

# Do Not Steal

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] The scripture reading comes from Deuteronomy chapter 5. Please follow along in your bulletin. Verse 1, And Moses summoned all Israel and said to them, Hear, O Israel, the statutes and the rules that I speak in your hearing today, and you shall learn them and be careful to do them.

Then in verse 6, Visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.

You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain. Observe the Sabbath day to keep it holy as the Lord your God commanded you.

Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, or your male servant or your female servant, or your ox or your donkey, or any of your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates, that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you.

You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm.

[ 2 : 0 0 ] Therefore, the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day. Honor your father and your mother as the Lord your God commanded you, that your days may be long, and that it may go well with you in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.

You shall not murder, and you shall not commit adultery, and you shall not steal, and you shall not bear false witness against your neighbor, and you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, and you shall not desire your neighbor's house, his field, or his male servant, or his female servant, his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's.

This is the word of God. Great. Thanks, Celeste. Let's just pray for a second and ask God to speak to us from his word.

Heavenly Father, glorious Son, Holy Spirit, as we come to your word this morning, God, we want you to speak to us. Jesus, it really is our belief that you lead this church.

You are the leader of Watermark. We've gathered this morning to hear from you, to hear your word. Christ is our king and our leader. Come and speak to us this morning. God, we're not here to hear or listen to the opinions of man.

[ 3 : 1 7 ] We're here to have your words spoken to us, and your word to resonate in our hearts. And so I pray, God, once you prepare our hearts, speak to us this morning, God. Draw us to yourself. Open the eyes of our hearts to see your majesty and your glory, God, and change us, we pray.

We pray these things in your wonderful name. Amen. Amen. I'm not sure how many of us here have been convicted of stealing before.

Maybe some of us. I remember the first time I tried to steal something. I was about eight or nine years old, and my friend and I both lived down the road from a supermarket in Johannesburg in South Africa.

And so after school, we'd jump on our bicycles, ride to the supermarket and hang out and talk about things that nine-year-old boys talk about. And one day we decided the supermarket's got this whole counter of sweets.

And we decided, let's see if we can go and grab a few and get away with it. And so we walked into the supermarket and looking very cool, grabbed a few sweets and tried to put them in my pocket.

[ 4 : 26 ] And then I remember I felt very convicted that this wasn't a good thing and tried to put them back. And in doing so, I caught the attention of the shopkeeper. She saw what I was trying to do, and she looked at me and scolded me for stealing the sweets, which I then denied, which was twice as bad, because now I wasn't only a thief, I was also a liar.

And so I was like, no, no, I wasn't. I promise you. And I got out of there as quickly as I could and promised to never try that trick again. This morning we are looking at the Eighth Commandments.

We're working through the series, Ten Words of Abundant Life, commonly known as the Ten Commandments. And we're looking at the Eighth Commandment, which is do not steal. Now, I must admit that when earlier this year we decided we were going to look at the Ten Commandments, I had no idea that it was going to be so challenging.

I knew kind of the breadth of Scripture meant that God calls us not just to obey the technical, no letter of the law, but the spirit of the law. But over the last few weeks, I have found this so challenging and so convicting.

And I'm sure most of us have as well. But what this means, of course, is that this is where the hope of the gospel comes in. Because the gospel is not just good advice, how to live our lives, it's good news.

[ 5 : 46 ] The gospel is not just a self-improvement project, how to make our lives work. The gospel is the account of how God has come to rescue us and to save us, not only to save us from sin, but also to change us and to redeem us.

What Chris spoke about, to make us the kind of people who become more like Him, who live like Him and behave like Him and act like Him. And so I just want to say right up front that every one of us this morning, from the sweet-stealing preacher in the front to those of us right at the back and everyone in between, all of us have come this morning and get to receive and hopefully be flooded by the good news of the gospel.

Friends, if you're here this morning and you're excited to be here and you're awake and you're thrilled to be at church, or if you're here and you're slightly hungover or thinking, what on earth am I doing at a church this morning?

Welcome. You and I, all of us, need the gospel together this morning. So this morning, we're looking at this eighth commandment, do not steal. And what I want to do is, I wanted to look at this commandment under three headings.

The first one is types of theft. There's varieties of what stealing looks like. Secondly, the heart or the root of theft. Where does that come from? And then thirdly, how Jesus makes us generous.

[ 7 : 06 ] Okay? Types of theft, heart of theft, how Jesus makes us generous. If you're looking for a seat, there's some seats in the front. You're welcome to come and grab some. Don't be shy. Okay? Great.

So firstly, types of theft. In Hong Kong, we don't get to experience a lot of common or petty theft like other countries in the world.

But that doesn't mean that it doesn't exist, right? In fact, the more modern and sophisticated a society is, the more sophisticated and elaborate are our means and the systems that we come up with how to steal.

And so there are a bunch of different types of theft. And I'm going to run through four of them and each of them are more complex and more nuanced, more challenging than the previous. So the first one is obvious. It's taking something that doesn't belong to you.

Okay? I'm sure we've all encountered this in some way. Maybe you've had something taken out of your bag when you're on the airplane or at the gym or something that's taken from you that belongs to you.

[ 8 : 07 ] In South Africa, which is the country that our family comes from, crime is quite a big deal. And in South Africa, public transport isn't a big deal. And so most people have cars.

And so our family, we had two cars. We had a more nicer family car, which Claire would drive with the kids. And that was parked in our apartment complex behind a secure gate.

And then we had this broken down, paint peeling, torn seat, dented, kind of student car, which was yours truly, my car.

And that we parked outside on the road, outside of our house. And every day, it was a challenge to see when I walked out of the apartment to go to my car to see if my car would still be there.

And amazingly, every day, it was still there. You could hijack that thing with a pair of tweezers, I'm sure. But for some reason, it was still there every day. Now the irony is that the nicer family car, we really took good care of.

[ 9 : 08 ] And when we knew that we were going to move to Hong Kong, we decided to take extra care of it, got all the dents fixed up so that we could sell it for a nice good price to help us move over here. And that car is the one that got stolen just before we left.

And they left the student dinged, beaten, bashed up car for us to do something else with. But we all know that feeling of having something taken from you that belongs to you, right?

It's not just the inconvenience of it or the price, it's the sense of being violated. You feel like somebody's come into your sacred space and taken something and messed with your sacred space.

There's a sense of being violated. But there's actually many ways that we can do this. Some of the less obvious ways are like downloading illegal music or movies, downloading software or computer games.

Things that don't actually belong to us but we take them as if they do. Kelvin, many of them there's some chairs in the front you're welcome to come and grab some. Fifteen years ago the most downloaded and illegally pirated movie apparently was Mel Gibson's movie The Passion of the Christ which is all about how Jesus died for sinners like us, right?

[ 10 : 21 ] And so even if it's a Christian movie it's still stealing. So the first kind is taking that which is not yours. That's obvious. Second kind of this is withholding from somebody else what is due to them.

So in Leviticus chapter 6 God says if somebody loses something and you find it and you don't give it back to them you keep it for yourself that's a form of stealing.

The point here is that withholding something that is due to somebody else is a form of theft. Now the most obvious form of this is tax evasion, right? Money that is due to the government but we hold on to it ourselves because we think that we'll handle it better.

Now interestingly Jesus somebody comes to him and says Jesus should we give money to Caesar or not? And Jesus says give to Caesar the things that belong to Caesar. Now you may think yeah but the government okay maybe you don't feel like this maybe in other countries you feel like but the government is not a very legitimate government.

They corrupt they steal our money they're not going to use it properly surely we don't need to pay taxes to that kind of government. But think about it Caesar was using the money that people gave to one persecute Christians and two set himself up as a rival deity rivaling Jesus and yet still Jesus says give to Caesar the things that are Caesar's.

[ 11 : 44 ] Another thing that would fall under this is tithing right? Giving to God's kingdom and as scary as it is God says that when the people of Israel were withholding from him their financial worship Jesus says as ludicrous as it is that's a form of stealing he says you're robbing God because what God is saying is that the money I give you says God is actually his money it's not mine it's his money he's asking us to steward it to take care of it and so when he says I want you to set aside a portion of that a small portion for something else for my purposes and we say no it's mine he says actually you're taking something that belongs to me here's another way that we can not give to people those that are due we can by not paying fair or adequate wages withholding wages from those who work from us and even if it's legally right God says in James he says the wages of those that are being taken advantage of cry out to me they reach my ears and I will defend their cause but the same goes the other way right if we are working for a company or organization and we are taking a salary and yet we're using company time or company resources for our own means or our own agenda enriching ourselves it's a form of theft okay so firstly taking something that doesn't belong to us secondly withholding something that is due to someone else third thing is dishonest or deceitful dealings transactions in the Hebrew

Bible the word for stealing is sometimes used for the word deceit for being dishonest and the idea here is that one of the ways that people can steal is not by taking something physical but in their transactions and their dealings being less than honest or fair so in the Bible God he has this phrase that he often uses how God hates or detests dishonest scales or weights and it's this beautiful picture how in the marketplace someone would go to the marketplace and the shopkeeper would sell something but be dishonest in their dealings so what would happen is you'd have some scales someone would say look I want a kilogram of rice and they'd put a kilogram scale weight on the one scale and then put rice on the other one and when those two balanced out you knew you had a kilogram of rice but what shopkeepers would sometimes do is they'd bore out the middle or they would change it and put say a 900 gram weight there and mark it one kilogram so they're only putting 900 grams of rice but they're selling you you're paying for one kilogram right it's a way of cheating or stealing from you by being dishonest and there are many ways that we've all experienced this how many of us have bought something and you get home and you realize it's defective or broken when we first arrived in

Hong Kong we didn't bring a whole lot of things from South Africa and so we hit carousel with a force and I remember one day we just moved to Hong Kong and we heard you've got to buy these things called dehumidifiers we didn't know what they were okay South Africa there's no such thing as dehumidifier so I hit carousel I find this guy he's selling a good one for a good price I meet him at an MTR station miles up north somewhere and I'm very chuffed with myself that I've got such a good deal come home plug it in and it turns on but that's about all that it does right completely ripped off how many of us have booked an apartment on Airbnb and they say king size bed jacuzzi everything you could want and you get your holiday destination and it's nothing like what they've described that sense of being cheated of having been stolen what about lying on our CVs or our resume it's a form of stealing of taking because it's being less than honest it's taking advantage of someone now the challenge is that sometimes these things aren't technically illegal no one's going to prosecute you or put you in jail for it but it is morally dubious

I remember when I was 12 years old my family went on our first overseas holiday and we went to Europe and we were very excited and we land in Italy and my dad goes to change money do you remember the days of traveler's checks if you're under 30 you don't know what that means we used to have these things called traveler's checks and he went to go change some traveler's checks and he came back fuming mad so what's wrong this is got completely ripped off this is the lady charged me like 20% interest or commission or something and he says to you can't do that you can't charge me 20% and she says yes sir I can legally the law says I'm allowed to charge you know 25% or something like that and he says young lady it may be legally right but it's morally wicked that line became a joke in our family you can do things that are legally right but morally it's questionable right throughout the bible God is often on this thing about interest rates he says that when somebody in the church family in the church community is going through a hard time and they need to borrow money don't charge them interest in the old testament it was against God's law to charge one of your spiritual family members interest because it's taking advantage of them when they fall in rough times they're out of money they have a medical condition they need to go to the doctor they need to borrow money don't take advantage of them and enrich yourself in their state of poverty

John Calvin who was a pastor in Geneva Switzerland 500 years ago he was also a kind of statesman and he lobbied to say that the church should look after the interest rates in the city of Geneva because for him it was a justice issue there's a theological issue not a monetary policy issue and so this issue of honest dealings is really challenging for those of us who work in advertising how do we advertise something honestly not overstate it or hide something that doesn't work so well someone once said that in advertising I'm sorry if you work in advertising this is not a slight on you but someone once said advertising robs you of your self-contentment and then sells it back to you in the form of a product very clever how do we advertise honorably fairly honestly lastly what about corporate sabotage how many of us have been tempted to sabotage a competitor's deal or maybe steal a client from a colleague in an underhanded way all of this is dishonest dealings okay so taking something that doesn't belong to you withholding something that does belong to someone else dishonest dealings and then fourthly this is the most complex and nuance and we'll just touch it briefly is social injustice and this is when society is structured in such a way where the system is ordered that it enriches a certain group of people at the expense of another group of people and one of the most obvious examples of this is apartheid in South Africa where a certain group society was ordered or structured legislation was put in place that one group would be enriched at the expense of another group and

[19:01] God says in Micah he says this woe to those who devised wickedness who lie in their beds at night thinking of wicked schemes they execute it because it is in their power to do so the system is set up that they can enrich themselves and they take advantage of the system okay so four different types of theft taking that that doesn't belong to you withholding that which belongs to another dishonest dealings and social injustice participating in social injustice secondly the heart of theft so what's behind this my guess is that many of us here aren't stealing sweets from the supermarket or robbing a bank or defrauding the government I hope but but sometimes we may be tempted with the more dishonest dealings maybe we tempted to just hold back or not be completely honest in our CVs or tax returns what's going on behind here and the heart of this is putting profit or personal possessions or personal gain before people it's looking at a situation say how can I enrich myself at the expense of someone else and behind that is there's two ways that this or two things that's going on in our hearts the first is just old-fashioned greed the excessive desire for more and more stuff or possessions taking back what's not ours keeping what belongs to someone else deceitful schemes comes because of an excessive lust for more and more stuff now of course the problem with greed is that none of us think that we're greedy right we just think of ourselves as good stewards or taking care of our family members but Jesus is actually very careful about warning us about our relationship with money

Jesus never says that money itself is wicked or inherently wrong it's not wrong to be wealthy to even have a lot of money but he warns us about the danger of money because it does something to our hearts and the first thing that Jesus says is there's this unshakable break unbreakable bond between what our treasure is what we hope and trust in and love and adore and what owns our hearts what captures our hearts Jesus says that the thing that we love and trust supremely actually owns our hearts and our hearts is the control center of our lives and that's why Jesus says that what we treasure actually is what we worship the New Testament is constantly warning us not about the inherent wrongness of having money or even being wealthy but the danger of what money can do to our hearts it can lead us astray from what's true and noble and honest and good and right and beautiful it can lead us astray from God himself but here's the other danger the New Testament says that the desire to get wealthy quickly or easily okay often blinds us to reality and walking around blind is a dangerous endeavor right so the New Testament the

Apostle Paul writes this to this young pastor Timothy says Timothy tell those that are in the congregation warn them that the desire to get rich quickly or easily they're going to fall into all kinds of temptation maybe the temptation to fudge the books temptation to be less than completely honest maybe the temptation to do what's legally right but morally questionable and he says these temptations cause us to fall into a senseless trap into a harmful trap that leads to ruin and destruction and I love how he describes that this desire to get rich quickly or easily leads to senseless behavior and just think about that how many times have we heard a story of somebody who wanted to try and steal something and they got caught and you hear the story and you think how stupid are you how do you think you could possibly get away with that I mean like that's just the most ridiculous thing I remember watching a YouTube video years ago some guy goes to rob a store and he's maybe slightly intoxicated and he sees the CCTV camera and he thinks this is his moment to shine right

America's got talent or whatever it is so he sees this camera and he starts dancing to the camera and dancing to the camera and then he realizes oh yeah actually I'm on a mission and he goes and robs the store and obviously his face is on the camera and they catch him pretty quickly and you think how stupid are you I mean like obviously you're going to get caught right but but what's happening there the desire to get rich quickly or easily leads us to do senseless stupid things it blinds us to to the reality of what's going on in life it blinds us not only to good sense but also to our own hearts and so the one problem is just this greed right this desire to get more but the other reason why we are maybe tempted in this way is because we don't really while we may know in our heads what God says about his faithfulness God's faithfulness may not really resonate with our hearts friends why is it that we are tempted to steal clients from a colleague it's because we believe that the life that we can secure for ourselves is better than the life that God is going to give us why are we tempted to exaggerate or lie on our

CVs or resumes it's because we don't trust that God really is able to provide for us and take care for us and so Paul writes to Timothy and he says this tell those who are financially well off not to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches he's not saying that wealth is a bad thing he's not saying that you mustn't be wealthy he's not saying it's wrong to be a wealthy person but he's saying don't set your hope your confidence your trust in the uncertainty of wealth that wealth is like a it's like quicksand if you try and build your life on it it's not going to build and be a solid foundation for your life he says rather remind these people of the faithfulness of God who richly provides us with everything we need to enjoy he says Timothy remind these people of the faithfulness of God remind them that God is sovereign remind them that their hope is not in their bank account or their job or their bonus their hope is in who God is that he's the sovereign

[ 25 : 33 ] Lord of all creation remember earlier we said God's name is Yahweh I am he has no limitations he's not the God of the wealthy or the God of the poor he's not the God of Israel the God of America he is the supreme being Yahweh I am who I am he's the God who rules and reigns over all creation friends he's the God who can take who can take care of your every need friends the God that we worship in Revelation 4 is the God before whom one day every knee will fall down and say all glory to you friends the God of the Bible is the God before whom all angels all angelic beings fall down on their knees and say worthy worthy worthy holy holy holy are you to receive glory and honor and might and majesty and praise friends the God that we worship is the God who tomorrow can drop a million dollars in your lap or the God who can allow some calamity some disaster to come and wipe out all your financial savings friends the God of the Bible is a sure and steady foundation and so Paul writes and says do not put your hope in the uncertainty of riches in the uncertainty of your bank account in the uncertainty of the stock market because it's a lousy foundation to build your life on set your hope on God set your hope on who God is his nature his character his faithfulness his steadfast love his unfailing and unshakable love friends banking our life on our bank accounts is like taking refuge in a straw hut during a T10 typhoon it's not going to save you and so Paul writes and he says remind us not to put our hope in riches but in the faithfulness of God and so what happens when we hope and trust in the uncertainty of riches first our hearts tend to drift away but secondly in order to feel safe and secure in order to feel successful we find it easier and easier to make decisions that 10 years ago we thought we'd never make to take endeavors that we thought we would never do to maybe just be not 100% honest on our tax returns to maybe just slightly exaggerate our current salary on our resume or CV when applying for a job we do things that are not illegal but it's maybe quite slightly cutting corners and we find ourselves being the kind of people that we never thought we would be friends we find ourselves putting profits and possessions personal gain ahead of people so how do we change how does Jesus make us generous friends the good news of the gospel is that in the gospel we discover that abundant life fruitful life meaningful life the life that we long for is not found in profit it's not found in possessions it's not found in personal gain it's found in a person friends in the gospel we discover that a person's life and identity and self worth are not found in their net worth or the abundance of their possessions but found in relationship friends in the gospel we discover the one person who though he had all the power all the privilege all the prestige of the world came to us in poverty allowed himself to be sold for 30 silver coins allowed himself to be sold so that someone else could be enriched so that he could not only save us but has set us free from the slavery of our heart's desires friends in Jesus we see that God who is infinitely rich became unfathomably poor

so that we can become eternally rich in him friends in Jesus we find that the king of all creation became a servant so that we who are slaves to our desires can be set free friends in the gospel we come to face to face with the problem of our sin and the problem of our heart but we also come face to face with the extravagant generosity and the riches of God's grace in Jesus and do you know what happens when we encounter Jesus and his grace when that penny drops when the extravagant generosity of Christ to us when that penny drops from our heads to our hearts it changes us and it makes us the kind of people that don't need a grasp for more but instead love to be generous towards others in fact we see this throughout the New Testament in the book of Ephesians the book of Ephesians is this incredible book about the riches of the gospel and Paul writes and he says once we were dead in our sins but because of Jesus we are alive in Christ once we were slaves to our desires but because of Jesus we now live lives of purity and grace and Paul writes about the incredible riches of the gospel and then in chapter 4 he shows how the riches of the gospel actually change the way that we live our lives and so this is what he says he says because of who Jesus is because of what you have in him put away falsehood and speak truthfully to one another put away anger and reconcile with your neighbor and then he says this tell the thief to no longer steal but rather let him work hard doing honest work with his hands so that he may have something to share with those in need you see that see the gospel doesn't just come and say stop stealing work hard you lazy bum the gospel comes and says work hard stop stealing so that you may have an abundance that you may have something to share with those that are in need and isn't this what we see with the story of Zacchaeus remember Zacchaeus in Luke 19 he's a Roman tax collector which meant that he's legally authorized by the Roman government to overcharge his own citizens in taxes and then he can pocket the difference so Rome says listen we want to collect a thousand denarii this year you can charge 150,000 and the difference is for your pocket and so Zacchaeus as a tax collector is ripping off his own countrymen his own nation in order to get rich and he's a social outcast because of it but he doesn't mind because he's got rich in the process who cares if you don't have friends as long as you're rich right and so Zacchaeus is a tax collector but one day



Jesus comes to him and Jesus showers him with the grace and the mercy of God and at the end of their lunch Zacchaeus is a changed man and this is what Zacchaeus says he says Jesus I'm going to give away half of my possessions to the poor and if I have stolen from anybody I will pay back to them four times what I've taken friends when we encounter the grace of God and Jesus do you know what happens the grace of God so hits our hearts it will transform us from being the kind of people who think what can I accumulate to being the kind of people who think how can I give away how can I bless others and that's actually what Paul says to Timothy straight after in that passage where he says tell those that are wealthy not to trust the uncertainty of riches but to trust in the faithfulness of God he goes on to say this tell those who are economically empowered that they are to do good to be rich in good deeds and to be generous and ready to share with everyone friends imagine living that kind of life imagine going to work tomorrow and with the attitude of how you can share a potential client with somebody who's new or starting out at the firm friends imagine going to work and asking the question how can I be 100% honest about the potential dangers of this investment to these potential clients friends imagine going to work and at promotion time putting in a good word with your boss about your colleague telling your boss what an asset they are to the company knowing that they may get promoted ahead of you friends imagine going to work and asking the question what's not just not just what's legally right but how can we be absolutely honest and fair in all our transactions and our dealings friends imagine going to work and walking away from a deal that's going to make you a ton of money and get you a massive bonus because you know that downstream somebody else in society may suffer even though you can enrich yourself our friends the question is this why would you do such a thing who would do such a thing and the answer is those that have encountered the unfathomably wonderful gracious incredible generosity of Christ it's those who have encountered the God who became unfathomably rich poor so that we can become eternally rich in him friends it's those who have had our worlds turned around because the magnificent faithfulness and the awesomeness of God has not just hid our minds but penetrated our hearts and turned our lives around friends it's those who once lived for themselves but as a result of his infinite beauty have now decided to live for him and live for others and so friends

I want to ask us this question as we close do you know him like that do you know him like that friends has your world been turned around like that like Zacchaeus friends maybe you've been a Christian for many years maybe you've been part of this church for a long time do you know him like that has he turned your world upside down friends do you know the one who though rich for your sake became poor on the cross so that you could become rich and become a different kind of person friends do you know him let's pray together heavenly father thank you for not just god thank you for the way that the gospel is not just good advice you don't just come to us and say stop stealing be a better person pull your socks up and sort your life out you come to us for the extravagant good news that you Jesus came to us in poverty that we might be enriched at your expense Jesus thank you that you didn't put your own personal gain before us but you put us before your personal gain

Jesus won't you come and change our hearts won't you come and write the gospel not just in our heads but in our hearts Jesus won't you come and transform us I pray Christ come and make us a different kind of people make us the kind of people Lord that walk to a different drumbeat that have a different ethos and motive in life those who live for a different cause because we've encountered the magnificent and sovereign God oh God come and do that in our hearts we pray amen down to time