

GIVERS NOT TAKERS

EXODUS 20:15

You shall not steal.

I heard a report this past Christmas from Oklahoma City. A woman had gone shopping with her grandkids – a four year old boy named *Jason* – and his little sister, *Susie*. They had just left the grocery store and were loading the car.

That's when Jason said, "[Grandma, Susie has something in her pocket.](#)" The little girl had grabbed a red barrette and stuck it in her coat. Grandma couldn't just drive away, so she unbuckled the kids, got them out of the car, and walked back into the store. As they placed the barrette back on the shelf, one of the clerks asked, "[Have you kids been good, so Santa will visit your house?](#)"

Jason replied, "[I've been very good, but my sister just robbed a store.](#)"

Not many preschoolers knock off grocery stores, but apparently they do when they get a little older. In 2003, there were 413,000 armed robberies in America.

In addition, there were 2.1 million burglaries - over 7 million acts of larceny - 1.2 million vehicle thefts. In 2003 almost 10½ million Americans were the victim of a property crime. Theft makes up ¾ of all crimes committed in the United States.

In fact, there's a major hotel in New York City that in its first year of operation lost 38,000 spoons - 355 silver coffee pots - 1500 finger bowls - and 100 Bibles.

Apparently, people were even ripping off the Gideon Bible from their drawer.

And who knows how many towels were taken from the hotel? There are folks who collect hotel towels! To them, it's like collecting

coins, or stamps, or baseball cards... *“Come over to my house and I’ll show you my stolen towel collection.”*

Perhaps it’s a sign of the times, that the number one computer game on the Wal-Mart website is *“Grand Theft Auto”*... It’s ironic, we arm our new car with a security system so no one will steal it from the parking lot... then we go to Wal-Mart and buy a copy of *Grant Theft Auto*, so our kids can learn how to jack cars.

We tend to play games and watch movies that glamorize theft, and burglary, and the heist. But then it happens to us, and it’s no longer a laughing matter...

Come home from work and find that your television, computer, microwave... all the jewelry is gone - you feel used... abused... encroached upon... violated.

You feel that your property is not even safe in your own home.

Several years ago we came in on a Monday morning to find that the church had been burglarized... the sound system and cash box had been stolen. I was so disillusioned. I couldn’t believe someone could stoop low enough to rip off God...

And what made matters worse, I thought I knew who pulled the heist... but I could never prove my suspicion. *It’s a terrible, helpless feeling to be victimized by a burglary...* Since the incident we’ve installed sensors, motion detectors, cameras, and monitoring devices. God and a security system guards the church’s property.

But the security system didn’t stop the fellow who walked in one Saturday morning and asked to use the church phone. He said he had a flat tire, and could he call for help?... After an hour or so on the line, we figured he’d had ample time, and asked him to wrap it up. When we got the next month’s phone bill there was a \$100 charge for a long distance call to India. He had stolen from the church.

Hey, we've had people come through the doors, and claim to be down and out and in need of financial help. We gave them some money only to find out later they were imposters... We've even had purses snatched from the sanctuary.

My point is, not to give our church a black eye. This kind of stuff happens in all churches. I'm just saying that we're living in a selfish society where people think they're entitled to anything and everything they want. And if they can't afford it, they'll take it from someone who can... *even if it means robbing a church.*

We live in a world that has very little respect for personal property, and the rights of ownership. This is why we need to hear the words of God thunder from the top of Mount Sinai – just four words, but vital words - **“You shall not steal.”**

Actually in the Hebrew it's just two words - a literal reading is **“Don't steal.”**

The word translated **“steal”** is the Hebrew word, *“ganaf”*, which means *“to carry away, as if by stealth.”* And it applies to a boat load of various activities...

Here's a list... *burglary, robbery, larceny, car-jacking, hijacking, shoplifting, pick-pocketing, purse snatching, embezzlement, extortion, racketeering, pilfering from public places, employee theft, underpayment of taxes, fraudulent insurance claims, padded expense accounts, copyright infringements, failure to pay child support, frivolous lawsuits, borrowed items that never get returned, etc...*

There are also accepted business practices that are nothing more than forms of burglary. *Price gouging, false advertising, deceptive packaging, unfair wages* – are all ways businesses steal from both their employees and their customers.

I hate to open up a bag of barbeque potato chips, and get bowled over by the gust of wind that sails out of the bag when I break the seal. What looked like a huge bag of chips was really 90% air and

packaging. That's also a form of theft. *Potato chip theft!* When the chips are down you don't want to get ripped off.

Guys, when we think of robbery, we mistakenly think of a masked man with a gun protruding from his pocket - or crooks in a get-away car – but there are many different ways to violate the 8th commandment. Let me give you a few details about some of the ways I've mentioned... and let me mention a few more...

Take for example shoplifting. It's become an American epidemic. A recent headline read, "[Shoplifting is America's biggest, fastest growing, most expensive crime. Ordinary people will steal everything from TVs to Bibles to Preparation H.](#)"

Convenience stores lose up to \$400 a month on purchases that never get paid. People pull up to the pumps, fill up their tank, and then drive off into the sunset.

America loses \$12 billion a year to shoplifters.

Pilfering, or employee theft, is another form of stealing. American businesses lose more to employee theft than they do to shoplifting – about \$5 billion more.

Taking home pads and pencils that are purchased by your employer to be used on the job - using office stamps for personal letters or bills - making copies without paying for them – placing personal expenses on a company expense account...

It's been estimated that 17% of business losses result from a company's own employees... Taking a 1½ hour, lunch hour. Not working 8 hours for 8 hours pay. Surfing the internet when you should be at work... these are also forms of theft.

I read one study where it was estimated that American businesses lose a staggering \$200 billion a year due to theft, security, and the surveillance needed to catch the thieves. The

study said that across the board 1/3 of the retail cost of most goods goes to cover the cost of stealing. It's called the "*theft surcharge*".

Imagine, if we could do away with shoplifting and employee theft everything we buy would be reduced 33%... I could've used a 33% discount this past Christmas.

But the 8th commandment deals with more than just business theft...

Hey, cheating on your income tax is also stealing. I read where if everyone paid the income tax they honestly owed we would pay off the federal budget in a year.

Borrowing items and not returning them is also a form of stealing... books, music CDs, yard tools, DVDs. Hey, long term borrowing is a form of theft.

Have you ever lied about your 13 year olds' age to get him into Six Flags, or a movie at the child's rate - rather than pay for an adult ticket? Again it's stealing.

What about taking a handful of grapes in the produce section, and eating them before you get to the check out - *without bothering to pay for them?* That's stealing.

Gambling, alcohol, and drug abuse are also ways of stealing money from the people you love. You're taking food from *their* mouth to feed *your* addiction.

What about going into the Brook at Calvary Chapel, grabbing a Coca-cola from the cooler, and neglecting to put 50 cents in the can? Again that's thievery.

Here's another example of theft - illegally copied software! In America today 33% of all computer software is passed through bootlegged copies... It's a sin.

And what about music piracy? Copying CDs, and going on the internet to get unauthorized downloads... Guys, it's not sharing, it's stealing. Yet 81% of all teenagers - and 77% of born again Christian teens commit this crime.

And here's the sadder statistic, "Of the Christian High Schoolers who believe unauthorized downloading of popular music is morally wrong, 60% do it anyway."

Kids use the excuse, "Everybody else is doing it, why should I care?" *You should care because God cares.* He's made honesty, integrity, and respect for other people a non-negotiable. God added "Steal Not" to His Top Ten.

Paul Stanley is a member of the rock group, KISS – not exactly a Christian band known for its moral standards – yet recently, Stanley commented, "When somebody has the nerve to steal your music and say their sharing a file, that's like me going to your house, taking your car, and saying we're sharing transportation. It's so bizarre that people can hide behind technology and cover up a tremendous loss of ethics. Stealing is stealing. You can't share something you don't own."

It's not every day the Christian community gets schooled on ethics from the rock band, KISS - but so be it. File sharing is not an innocent act. It's stealing someone's property. *As a Christian don't take what doesn't belong to you!*

And there are many other ways to steal...

Have you ever stolen the glory from God?

Have you ever stolen years from your parent's life by acting like an idiot?

Have you ever stolen someone's innocence by leading them into sin?

Have you ever stolen someone's faith by planting a doubt in their mind?

Have you ever stolen a person's reputation by repeating some gossip?

Have you ever stolen a blessing from your family by being too lazy to get up and bring them to church? *There're a zillion ways to break the 8th command.*

In his book on the Ten Commandments, Philip Ryken, writes some sobering words. He says, "The trouble is that when it comes to stealing, nearly everyone is doing it... Yet nearly 90% of evangelical Christians claim they never break the 8th commandment... What it shows is that Christians have forgotten what stealing really means. The truth is that theft is pervasive at every level of American society, and like everyone else, we are all in on the take."

Martin Luther called the whole human race a band of thieves. He wrote, "It is the smallest part of the thieves that are hung. If we were to hang them all, where would we get enough rope? We must turn all our belts and straps into halters."

Luther realized that humans are prone to a stealing mentality. Our selfishness spawns a shortcut culture. We're tempted to take what we want the easy way – to buy a lotto ticket, or fill a slot machine with coins... *or to steal...* rather than work.

Once, a woman volunteered her time to serve the church. She was cleaning alongside a 13 year old boy. He was also helping, but with a different motivation. He was working off his community service. He'd been arrested for shoplifting.

At one point, the boy asked the woman, "What bad thing did you do to be working here?" She laughed. "Why son, I didn't do anything wrong. I'm just helping the church. What did you do?" He said, "*I didn't do nuttin' either.*"

That's when she said, "I hope you explained that to the arresting officer." The kid replied, "What was the use? He went to my house and found all the stuff."

As Ryken says, "Christians have forgotten what stealing really means."

Guys, to gain God's perspective on the sin of theft, Christians need to understand the theology behind the biblical notion of personal property.

In reality, the Bible teaches that all property belongs to God!

I have a deed at home, that says I own my house – *at least the bank and I own it* – but that deed is an illusion. Ancient Israel had it right - all the land belonged to God. Each Israeli lived on a borrowed parcel. All the land was *God's sod*.

Leviticus 25 explains the year of Jubilee... Every 50th year in Israel all debts were canceled and the land returned to its original owner. Everyone started over. In explaining this principle, God says in Leviticus 25:23, "The land shall not be sold permanently, for the land is Mine; for you are strangers and sojourners with Me."

God honored the right of personal ownership... *up to a point*. But ultimately the land didn't belong to the purchaser, or the name on its title... It belonged to God.

Job 1:21 best sums up the Bible's teaching on private property. Job declares, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD."

Everything we own belongs to God, and is on loan to us. That's why stealing what belongs to another person is not only a sin against man, but against God.

This is what the writer of Proverbs had in mind in 30:7, when he prayed to God, "Two things I request of You (deprive me not before I die): Remove falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches - feed me with the food allotted to me; lest I be

full and deny You, and say, "Who is the LORD?" Or lest I be poor and steal, and profane the name of my God." He feared an abundance that would lead to neglect, but he also feared stealing for it would profane the name of God.

In one sense the 8th commandment is a prohibition against **stealing**, but in another sense it's a call to **stewardship**. Everything I have belongs to God... that means you shouldn't take it from me, but it also means that I should use it wisely,

I'm a manager, not an owner. I'm accountable to God for how I use what he's given. I can glorify God with my money - or steal from Him and use it selfishly.

Guys, when it comes to personal possessions...

The world says, "What's mine is mine... I'll keep it."

The thief says, "What's yours is mine... I'll take it."

But the Christian says, "What's mine is God's... I'll share it."

This is what Paul teaches in Ephesians 4:28, "Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need." We're to *labor* in order to *love*.

God gives us the will, ability, and opportunity to labor. He's ordained hard work. It's good for us... it imparts a sense of purpose, and keeps us busy, and meets our needs. But it also provides us a way in which we can bless others. With the money we make, we can give... A Christian should work hard - then share the wealth.

"Rather than take from others and *steal* from their lives. We should give to others and *fill up* their lives." *That's one rhyme that only works with a southern accent.* The point though is that as Christians we need to be *givers not takers*.

Here's another way to think about it...

There are actually 3 ways to accumulate property: *by gift, by toil, by theft.*

God sanctions the first two: *gift and toil... love and labor...* while theft is an assault on both! When you rip off another person's property you deprive them of the rewards of their honest toil - and you're certainly not showing them love.

In the middle of the 1999 football season, Florida State coach, Bobby Bowden, suspended his star player after he was caught shoplifting. The guy walked out of a store with over \$400 worth of clothes. He'd spent just 20 bucks. When the young man was interviewed, he complained, "*It's not like I've murdered the President.*"

But stealing is in a sense murder... Notice the progression in the 6th, 7th, and 8th commandments... The **6th commandment** affirms the sanctity of life. The **7th commandment** upholds the sanctity of marriage - the institution that propagates life. Then the **8th commandment** protects the sanctity of private property – the stuff used to sustain life. In its rawest form, to steal another person's property is to prohibit them from meeting their needs - and kill them by a slow death.

It's interesting that the 8th commandment starts a new division in God's Top Ten. In the Old Testament when the Hebrew people broke one of the first seven commandments the punishment was death. The first seven were capital crimes.

But the remedy for the eighth commandment was not death, but *restitution*. The person who stole from another man was to pay him back with penalty and interest.

Exodus 22 says, "*If a man steals an ox or a sheep, and slaughters it or sells it, he shall restore five oxen for an ox and four sheep for a sheep... He should make full restitution; if he has nothing, then he shall be sold for his theft. If the theft is certainly found alive in his hand, whether it is an ox or donkey or sheep, he*

shall restore double.” If he pawns off the goods he should pay back 5 to 1 for an ox and 4 to 1 for a sheep. If he’s caught red-handed he should give back what he stole, and another of the same kind. What he tried to take - is now taken from him.

It’s interesting, that what was *demanded* under the Law is now desired by the Christian. In Israel you were forced to make restitution – in Christ you want to make restitution. *Just think of that wee little man named Zacchaeus...*

Zacchaeus was a tax collector. He was a short man with a long list of sins.

In Luke 19 Jesus spots him dangling from a tree. He calls him by name and invites Himself over for dinner. And the Jews were shocked. Zacchaeus was a Roman collaborator - a Jewish traitor. He was a crook and swindler to boot.

But the acceptance Jesus showed him that day melted his heart. It changed Zacchaeus. The love he received delivered him from his greed and theivery. It forced him to look outside of himself and become concerned for other people.

Luke 19:8 tells us “Then Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, “Look, Lord, I give half of my goods to the poor; and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold.” Jesus never asked him to make restitution. It was the conclusion he came to on his own after he was forgiven by Jesus.

When I was in college we played golf every Monday. I was part of a regular foursome that teed it up at the local country club. There was only one problem...

The course was closed on Monday. There was no one there, so we’d park by the side of the road, climb the fence, and play a complimentary round of golf.

I thought it was no big deal... until a few years later when I truly gave my life to Jesus, and received His forgiveness and His love. I

was a new person. And the stolen golf started to bother me. I was paying for it with a guilty conscience.

One day I wrote a check for the green fees I'd never paid, and dropped it in the mail. It was the best expenditure I've ever made. Since then, I've concluded that no amount of stolen money is worth the guilty conscience that comes with it.

Hey, I'd rather pay the extra tax, than worry about whether I'd been honest.

God wants each of us to live a life of integrity, and honesty, and faithfulness.

This needs to be a non-negotiable... This is a commitment you need to decide on in advance – *that everything in life is the property of God, and I'm going to handle it in a way that'll bring Him glory and show love to other people.*

If He's given it to you, I won't take it. If He's given it to me, I'll use it wisely.

And not only am I going to make this commitment I'm going to encourage my kids to do likewise. For certainly this one virtue that's learned by example.

Laura Slessinger tells about a guy named *Harvey* who called into her radio show to tell his story, "After filling up my truck with gas, I went and paid for it in cash. The clerk gave me my change which I counted on the way out. I realized he'd given me \$5 too much, so I returned and asked him to check for his error. He was very surprised when he realized what he'd done, and my response.

He thanked me and noted that this had happened only once before. That customer, the clerk remembered, was a little older. But his vehicle was a van and had the same signs on the side as my utility truck. By his description I realized it was my father. This was almost twenty years earlier.

I was very fortunate to be able to work side by side with my father for many years. This is but one of the lessons I learned from him by example.”

May our kids also learn the same lesson and keep the 8th commandment.

I would be remiss if I didn't share with you one other way we can break the 8th commandment, and steal. Perhaps this is the most sinister form of the crime...

In Malachi 3 the prophet asks, "Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, 'In what way have we robbed You?' In tithes and offerings. You are cursed with a curse, for you have robbed Me, even this whole nation." It's also a violation of the 8th commandment to steal from God the tithe that belongs to Him.

Understand, in the Old Testament you never *gave a tithe you paid a tithe*.

The word "tithe" means "tenth". And the first 10% of all you had or accumulated belonged to the Lord. A tithe was not you being generous. You weren't doing God a favor, or giving to God from your own resources. Rather the tithe was you giving back to God what you owed Him in the first place. The tithe belongs to the Lord.

The firstborn of the flock - the firstfruits of the crop – were never yours. They belonged to God from the moment they were born, or sprouted from the ground.

When I get paid, I deposit my check, and then sit down to pay my bills. But before I write the first check - or casually glance at what I owe, (*I don't want any doubt to cross my mind*) – the first thing I do is write my tithe to Calvary Chapel.

The first 10% doesn't even belong to me. There's no decision involved. I have decided beforehand the tithe belongs to God. To hold it back is to steal from Him.

I love the story of the missionary who had taught this truth to an African village.

One day, there was a knock on the door of his hut. He opened the door, and there stood a boy with a fish in his hand. He said, “I brought my tithe to the Lord.”

The missionary was excited for the little boy... He said, “Well, if you’ve brought me one fish as a tithe - that means you’ve had a good day. Where are the other 9 fish?” The boy answered, “They’re still in the river. I haven’t caught them yet.”

Here’s an attitude that glorifies God. I’m so thankful for what He’s done - I love Him so much for who He is – let me give Him *the very first and the very best!*

And of course, tithing is the one place in Scripture where God challenges us to test Him - to see if He won’t bless us if we tithe. Malachi 3:10, “Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and try Me now in this,” says the LORD of hosts, “If I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it.”

As I’ve mentioned, the 8th commandment is all about stewardship, and the tithe is the ultimate test. Stealing is always wrong because everything belongs to God. But how can I really believe God owns all my stuff if I can’t trust Him with 1/10th?

Surely we believe *God* can do more with 90% than we can do with 100%!

During a worship service at a church in Binford, North Dakota, an elderly lady named “*Mary*” fainted, and struck her head on the end of a pew. Immediately an ambulance was called. Mary was strapped to the stretcher, and was ready to be taken out the door, when she motioned for her daughter to come near her side.

All the church members thought Mary was uttering her last words, but they were wrong. Instead, Mary whispered to her daughter, “**My tithe is in my purse.**”

Tithing to God was such a habit, before Mary left for the hospital she wanted to make sure she dropped her tithe in the offering. And that’s how tithing needs to be handled... make it *a holy habit*. Test God regularly, and you’ll regularly be blessed.

Whatever you do, don’t steal from God.

In conclusion, if you’ve broken the 8th commandment... *and after this morning, I’m sure we’d all admit we’ve broken it in one way or another...*

If we’ve been a taker instead of a giver... Or if we haven’t been the kind of example Jesus desires, and our kids deserve... Hey, we still have hope...

If you’ve violated “**You shall not steal**”, and been a thief... remember that Jesus died to forgive thieves. *It’s no accident He hung on a cross between two thieves.*

And when one of them cried out and asked, “**Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.**” Jesus said to him, “**Today you will be with Me in Paradise.**” Jesus is willing to take a thief and make him His child.

Jesus is into taking burglars and turning them into blessors. He transforms robbers into hard-working givers. As Paul says in Ephesians 4, “**Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need.**” **Be a giver not a taker!**