see it in a

completely new way that was surprising, and you see something else. Tell us about that technique, how you came to it, and how it became part of the video.

Bot: Yeah. That was you, Everett, right?

Everett: Well, I think we all noticed it in the script, this idea of the turnover.

Bot: Yeah.

Everett: Specifically, like: Try to reimagine a command that's phrased as a prohibition. If this is what it's telling you not to do, what is it implicitly telling you *to do*? And the example we worked through during the story sprint was word six, "Do not kill," where, very explicitly in the script say: Flip this command over. The command not to kill is actually a command to cherish and protect life and help it flourish. And Josh Espasandin, who's one of our animators, did this sketch where he drew a skull and then drew the skull upside down so that it became a flower pot—

[Jon chuckles]

Everett: —with flowers growing out of it.

Jon: Yeah.

Everett: It no longer looked like a skull. So he did this little optical illusion thing. And we're like, "*Yeah, that's it.*" And every command you can kind of do this with. Now, it's emphasized more or less in certain videos, but there is always an element of, like: Maybe one way to get at the wisdom underneath or inside this command is to turn it over. Almost like—I think of it like a—the door to a safe where you have to kind of rotate this knob to kind of open it up. So yeah, we thought: The commands seem so simple and so succinct, they're almost just like—

[Music fades in]

Everett: Yeah, like a checklist.

Bot: Mhm.

Everett: We were like, "You could just write them on a Post-it they're so small." So we started using Post-it notes and just designing: Here's the command for "Don't make an idol." Here's the command for "Don't take the Lord's name in vain." And every one of them, you can imagine an inverted version. And sometimes, flipping it over and thinking of it from the other direction is the key to unlocking the wisdom.

[Musical break (14:56-15:01)]

[Visual Development and Storyboarding With Rose and Nyssa (15:01-26:58)]

Jon: So after the story sprints, we know some really important things. We know what the video is really about. We know what type of video we're going to make. We know the key visuals that are going to make it all work. And after the story sprint, the team got really excited about this collaborative art book style that would bring the 10 Commandments series to life. But the question now is: What will this communal art book feel like? Because it could be a thousand different things. And nailing down this process is called visual development. Alongside visual development is: How is the script going to build visually? How are we going to show this idea of wisdom? When does it appear? What does it do? And all of that is solved in the process called storyboarding. So here with me to talk about visual development and storyboarding are two more of our artists from the animation studio. We have story artist Rose and senior 2D artist Nyssa. Hi, Rose.

[Music fades out]

Rose: Morning, Jon.

Jon: Good morning. Hi, Nyssa.

Nyssa: Morning, Jon.

Jon: Good to be with you both. Tell me, like, what was your experience of going through the story sprint and then moving towards figuring out: How are we going to do this collaborative art book thing?

Rose: [Jon backchanneling throughout] Well, we wanted to help keep people grounded, like you were really there. Like you're listening to yours and Tim's conversation really presently, and you're, like, watching things happening in front of you. And I think that's

part of why we stayed so tactile, because these topics can get really heady, but they're so practical. And the way that you lay them out in the videos is practical, and so we wanted to echo that in the visual way that we built things.

Jon: So the idea is: Let's look at a collaborative art book with lots of different voices? But there still needs to be constraints.

Nyssa: Yeah.

Jon: But yeah, how did you solve that?

Nyssa: [Jon backchanneling throughout] For us, it was tools limitation. So I got really enthusiastic about papers and started photographing a *ton* of papers. We had dozens and dozens and dozens. We decided to do, like, a three-paper palette of, like, a base paper, a scrap paper, and an accent paper. And then every artist could take those three papers and use them however they needed in the scene, but they would be consistent scene to scene to scene to kind of create that, like, color and visual unification. And we did the same thing with the tools. So the marker pen and the Sharpie pen were like the base limitations that all artists were going to be working with, no matter what scene they were working on or, like, how many things they had to do with those basic tools.

Jon: Mmm. Oh, that's cool. So basically, I'm imagining, if you had a big art book on a table and then the table was just full of papers and pens, and those are the only things you got to use, but let's all use it in our own way to kind of, like, fill out pages of this art book.

Nyssa: That's *exactly* the vibe we were going for, yeah. 100 percent.

Jon: Yeah. And other than pens and paper, were there other limitations, or really, like, any style is now fair game?

Rose: Well, you guys eventually landed on there being three kind of detail-leveled styles within the whole thing. So you had what we're affectionately calling nugget people.

[Jon laughs]

Rose: And—

Jon: And those are, like, the very basic people.

Nyssa: A shape with noodle arms.

[Jon laughs]

Rose: Little square, two dots, a mouth. Now you've got a person.

Jon: Yeah.

Nyssa: And those were designed to have a lot of movement and versatility, so our character animators could have some kind of really fun, dramatic, high-energy movement to play with. And then the medium style was kind of this, like, newspaper, mid-century ad style. Like a—

Rose: That's right. That was really mid-century—

Nyssa: Well, it's a—

Rose: —because you guys also started leaning into, like, the continuous line look for backgrounds, and that went really well with that middle style, and that's like—you don't need them to move a ton, but you still need a little emotion and—they're very versatile. So you could put a lot of things in that middle style.

Nyssa: Cartoony, but a little bit more realistic. And then we had this final style that was—we called it fine style. And it was basically: What if you tried to render realism using these limited tools that we're, like, using in the sketchbook? And that ended up being kind of a, like, no movement, maybe some cycles, maybe a little bit of, like, background effects, but the image itself kind of carried the scene for a long period.

Jon: So these would have been as—like, there's detailed portraits of people.

Nyssa: Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah, exactly.

Jon: Yeah. Okay, so you got a limited palette of papers, pens. You have: Choose one of these three approaches to how detailed it's going to be, and that then created limitations that then allowed every video to have some sort of consistency of feel. What about typography—any stuff on screen with words?

Nyssa: A lot of the typography is actually hand-drawn throughout the videos. The two pieces that were consistent are the quotes, the, like, Scripture quotes, and those end up looking like a standard typewriter font on a piece of white paper. And then all of the title citations. So for quotes or for beginnings of videos, we ended up photographing a bunch of, like, label maker strips, like with a bunch of dents and warps and stuff in them, and then one of the animators created a text script that allows us to make it look like it actually got, like, punched out on the label maker. So hand-drawn, basic typewriter, and then a punch label maker.

Rose: Something I love about your process and bringing in typography was, like, you were so guided by: It has to be tactile. It has to feel like it could be really on the page. And that was really, really cool because even with a typewriter, like, it leaves those indents as it punches the paper. Like, I could feel that through the whole vis dev process.

Jon: And what kind of images and symbols became really important as you developed the look that then kind of led us into understanding the story more?

Rose: So there's a big, pervasive character through the whole series, which is wisdom. And wisdom takes its own look through each of the ten videos. And so that's kind of where story started coming in, was like: What is wisdom doing? What is the thing that's going to define wisdom?

Jon: And what was wisdom, actually, in the video? What is it? Not theoretically—

Rose: Oh.

Jon: —but like—

Nyssa: Oh, it's markers.

Rose: Oh, it's the markers.

Jon: It's markers.

Nyssa: Yeah. [laughs]

[Nyssa, Rose, and Jon laugh]

Nyssa: It's just—it's, like, highlighters. [laughs]

[Nyssa, Rose, and Jon laugh]

Jon: It's colorful highlighters.

Nyssa: Yeah. [laughs]

Rose: I was like, "*Man, can I define wisdom for you right now, Jon?*"

[Nyssa, Rose, and Jon laugh]

Rose: I—I—

[Nyssa, Rose, and Jon laugh]

Jon: [jokingly] What is wisdom, Rose?

Rose: [jokingly] It's too early in the morning.

Jon: Yeah. And what was lovely was: Every command has its own perspective on how that wisdom gets realized. And so each command does something unique with the markers. Give me a couple of examples.

Rose: [Jon backchanneling throughout] So in "No Stealing," wisdom becomes like a ribbon, like a party ribbon, that, like, wraps things up from God. I had to dev that one. I

did the thumbnails and the storyboards for “No Stealing,” and I was like, “*This is kind of off the wall, but I think this is the right move.*” Like, God’s trying to give us a gift. It is celebratory. Let’s lean into that.

Jon: Okay, so you were doing the story development for that specific video, and one of the ways that you would approach it is: “*Okay, what’s wisdom do?*”

Rose: Yes.

Jon: And the wisdom of “Don’t steal,” you flip it over, and it’s: Let’s steward each other’s stuff collaboratively, communally. Let’s be generous. And so that brought to you the idea of wisdom being a wrapping.

Rose: That’s right.

Jon: That’s cool. And then how does that unlock, then, how the video works?

Rose: This got really cool. In the video, we started playing with, like, how things go in boxes. And so when you see people stewarding other people’s stuff, you’ll see it in packages, because we really—in our modern language, we know that a package belongs to someone specific. Like—

Jon: Right.

Rose: Like, we respect the package.

[Rose and Jon laugh]

Jon: Yeah, there is actually a porch pirate—

Rose: Mhm.

Jon: —right?—in this video—

Nyssa: Yeah.

Jon: —not respecting the package. [laughs]

Rose: Yeah. And so we were able to translate stewarding each other’s stuff through the package. So we get to mend ancient wisdom and thought with how we see things.

Jon: Yeah. What other symbols or techniques became important?

Rose: I think the other most important one is, like, everything was on one flat paper, mostly, or, like—it could be on two flat papers, but we never went 3D unless wisdom was revealing something.

Jon: Mmm.

Rose: And so this mechanic of pulling a piece of paper aside and being able to go through, like, a cutout became, like, a real highlight moment. And so building the storyboards was like: How do we peek to that moment where we get to go deeper?

Jon: Mmm.

Rose: It's cool and exciting, and it only happens, like, once or twice per wisdom moment.

[Jon chuckles]

Nyssa: There's also moments where, like, really visceral physical things happen to or on top of the paper. Like in the second idols episode, there's a couple of times where people start kind of not following the word as well as they should, and the paper starts physically crumpling around them.

Jon: Mhm. Yeah.

Nyssa: And we did some work on, like: How do we photograph the crumpled paper in order to create, like, that sequence of these people engaging in the physical element as the emotional and mental element of the video, what's happening with them. And then sometimes, we'll have, like, very small stop-motion elements of paper rolling up or paper crumpling for very specific key moments of, like: Okay, now is the moment to break the 2D space and really emphasize what's happening to this character.

Jon: Hmm. One of the exciting moments that Bot and Everett were talking about during the story sprint was when Josh drew a skull as an icon for "Do Not Kill" and then showed how, if we flipped it over, it kind of looked like a vase that you could put flowers in. And that kind of then created this "aha" of this visual technique. So each of the videos you guys had to wrestle with: How do we do that? What's the icon? How do you flip it over? What does it become?

Rose: There were a couple challenges because there are a couple videos where it's not explicitly said where we flip the wisdom over.

Jon: Right.

Rose: There's not that *key* word, but it's still important to flip it over. And so for me, it wasn't just like: What does it look like? I think that was one artist, Rooney, who kind of did the deep dive on, like: What do those look like? It's like: "*Okay, well, when does it have to happen?*" I mean, timing is everything.

Jon: Yeah.

Rose: And then, in the outro—which I hope everyone does see the outro—we eventually get to see them all flip over. And we didn’t design them all to flip over at first, but it seemed really appropriate.

Jon: Yeah. A few of them, like “Honor your”—

Rose: “Parents,” yeah.

Jon: —“parents,” it’s already said in the positive. But there is a flip over for that one?

Rose: Mhm. There is now.

Jon: [laughs] I haven’t seen it.

[Rose laughs]

Jon: [chuckles] I haven’t seen that.

[Nyssa and Rose laugh]

Jon: That’s awesome.

Rose: Yeah, because I think you guys use it as, like—you’re not just honoring your parents, but you’re honoring, like, all of—

Jon: Yeah, multi-generational—

Rose: Multi-generational.

Jon: —communal life.

Rose: Mhm.

Jon: Yeah. So during the storyboard process, you’re actually—you’re creating key visual moments across the entire script that tells the story—“how’s the story work visually?” And by the end of that, the story needs to make complete sense to us and have a logic and be compelling. And sometimes that’s really hard. Was there any in particular that became really difficult?

Rose: You know, luckily, these were clicking, which was great.

Jon: Yeah.

Rose: And your podcast was wonderful.

[Music fades in]

Rose: There weren't a ton of places where we needed to, like, adjust things. I think there were a couple videos where we were like, "*Oh, we need one word here.*" Like: "*Can we just add some space?*"

Jon: Yeah.

Rose: But generally, the ideas were pretty straightforward.

[Musical break (26:53-26:58)]

[Animation With Greg and Josh (26:58-40:44)]

Jon: All right, once visual development is complete and the script has storyboards, the team is ready to move on. You've got to draw everything. You've got to make everything move and put it all together in the final video. We call this production. It's when all the ideas get created and composited together. To talk about this last step, I've got two more artists up here in the podcast studio. We have lead animator Greg and senior animator Josh. Josh, hi, good morning.

Josh: Good morning.

Jon: How are you?

Josh: I'm doing well. How are you?

[Music fades out]

Jon: Great. Hi, Greg.

Greg: Hi.

Jon: Thanks for being here.

Greg: Exciting to be here.

Jon: You do look excited.

Greg: [excited] I am.

[Greg and Jon laugh]

Greg: I've never been in this part of the office. I was just—

Jon: You've never been up here?

Greg: No, never.

Jon: Huh. Yeah.

Greg: It's just cool to get to talk about what we do, so.

Jon: Yeah.

Josh: We don't get called to the principal's office too often.

Greg: No.

Jon: [excited] Did you know this used to be the principal's office?

Josh: Right. Yeah.

Greg: Oh, really?

Jon: Yeah. There used to be a school here, and the principal's office was right here where we are sitting.

Greg: Wow. Wow.

Jon: Yeah. [chuckles] Okay. We're talking 10 Commandments, and you guys are highly involved in the actual production. A lot of the ideas have been fleshed out, but it's like: *"We've got to make this thing, and it's got to work. And let's make it so it doesn't crush our spirits as we make it."*

[Greg, Josh, and Jon laugh]

Jon: *"And let's make it really good."*

Greg: Yeah.

Josh: Mhm.

Jon: So tell me a bit about being part of the story sprint and then how your mind kind of immediately went to: How are we going to make this?

Greg: Yeah, I think this was an interesting one because it's also a series of twelve videos. So a lot of our theme videos, we have many months to put into one five-to-six-

minute video or something along those lines. And in this case, we had to do twelve. And they range from like a minute or a couple minutes to like five or six. And so I think that just the nature of having a bigger scale of production had to influence, in some aspects, how we approach that production, that we maybe need to simplify some of the art and animation. Plus, also, there's this great casual tone to the conversations that is really sort of, I think, like, the engine of the creative train, that we don't want the animation, which is, maybe not the caboose, but it's towards the end—we don't want that to, like, deviate and go in some other direction that doesn't really serve or fit that casual tone. So I think a lot of that, kind of combined with part of our studio culture, is just, like, doing a lot of doodles on pieces of paper, kind of amalgamated into this direction of kind of like a casual coffee shop conversation. I can imagine sort of doodling to, like, take notes and sort of—as like a mindfulness engaging with what I'm hearing. This would also potentially lean into a slightly simplified art style, which could lean into an animation style that captures that, but all of that with the intention of: How do we best kind of just capture the vibe of the audio?

Josh: Yeah. Just felt like it needed a more casual, approachable feel. And also felt really good, because the 10 Commandments are just such this sacred, almost like unapproachable thing—

Jon: Yeah. Comes off the mountain.

Josh: Yeah, comes off the mountain on stone tablets. And how do we make that more approachable?

Jon: Yeah. Josh, you've drawn a lot of things here over the years, over the many years.

Josh: Mhm.

Jon: How many—how many years has it been? How many days has it been?

[Josh laughs]

Jon: You count the days.

Josh: Yeah, it's like 2,180-something work days—

[Jon laughs]

Josh: —uh, that I have not worked—

Jon: Yeah, quote-unquote “worked.”

Josh: Yeah, quote-unquote “worked.”

Jon: So in all those days, you've drawn a lot.

Josh: Mhm.

Jon: What was drawing for 10 Commandments like? And in particular, was there anything that was really fun to draw? Anything really challenging?

Josh: Yeah, actually, my first few years working at BibleProject it was a lot of moving around, like, digital paper puppets.

Jon: Yeah.

Josh: And then Sermon on the Mount happened. And since then, I've done nothing but —the way I like to put it is, you know: draw the same character over and over in slightly different positions for eight hours a day. And I love it. [laughs]

Jon: And so we can create the illusion of that character alive, moving?

Josh: Yeah. Yeah, illusion of life.

Jon: Yeah.

Josh: And you're working hard on these 100, 200 drawings sometimes of this one character, and you hit play, and it just, like, moves across the screen. And it's so fun. And with 10 Commandments, it was really fun because you're dealing with a lot of characters that are dealing with interpersonal conflict. And we're able to see these characters' emotions, facial expressions, reactions to them being wronged, and really be able to relate to those characters instead of: This person's an icon for, like, this story or this idea. You get to, like, feel like they're a real person dealing with a problem you probably had yesterday.

[Greg chuckles]

Jon: Mhm.

Josh: And when you hit play, and you can feel for that character, like: "*Oh man, I feel so bad for this character.*" And it's like—

[Greg laughs]

Josh: "*Well then, good. I did my job.*"

Jon: Yeah.

Josh: Yeah.

Greg: With this video, a lot of the characters are drawn in a modern style.

Jon: Right.

Josh: Mhm.

Greg: So I remember one of our artists was commenting, “It’s just nice to not draw sandals on everybody.”

Josh: Mhm.

Jon: Yeah, that’s Everett. Yep.

Greg: And so I think that maybe helps people put themselves into those characters a little bit more because it’s not so anachronistic. Like, “*Oh, like, clearly that’s, like, a first-century Jewish dude.*” It’s like, “*Oh, that could actually, like, loosely—I can kind of see myself in that a little bit.*”

Josh: Mhm.

Jon: Yeah. One of the key parts of this video is showing wisdom as these colorful markers that move around the screen. How were you guys involved in shaping the movement of wisdom, and what was that process like?

Greg: Yeah, one of the things that was really exciting to me as, like, a creative challenge was that every video has a slightly different look for the wisdom. It’s always composed out of these moving, kind of highlighter markers, which, that was sort of an exciting thing for me technically, like: How do I make digital highlighters that behave like analog highlighters that look like the Photoshop brushes that our artists are using?

Jon: Mhm.

Greg: But I need to animate a ton of these—

Jon: Yeah.

Greg: —and so I can’t draw everything frame by frame.

Jon: Yeah.

Greg: And I did not grow up loving drawing.

[Jon laughs]

Greg: Maybe I did until I got a B plus in art in fifth grade.

Jon: Awe.

Greg: I feel like that—

[Josh laughs]

Jon: Crushed your spirit.

Greg: It did. No, uh—so I think there was a lot of, like, on the technical side, the process of, like, [chuckles] playing with a highlighter, and, like: How does this—what happens when a brush crosses over itself? And—you know, just a bunch of these, like, technical things. And because the series was so handmade, when you think about moving a highlighter across a page, like, the angle of the brush is going to change—there's all these, like, little kind of—

Jon: Yeah.

Greg: —human things that happen, and wanting to try and capture as many of those things, like, in the technical nerd side of creating these setups as possible.

Jon: Yeah. When you say setups, you mean?

Greg: Yeah. Like, nitty-gritty into the animation software, like—essentially, what I ended up doing was taking a tiny piece of one of the Photoshop brushes—

Jon: Uh-huh.

Greg: —that the artists were using and then inside, in the animation software, cloning it along a vector path, like, thousands of times—

Jon: Okay.

Greg: —with these, like, controls so that I could make it so the angle at the end is just slightly different from the beginning—

Jon: Mmm.

Greg: —or that every frame, the path is just changing slightly as if it was being redrawn.

Jon: Mmm. Right.

Greg: I can just sort of set a value at the first frame of zero, like it's not drawn on, and then skip forward twenty frames and be like: 100. And then it just draws on.

Jon: And then it does the math?

Greg: Yeah.

Josh: I think we're really happy that we didn't have to frame by frame all the wisdom in this series.

Jon: Yeah. So that's all scripts in the software?

Greg: Yeah. A combination of scripts and just, like, using stuff in really creative ways to make it look like things the software doesn't normally do.

Jon: Yeah.

Greg: Which is to me just such a fun, creative, nerd challenge.

Jon: You like that process?

Greg: Yeah.

Jon: Yeah.

Greg: Yeah. And then also making little setups like that that all the animators could use so that they could animate some of those things themselves and get a consistent look.

Jon: And then would you have to go back and adapt those when they're like, "*Hey, wisdom needs to do this movement*"? And you're like, "*Ooh, actually, the script doesn't do that.*"

Greg: [Jon backchanneling throughout] To an extent, yeah. I mean, there's like—in the first video, wisdom has this sort of, like, thundercloud look to it. And so there's always some pieces of that that are made with highlighters. So some of those things wouldn't necessarily need to be adapted. But then, in one of them, it's like this sort of, like, rippling-out audio waveform where Everett had this idea of: What if one layer of this wisdom is a circle, but every, like, seventy-two degrees there's a sort of, like, waveform distorting it? And then the distortion gets bigger and bigger, or the amplitude increases the farther it gets away from the middle, which is like: Okay, that's a totally different set of things.

Jon: That's a new math problem. [laughs]

Greg: Yeah. Great, let's do it.

[Jon laughs]

Greg: [chuckles] And so figuring: Okay, how do I just, like, limit that distortion to just these, like, small slices, and how do I make it so that there's more images getting [chuckles] cloned along this path the longer—all sorts of things like that. But that was really fun for me.

Jon: So do you feel like you have a personal relationship with each of these wisdom highlighter?

Greg: Kind of, yeah. I mean, it's—it's cool how really, like, the vibe of, you know, the podcast—conversational, meditative journaling, [chuckles] doodling—like, I've had hours and hours over the last year where I'm like, "*How would fire look like if it was drawn with highlighters? But how do we make it not look like hellish fire?*"

Jon: Right.

Greg: "*It needs to be kind of like a warm, pleasant fire*"—you know, but it's abstract.

Jon: Yeah, an inviting fire.

Greg: And everyone sort of has an idea of what fire looks like. So: “*How do I maybe not play into that too much?*” Or water, or some of the different elements that wisdom has taken on, where they’re a little bit more abstract, but we still want to hint at something, like water, that people are going to be familiar with. So that’s been a super fun part of the series for me.

Jon: Every video has a Post-it note with a diagram of the command.

Greg: Yeah.

Jon: And then you can flip it over and see it in a new way, usually, from the negative to the positive.

Greg: Yeah. Right.

Jon: Tell me about animating those.

Greg: I think that was sort of a motif that came up pretty early even in—

Josh: Yeah, in the story sprint.

Greg: I think we could pull up some example—very rudimentary examples, from the story sprint.

Jon: Well, actually, Josh, you drew the skull.

Josh: Oh, yeah. [laughs]

Greg: That’s right, yeah.

Josh: Yeah. That was one little contribution I had to the Post-it [laughs] notes—

[Jon laughs]

Josh: —from the story sprint was—yeah, the “Do not kill.”

Jon: Yeah.

Josh: And, you know, I drew the skull, and—okay, what happens if you flip this skull over?

Greg: It had a line through it, so it’s like, “*Don’t do this.*” Yeah.

Josh: Yeah, “*Don’t do this.*” You flip it over, and I’m like, “*Oh, this skull kind of looks like a flower vase.*” And so: “*Let’s turn it into vase.*” “*Uphold life. Nurture life.*”

Jon: Yeah.

Josh: And yeah, it's cool to see that kind of carried through the design.

Jon: Yeah.

Josh: Yeah.

Jon: And then, when you would go to execute that, each one—that must have been a delightful thing to have to animate.

Greg: Yeah, I think we designed an icon for every commandment that has both, like, a negative and a positive spin to it.

Josh: Mhm.

Greg: It'll sort of bounce up and then flip around, and then we've sort of had this ongoing motif of when it comes back down, then usually a little bit of wisdom sort of peeps out behind.

Jon: Yeah, a little poking out of the wisdom behind it, yeah.

Greg: Yeah. Yeah, before it slides over and we kind of zoom into the wisdom world at the end.

Jon: Yeah. Mmm.

Greg: That's sort of been a fun little motif to—

Josh: Yeah, always playing with that—like, hinting at the wisdom without fully revealing it.

Greg: Yeah.

Josh: Yeah.

Greg: Yeah, yeah, yeah. But then opening the door to sort of zoom in to the full marker-wisdom world to, I think, try and communicate the idea that there's things that these commandments say at face value that might be true, but when you think about things and turn it over in your mind and really sit with it and meditate on it, there's, like, this whole other world, like, worth meditating on.

Josh: Mhm.

Jon: You know, there's a lot of movement. There's a lot of thought. But the end effect when you watch it is, *"Oh, this is pretty simple and casual."* And you could almost begin to think: *"That must have been pretty easy to create."*

[Jon and Greg laugh]

Jon: But what did it take to create that, you know, casual, very approachable, down-to-earth aesthetic?

Josh: Yeah, everyone—all the artists got to kind of contribute their own spin on a drawing, on a piece of art, but they're all pulling tools from the same drawer. So really having to, like, limit the tool set really helped. Like, you imagine: open a drawer, and all you have is a black marker and some highlighter and colorful markers and stuff. And that's all you have to play with. And so limiting the tool set, limiting how things move, like—the more complicated a drawing is, we'll move it a lot less.

Jon: Right.

Josh: [laughs] And when the character—

Jon: So you have to draw it a lot less? [chuckles]

Greg and Josh: Yes.

[Jon laughs]

Josh: Exactly. But if the character's simpler and simpler, then we can move them around a lot.

Jon: The nugget characters?

Greg: Yes.

Josh: Yes, the nuggets. Yes.

Greg: The nuggets.

Josh: I worked exclusively on the nuggets.

Greg: Yeah.

Jon: You drew a lot of nuggets?

Josh: [laughs] Yes.

Greg: He's kind of—kind of the nugget boy.

[Greg, Josh, and Jon laugh]

Josh: Please [laughs] don't call me that.

[Greg, Josh, and Jon laugh]

Greg: Nugget Man—I don't know.

[Greg, Josh, and Jon chuckle]

Jon: Yeah. Is Nugget Man better?

Josh: Uh, sure. [laughs] Yeah.

Jon: Okay.

Greg: Specialist.

[Josh laughs]

Jon: The nugget specialist.

Josh: Nugget specialist. Yeah, when you watch any of our videos, even ones I didn't work on, I look at it, and I'm like, "*Oh, of course that's how we would do it.*" But you know, I've been part of videos where I'm—I'm actually, like, in the early process of another video now where I'm like, "*Man, how do we solve this problem and make it look like: 'Oh, of course you did it that way.'*"

Jon: Right.

Josh: And there's so many iterations that—and same with 10 Commandments. Yeah, there were a lot of different directions—

[Music fades in]

Josh: —we could have gone because every artist draws differently. But really limiting to, like, a fine, medium, coarse style of illustration, limited tool set that really simplified and reigned things in—

Jon: Yeah.

Josh: —to keep it really efficient and fun.

[Musical break (40:38-40:44)]

[Concluding Thoughts From the Artists (40:44-44:58)]

Jon: There are a lot more steps to a fully finished video. We mix the audio together—that's done by our very own Tyler Bailey. We create thumbnails and titles and copy and a marketing plan done by many more people on the team. And then the most important step is left: You get to watch it. At the end of every interview for this episode, I asked the artists what they hope for you, the audience, to take away from the 10 Commandments video series they worked so hard on, and here are some of their responses.

Nyssa: I mean, we all kind of grew up with experiences of how the 10 Commandments are delivered to us, and I have never been super enthusiastic about that paternal habit that we have in engaging with them. But the experience of going through them, like, asking all the questions and reconsidering them, has been like a real salve to that experience. They're not judgments for what you've done so much as, like, encouragements for what you could do.

Rose: I think the experience was sort of like: These things are not past-failure ideas. These are "*Wow, I can do a little better on them every day.*"

Everett: It's the wisdom for your day-to-day life, and it's super contemporary, as alien as the commands might sometimes sound about how to treat your slaves and stuff about making idols. But if I approach it as wisdom, it applies to so many things. I remember we were drawing the end of the video for the fifth commandment, "Honor your father and mother," and Mac drew this picture of a nurse orderly helping an elderly person down an inclined ramp. And now, when I'm biking around and I see these accessibility ramps, I'm like, "That's honoring the fifth commandment." That's what I hope people get out of the video—to start looking around and seeing: What does it mean to live out these commands in my life?

Bot: The 10 Commandments, people could easily just be like, "*Oh, yeah, got it. Know those.*" And they put them on the shelf, and they look at them, and they're like, "*Yeah, of course I'm doing those. Come on, I'm a good person.*" And what I really hope people are invited into is: Take it off the shelf, [chuckles] dust it off, and hold on to it, and carry it with you. It's everywhere. It's happening, and it's closer than you think.

Josh: I hope our audience takes away that concept of turning things over. And something that seemed really simple, like, just "Don't do this," is not as simple as it sounds. Like the second commandment of, "Don't make a molten idol." It's actually super easy for me to not to make a molten idol. But then you flip that around, and it's like, "Don't make an image, but *be* an image of God." That is far more difficult and far more important to learn how to live as an image of God.

Greg: There's a part of the introduction where we reference Psalm 1, which says, like, "Blessed is the one who meditates on God's instruction day and night." It's just been such a sweet experience for me in the season that I'm in, raising young kids and looking back in the family that I grew up in, which has been full of a lot of people who loved these commandments, and to see the heart throughout the Psalms of this love for God's instruction. And who doesn't want to live in a world where I don't covet or I don't try to fashion my own idol of my career or things like that? I would just hope that other people have that experience of sitting with Scripture and being blessed by that and then going out and blessing others.

[Musical break (43:54-43:58)]

Jon: Okay, that's it for this special behind-the-scenes episode on the 10 Commandments series. Thank you to our artists, Everett, Bot, Rose, Nyssa, Greg, and Josh, for coming up here and sharing. This entire 10 Commandments series is out. If you haven't watched it, go watch it right now. You can find them on our website, on our app, it's all on YouTube, and all the links are in the show notes. BibleProject is a crowdfunded nonprofit, and we exist to help people experience the Bible as a unified story that leads to Jesus. Everything that we create is free because of the generous support of thousands of people just like you. Thank you so much for being a part of this with us.

[Music fades out]

[BibleProject sonic logo]