



grow. pray. study.

October 13, 2019 *Words of Life: Reading the Ten Commandments through the Eyes of Jesus*
“Justice: Do Not Steal”

Scripture:

Do not steal. *Exodus 20:15*

Doom to those who pronounce wicked decrees, and keep writing harmful laws to deprive the needy of their rights and to rob the poor among my people of justice; to make widows their loot; to steal from orphans!

Isaiah 10:1-2

I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ *Matthew 25:42-43*

Questions in this GPS marked with an arrow bullet point are particularly recommended for group discussion. Group leaders may add other discussion questions, or substitute other questions for the marked ones, at their discretion.

This week we are memorizing:

Do not steal.

Stealing is wrong—period

MONDAY 10.14.19 Exodus 20:15, Jeremiah 7:4-11

We may limit the 8th commandment to certain actions (e.g. breaking into a person’s house or car). We may confine it by situations: “It’s not ‘stealing’ if the other party can afford to lose what I take.” But the prophet Jeremiah spoke with an invading Babylonian army close to Jerusalem. He said, “If you steal” (no qualifiers) you shouldn’t think even faithful Temple (church) worship will keep you safe. (Pastor Hamilton’s sermon named kinds of stealing that Israel—and we—might ignore, e.g. exploiting workers—see [James 5:1-5](#)—or keeping what you find rather than returning it to its owner—see [Exodus 23:4-5](#).)

- Why would people repeat “This the Lord’s temple!” three times like a magical spell? An earlier episode might explain it: “The deliverance of Jerusalem in 701 B.C. in Hezekiah’s reign had become almost legendary and led to the idea that Jerusalem was inviolable because of the sanctuary (cf. [2 Kings 18:13–19:37](#)).” * Are you ever still tempted to think that some past blessing from God guarantees continual safety, whether you’ve upheld your covenant with God or not?
- Jeremiah was blunt in verse 11: “Ultimately the people were treating the temple, the house of God, as robbers do their dens. It was a temporary refuge till they sallied forth on another foray.” ** Centuries later, Jesus quoted Jeremiah, telling priests ripping off pilgrims that they’d turned the Temple into “a hideout for crooks” ([Mark 11:15-18](#)). Do you know how your church ensures their religious activity doesn’t hide crooked dealings? (To see how Resurrection does this, [click here](#) (cor.org/leawood/give) to read the “Corporate Stewardship & Financial Reporting” section and see the financial report.)

Prayer: God, everything in the world is ultimately yours ([Psalm 50:9-12](#)). Help me deepen my grasp of the folly of trying to cut corners to increase my little pile of stuff, and to live with your profound integrity. Amen.

* Charles L. Feinberg comment on Jeremiah 7:4 in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Abridged: Old Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994, p. 1173.

** *Ibid.*

Rich or poor, don't steal

TUESDAY 10.15.19 Proverbs 22:22-23, 30:7-9

The Hebrew sages who wrote and compiled practical advice in the Proverbs knew the importance of all kinds of integrity, including not stealing. In Proverbs 22, they singled out the evil of stealing “from the poor” (a theme we'll also see that Israel's prophets emphasized). But the passage in Proverbs 30 also noted that being poor did not make stealing okay—that behavior also dishonored God's name.

- Much of the Bible's wisdom assumed a longer time frame than we often use. From a purely human outlook, a skeptic might ask, “If it's true that the Lord will take up the case of the poor, why are they still poor?” But Proverbs 22 assumed a similar view to the one the apostle Paul wrote in [Romans 12:19](#), trusting God to make all things right in eternity. How easy or hard do you find it to be patient with God when wrongs don't get fixed “right now”?
- Proverbs 30, attributed to an otherwise unknown person named Agur, challenged a belief that may have been as common in Biblical times as it remains today. It's the idea that stealing is okay if a poor person steals from a person or company richer than they are. Agur didn't see it that way. He said that even if he stole because he was poor, that would dishonor God's name. Do you agree or disagree? Think through your reasons.

Prayer: O God, if I am relatively well-off, help me not even inadvertently support practices that oppress the poor and needy. And if I am poor, keep me from handy rationalizations about that being a reason to act dishonestly. Amen.

Sometimes “legal” is still stealing

WEDNESDAY 10.16.19 Isaiah 10:1-2

The prophet Isaiah used the words “rob” and “steal” to describe pronouncing wicked decrees and writing harmful laws. That must have stung. It likely made some “reputable” Israelites angry, those who justified unjust acts toward needy people, widows and orphans by saying, “It's not wrong—it's legal.” Powerful people still sometimes draw up laws, not to foster equal justice, but to try to legitimize injustice. (Pastor Hamilton's sermon noted “stealing” includes “to charge someone to do something they didn't really need done, or to charge them more than they should have been charged.”)

- Scholar John Goldingay rendered Isaiah 10:1 in a more modern way than “Doom” by writing, “Hey, you who inscribe wicked statutes.” * [Isaiah 5:8-10](#) said one abuse (surely not the only one) involved the wealthy taking land from the poor to create large estates, when land was one of the only stable possessions a family could have. What legal practices that burden today's needy do you think Isaiah might challenge as “harmful laws”?
- Scholar David McKenna wrote that Isaiah didn't only address a few unjust leaders. “While God holds elders, judges, and prophets responsible for misleading people, those who follow cannot claim innocence. ...there is a certain codependency between corrupt leaders and corrupted people. One cannot exist without the other.” ** How do you seek to be a responsible follower in choosing which leaders you follow in business, politics, entertainment and church life?

Prayer: God of all, awaken me to any places where I use “legal” as an excuse for something I know down deep isn't “right.” Grow me into a responsible follower, careful to choose leaders of integrity. Amen.

* John Goldingay, *Isaiah for Everyone*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015, p. 42.

Through Jesus' eyes: not stealing means being generous

THURSDAY 10.17.19 Matthew 19:16-22, Luke 19:1-10

Today's two Scripture readings show that Jesus expanded the 8th commandment's reach, as he did with the 6th and 7th commandments. (He didn't quote "Do not steal" in the Sermon on the Mount but did in his reply in Matthew 19:18.) There was no suggestion that the rich young man got his "many possessions" dishonestly, but Jesus challenged him to use them to help others. Zacchaeus, whose wealth sprang from being a Roman tax collector, responded to Jesus by voluntarily sharing much of what he owned.

- These stories show that in Jesus' mind, "do not steal" included "do not hoard resources beyond what you need instead of using them to help others." (They didn't give us a detailed formula for defining "need.") That makes sense, because "stealing" is the opposite of "love your neighbor as you love yourself" (see also [Matthew 25:31-40](#)). Who have you seen live out the kind of broadly generous spirit Jesus said his kingdom calls for? Do you live that way?
- John Wesley, Methodism's founder, stated his grasp of Jesus' teaching in his sermon "The Use of Money." He condensed it to three rules: gain all you can, save all you can, and give all you can. He added that the first two rules were futile unless the third was followed.* How highly do you rank giving in your personal values as compared to gaining and saving? What changes might it take to make you more like Zacchaeus than the wealthy young man who "went away saddened" from Jesus?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, calling you "Lord" means more than putting my name on a church's member list. I want to make you Lord of my time, my ambitions, my money—my whole life. Amen.

* [Click here](#) to read Wesley's full sermon #50, "The Use of Money." In it, you'll find that Wesley qualified "gain all you can" by stressing that he meant that only about honest, ethical pursuits.

Thieves: work so as to have "something to share"

FRIDAY 10.18.19 Ephesians 4:20-28

Ephesians 4:28 is part of a longer passage about how to live as a Jesus follower. We often skip over verse 28 to focus on important messages about handling anger positively or using our words to build up others. But in verse 28, Paul said something striking. He spoke to "thieves," using the word almost as a job title. It may have been: "in the ancient world thieving was rampant....The public baths were the clubs of the time; and stealing the belongings of the bathers was one of the commonest crimes in any Greek city."*

- Notice why the apostle said to give up stealing. It wasn't just to support yourself or be respectable. He said thieves should work "so that they will have something to share with whoever is in need." As scholar N. T. Wright paraphrased it, thieves "should say to themselves that they have a duty to help those in need, and they should work to make it possible (verse 28)." ** Whatever work you do, have you ever thought of it as a way to help make it possible for you to help those in need?
- Beyond the specific counsel to thieves, this passage reminds all of us of the life-changing impact of a commitment to follow Jesus. "Change the former way of life that was part of the person you once were....clothe yourself with the new person created according to God's image in justice and true holiness" (verses 22-24). What are the biggest changes following Jesus has brought in your life? What are one or two changes that you are still working with God to make?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, sometimes I think I just work "to pay the bills." Teach me that a deeper purpose in the work I do is to enable me to help someone in need to pay their bills. Amen.

* William Barclay, *Daily Study Bible Series: The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians (Revised Edition)*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1975, p. 157.

“Not stealing:” about actions, not words

SATURDAY 10.19.19 Romans 2:17-23, Mark 12:38-40

In Romans 1-3 the apostle Paul methodically built the case he summed up in Romans 3:23: “All have sinned and fall short of God’s glory.” In chapter 1 he reviewed the many moral failures in the Gentile world. In chapter 2 he turned to those (like him) with Jewish background. Why would he ask them, “If you preach, ‘No stealing,’ do you steal?” Mark 12:40 named one reason. “Widows often had debt and normally lacked influential advocates; people of status could thus seize their property more readily, often through legal means. Scripture demanded special consideration for the defenseless, including widows ([Ex 22:22](#); [Dt 10:18](#); [Isa 1:17, 23](#); [10:2](#); [Jer 7:6](#); [22:3](#)).” * Paul summed up the central point of all 10 Commandments, including “Don’t steal”: “The commandments, Don’t commit adultery, don’t murder, don’t steal, don’t desire what others have, and any other commandments, are all summed up in one word: You must love your neighbor as yourself” (Romans 13:9).

- Sometimes it may feel complicated to try to figure out, “Is this ‘stealing’ or not?” This part of Pastor Hamilton’s sermon may simplify it for us: “We’re called to do justice—to ensure fairness. We’re called to do good to others. . . . We’re called to have honest weights and to pay a living wage. . . . And ultimately to do unto others as we would have them do unto us.” How about if any time you find yourself wondering “Is this ‘stealing’ or not?” you simply reverse the situation and ask, “Would I want someone else to act this way toward me?” Do you believe our world would be a better place if we all loved our neighbor as our self rather than trying to figure out how much we can get away with?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, if there’s any place where I’ve been stealing, in little or big ways, give me the courage to stop. Teach me how to more fully love my neighbor as myself. Amen.

Family Activity: God commands each of us to be generous, not stealing from ourselves or others. Martin Luther King, Jr. said, “Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.” Gather your family for a late night drive out to the country. Find a place where the sky is dark, and the stars shine through the darkness. Depending on the weather, place blankets on the ground, lie down and look up at the sky. Take the first moments to simply be still and give thanks for God’s beautiful creation. Invite everyone to try and count the stars. Discuss the difference the stars make in the night sky. Imagine together what the sky would look like if it were robbed of its stars. Read the above quote from King and Matthew 5:14-16. Share ideas about ways each of you can be generous lights in the darkness for God. Pray and ask God to help you.

* Zondervan, *NIV, Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible*, eBook (Kindle Locations 227045-227050). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

Prayer Requests – cor.org/prayer *Prayers of peace and comfort for:*

Caleb Longest and family following the death of Mary Anne Longest (Grandmother), 9/10/2019

Dave Rehnblom and family following the death of Grace Rehnblom (Mother), 9/26/2019