

# Eighth Word: Bless (The Ten Words)

Reconnect – August 22, 2010

**Text:** Exodus 20:1-2, 15; Ephesians 4:28

**Key Thought:** Giving when it's not deserved shows both God's love and how we rely on Him.

"You must not steal." Exodus 20:1-2, 15, NLT

## EIGHTH WORD:

# BLESS



August 22, 2010



### Intro: When the going gets tough, the tough steal

- High profile fraud cases recently – first in the States, with Bernie Madoff (millionaire investor who deceived clients into thinking that they were making lots of money) and then here with Earl Jones and a steady stream of others
- Then, just recently, for the next generation, we have this girl, Ashley Kirilow, who evidently faked three kinds of cancer in order to raise money (and sympathy, and attention) for herself
- Outrage in all cases is predictable and understandable – but also says something about people, because in each case, the fraudster was able to do what they did because of something in their victims
  - For Jones, it was their greed – they were content to be told that they were making huge returns even though it made no sense in that economy
  - For Kirilow, it was their desire to do good or to be emotionally vindicated – they wanted to help someone who seemed to be so in need of it, and who was so grateful for their help
- Both leave behind many victims and nothing else to show for what they've done

### Q: Have you ever been stolen from or taken advantage of, especially financially? (discuss)

(Victim of theft – my cellphone – church fundraiser, gone... my day planner, gone... threw me for the whole year... my Bible, gone... (drat that Bible College...))

- We don't like to talk about it... shame in being the victim of a crime, shame in being the doer...
- III. – trading a car for a bike, then buying back the car for \$1600... from family...

### Q: What feeling(s) came from that? What practical impact on your life came from it?

effects of being stolen from / ripped off – hurt, paranoid, fearful, uncertain, blocked, deprived, unable to function, fear of loss in future

## **“Don’t take what doesn’t belong to you”**

- First we learn to ask for things, to the delight of our parents
- And then we learn that we can take things, too – we have the power to affect our own situation, and to help ourselves
- But then soon after THAT, we are generally taught to not take what isn’t ours – the “no, no, that’s not yours” phase – because our taking, left unchecked, will always go too far – it seems to be part of being human that our “taker” is broken

## **Perpetual victims – God’s people in Egyptian slavery**

- God’s chosen people Israel knew that firsthand – they had been slaves in Egypt for 400 years, exploited and oppressed
- Part of the evil of slavery is that your work, the thing that you were made to do, goes to someone else – so no matter how hard you work, you can never get ahead or benefit from it – someone else does, instead, and all you have is fatigue without results (which may feel like working a low-paying job, too!)
- Everything they’ve ever done, everything they’ve ever had of value, has been taken from them
- But now, things are different – now, they have come out of Egypt with wealth (“plundered the Egyptians”) – the wages of their slavery, and they have their freedom, and they are learning what it means to be a nation directly from God, at the foot of a fiery mountain
- And God says to them, “You must not steal” – you must not ever become, even for a moment, like the place you just came from, like the people who oppressed you for so long – you must not take what is not yours, because you don’t need to – God is big enough and great enough and loving enough to provide for them everything they will need, not only in their journey through the wilderness to the Promised Land, but in an ongoing way after that, too
- In essence, He says, “You’re not going to play that game anymore” – you’re not going to be the aggressor, and you’re not going to be the victim – instead, they were going to start a new way of living, that would revolutionize the world, a way that involved giving as a part of living, just like God had promised to their ancestor Abraham, way, way back long before:

The LORD had said to Abram, “Leave your native country, your relatives, and your father’s family, and go to the land that I will show you. I will make you into a great nation. I will bless you and make you famous, and you will be a blessing to others. I will bless those who bless you and curse those who treat you with contempt. All the families on earth will be blessed through you.” **Genesis 12:1-3, NLT**

- But unfortunately for them, they kept going back to their human nature... the call of the way of life of “everyone else” was too strong, and they forgot about God’s provision and generosity, as well as how they had once been victims of such injustice...

**Q: Why do people steal? Have you ever stolen anything? Want to “come clean”? Police are standing by...**

III. – my marble stealing days (erasers, etc.) – free stuff in desks

III. – Accused of being a thief – a jarring occurrence – KFC delivery, Wal-Mart shopping

### **Black and white, shades of grey...**

- On the surface, it looks pretty black and white – what’s mine is mine, what’s yours is yours – but it can get complicated
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**Q: What are some “grey” areas, when it comes to taking what might not be ours...?**

Grey areas: internet access, income taxes (declaring tips, etc.), cash for renovations/purchases for a discount – discussion?

### **Stealing, then and now**

- Not just theft, but kidnapping in the ancient world – stealing a person
- Building a society – the idea of personal property – slaves wouldn’t have owned land, they would have been squatters in Egypt, scrabbling to get by – God says this is how you are to live

“[All of] what we possess is a gift from God, who owns everything... Part of that gift from God is in the tasks He gives each person to do... This gift is undermined when a man cannot enjoy the fruit of his toil because someone has stolen what he has produced. Theft then is an attack on the dignity of human beings and their work” (**Rooker, The Ten Commandments, 151-152**)

- The nation have been slaves in Egypt their whole lives – their whole lives, the product of their work has been stolen, as they are slaves – the work they have done has been for others, or has been taken by others, never allowing them to be able to work harder and progress or improve themselves – they have been trapped by theft, by exploitation – so God says “You’re not going to be like they were”
- In the West, we are **WEIRD** – Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, Democratic – and we see the world in very different ways than the rest of the world does (National Post, August 21, 2010
  - The Ultimatum game – if you can’t find a way to make a deal with someone else to split it, then you’re not going to get any of the \$100 that’s been offered you
- We have so much stuff, that we can’t even get a handle on what we have – one of the fastest growing market segments for businesses is self-storage – PODS, Dymon and the like – because we have so much stuff, that we MIGHT need “one day”, that we just HAVE to pay money to keep it in a place that we can never see it, much less use it...! (WEIRD for sure!)
- We are vulnerable to theft because we have stuff – if we didn’t have stuff, no-one could steal from us
- Hoarding – we have more than we could ever use in the west, but we are surrounded by so much stuff we can’t see it, and even when we do, we have stuff that no-one else would want, because they have tons of stuff too – i.e. trying to donate things to a Goodwill or Salvation Army...

## Q: Why do people steal?

Fraud... victimless crime? But it raises the price for everyone else... But what if you're desperate?

Why do people steal? Greed... they want more of what they have or don't have... fear... of not having enough to get by on or of running out of what they're using to live... boredom... not challenged enough in their lives so they need to do this to feel "alive"... desperation... because they feel they have no other way to live...

cruelty... in order to make other people hurt... psychosis... i.e. being a kleptomaniac, mentally ill, hoarder... (classic ethical dilemma – your loved one is in need of a life-saving drug that you don't have the money to buy – the pharmacy has it – do you steal it in order to save their life?)

Stealing from your neighbour breeds distrust and strife (Enns, Exodus) – how can we ever connect if we're either wronging them or worried about being wronged

MVP – most valued possession – confess! (Can't be your kids... or your spouse... !)

Why wouldn't you want to lose that thing? What do you run back into the burning house for? Or the slow-burning house?

## How to get past stealing? (discuss)

- see it for what it is – stealing isn't only being a pickpocket or a fraudster – it's all of the small ways we take what's not ours, and even in the ways we deny others what should be rightfully theirs
  - Pickpockets – organized theft, theft as an art form, thoroughly schooled in theft – most of us would never consider doing that – but we might consider cheating on our taxes, or paying cash to someone doing our renovations...
- remember what it's like to be a victim, see who the victims are (give it some thought)
- work with your hands, like what the Bible says – a good honest day's work
- hold yourself accountable with a close friend
- practice random, undeserved giving – work your "giving muscle", bring your giving impulse to life
- Difference between being shrewd and being a thief – shrewd is hanging on to your money with a sharp mind, thief is taking what isn't yours –

O God, I beg two favors from you;

let me have them before I die.

First, help me never to tell a lie.

Second, give me neither poverty nor riches!

Give me just enough to satisfy my needs.

For if I grow rich, I may deny you and say, "Who is the LORD?"

And if I am too poor, I may steal and thus insult God's holy name.

**Proverbs 30:7-9 – Sayings of Agur:**

## The idea of blessing

- redeeming a churchy word...
- greater to the lesser? Instead of curse... give instead of steal...
- “bless” – giving with a spiritual dimension, perspective

“Bless” – churchy word – generally meant to experience God’s favour, as in “be blessed” – but also meant to give what was not deserved or earned, as in “to bless someone” – but over time it took the same meaning as “give”, except it was Christianese – but truthfully, to bless DOES mean to give something that is unearned or undeserved, with a view to performing a spiritual act / spiritually perceptive decision, something designed to hopefully turn their attention to matters of faith or their spiritual journey, something surprising, over & above  
i.e. A good waiter/waitress – you give them a tip – a tip is not a “blessing”, it’s something that they deserve, given the amount of money they make and the service they provided you – a blessing would be something much more over and above what a normal tip would be (15-20%)

How can we bless others? How can we live lives with open hands, refusing to let our stuff have power over us? The Israelites went from having nothing (and all the stress and worry that goes along with that) to having possessions, and worry that they were going to lose them

### Key Thought:

**Giving when it’s not deserved shows both God’s love and how we rely on Him.**

If you are a thief, quit stealing. Instead, use your hands for good hard work, and then give generously to others in need.

**Ephesians 4:28, NLT**

### TAKE IT HOME:

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God’s love and how we rely on Him.**



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for good hard work, and  
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**Ephesians 4:28, NLT**

### Conclusion: God the giver and his greatest gift

These commandments reflect what God is like – God is a giver, not a taker – He doesn’t steal, because everything in heaven and earth is His, to give – He’s a giver, even giving His only Son for us – He works for our good and He gives to us for our good – “He causes the [life-giving] rain to fall on the just and the unjust” – you can’t be a taker and be truly near God, because it’s foreign to Him Some people are takers – first in line for free stuff, always making sure they get what’s being given out, always with their hand out – drives me nuts...

**Response: Come All You Weary (Cam and band)**