

# The Father's Ten Good Words: Treasure My Generosity

James 5:1-6; Exodus 20: 1-2; 15

You shall not steal. What's so good about the Father's Eighth Good Word? Let's find out.

In fact, we'll explore

1. The Goodness of it
2. The Gravity of it
3. The Generosity of it
4. The Gaiety of it

## 1. The Goodness of the Eighth Good Word (God cares about you and your neighbor)

The first thing we need to hear in the Eighth Good Word is its *goodness*. Like all the good words, the 8th is an expression of the Father's good heart.

The 8th Good Word shows that the Father deeply cares about you, and about your neighbor.

So he declares: "don't take!"

Don't take what? Well, conveniently, we can say there are 6 Ts:

*Things*. If we take belongings from someone, we fail to honor the dignity of the person who made it, and the one from whom we took it. Most of us would have a harder time stealing from a person with a name and a face and a job and maybe a family. We'd have a slightly easier time stealing from a rich person. But easiest of all would probably be for us to take something from a faceless corporation. Who does it hurt if I cut into the profits of a big company? Well, of course it hurts that company's profitability. But guess who else it hurts? Customers like you. And your neighbor. Because of course a company has to raise their prices to compensate for the losses they experience from theft. It's *good* for the Father to say, don't take *things*.

What else? *Treasure*. Ideally, money represents the value of good work. So the Good Father calls us not to plunder the treasure of our neighbor. You honor me, and I honor you, by honoring each other's money as a symbol of the value we generate as humans made in God's image.

The third thing we can't take is *time*. I mean, we can "take our time." But we can't *take someone else's time*. Not because time is money, but because someone else's time is not ours to take. It's theirs to give. And when we're employed, this means that it's theft for us to say we

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worked 42 hours if we spent 5 of those hours scrolling on social media or working for ourselves. It's God's goodness that calls us to honor our neighbor's *time*.

Fourth, the Father is good to forbid the theft of *talent*. On my birthday, at the beginning of lockdown, I decided to read 10 original poems on Facebook Live. I thought I'd read a few of my favorite poems by contemporary poets (who aren't famous). I contacted them to ask permission. They not only granted permission, but tuned in to hear my poetry reading. Honor given; honor returned!

God is good to call us to help our neighbor enjoy the fruit of their labor, and to call us not to rob the fruit from their tree. Be careful what you do with quotes, songs, ideas. If there's ever any doubt, get permission, give credit. Don't take talent.

*Taxes*. Don't cheat on your taxes. You might think that the government is impersonal, or worse. Let's just quote Jesus here: "Render unto Caesar what is Caesar's." Jesus says that we must not steal from the public coffers.

And that brings us to the final T—another one that Jesus mentions in the same breath as taxes: *tithes*. Give to God.

Tithing is an Old Testament institution. The New Testament does not abolish it, but rather encourages even more radical, free generosity in giving. I'm not prepared to say that if you don't give 10%, you're stealing from God or the church. But I'll say this: I have given at least 10% for a long time, plus supported other missions and missionaries. And I've never regretted it, and I've never gone hungry. 10% is a great threshold for everyone, rich or poor, because it calls for everyone to pull their weight. If we don't give generously and sacrificially, we are not listening to the Father's Eighth Good Word.

Remember, in each of these 6 Ts, the Father speaks a *good word*. When he says "don't steal," he's looking out for your neighbor, and for *you*. There's a great Goodness in the Eighth Good Word.

## 2. The Gravity of the Eighth Good Word (You're ultimately ripping off God)

But there's also, secondly, a *gravity* to the Eighth Good Word. What's so grave about it? So serious?

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When you rip off your neighbor by taking taxes or tithes or treasure or time or talent or things, you are defrauding the image of God.

Remember what Jesus says when he's asked if we should pay taxes to Caesar? "Whose image is on the coin?" Answer: Caesar's. Exactly, Jesus says— *give to Caesar what's Caesar's, and to God what is God's*.

Your Father God has imprinted his image not on coins, but on something more valuable: on the very faces and bodies of your neighbor. If you don't give Caesar what is Caesar's, you're a fraudulent, rebellious subject. But if you don't give to God what is God's ... Your neighbor *belongs to the Lord*. If you take from her or him, you're robbing *God* of his estate.

By the way, what is the most grievous theft of all? The very next chapter of Exodus: "Whoever steals a man and sells him, and anyone found in possession of him, shall be put to death" (Ex 21:16).

In Bristol, England, where I'm a student, there was a statue of Edward Colston. Until last week. 300 years ago, Colston trafficked some 80,000 Africans from their kidnappers, and sold them to planters across the Atlantic. After many unsuccessful petitions to remove his statue, last week protestors pulled it down and threw it into Bristol Harbor—right where those precious, stolen image bearers were delivered, bought, and sold.

We are still reckoning with the consequences of those who stole Africans, traded Africans, bought Africans, and possessed Africans; with those who plugged their ears to the Father's Eighth Good Word.

Even, and especially, this worst theft of all, is ultimately an attempt to defraud our Good Father. When we steal, we're trying to raid and plunder our *Father*— a Father who is prepared to *give us his kingdom!*

The gravity of the 8th Good Word: the ultimate offense and violation in any theft is against our Good Father.

### 3. The Generosity of the Eighth Good Word (In Jesus, our rich God gave us all)

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But third, there's not just a goodness and a gravity in the 8th Good Word; there's also a Generosity.

What has our Good Father done—when we've plugged our ears to his Eighth Good Word and tried to plunder his own estate?

The astonishing thing—the almost scandalous thing—is this: instead of demanding restitution, and throwing us into debtor's prison until we could pay (which we could never do), our rich Father sent his rich Son, Jesus, to us. Paul says that though Jesus was rich, for our poor sake, he became poor, so that by his poverty, we might become rich.

Like the priest in *Les Misérables*, the Father welcomes us into his home. We plunder him of his silver candlesticks, and much more. And then he nevertheless gives grace, welcome, home.

And when I say grace, you need to understand that it's not cheap grace. Because what the Father gives us is his own Son. The Son divests himself of all his riches, walks in our sandals, has a housing problem the moment he's born, and ultimately has his life stolen from him. The one perfect image of God, stolen from his God and Father by religious and secular people alike.

But that's not the whole story, because Jesus says that actually, no one steals his life from him, but rather he lays it down for us. We steal, he gives.

And like Jean Valjean, when it really grips our hearts that our Good Father has been extravagantly, scandalously generous in the face of our pilfering and our man-stealing, and allowed us to be called by the name of his dear Son—to appropriate his good name to ourselves and say “I have sinned, but I am a *Christian*.” —When this really grips our heart, we are finally ready to hear and live the 8th Good Word. We become givers instead of takers.

### **4. The Gaiety of the Eighth Good Word (God makes us content and generous in Christ)**

This has all been really *heavy*, huh?

But the 8th Good Word is not just Good, not just Grave, and not just Generous: there is also a wonderful Gaiety to the 8th Good Word!

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The Father speaks this word, and when we truly hear it, ultimately in his Son, we are filled with Gaiety: we become, by God's grace, not just content and generous with what we have, and with our lives: we become cheerful human beings.

We got ourselves in a serious situation. God provided the serious solution. But the goal of all God has done is that we would be content, generous, *joyful* people!

Proverbs 30 has a great prayer. Father: don't make me utterly poor, or I'll be tempted to steal. But don't make me so rich that I don't think I need you.

In other words, let me experience your generous provision, Father, so that I am delighted with what others have and enjoy; so I celebrate what each of us have; so I work hard; so I have enough to give to others who are in need.

I have met people who are minimalists, and have *very little* in the way of income and possessions; as well as people who have lots of money and tons of cool stuff. I've known both kinds of people who are mature in Christ, and who are joyful people: they have heard the Father's 8th Good Word, and their lives are not just full of generosity, but *gaiety*: they overflow with joy and thanksgiving, and it shows.

## **Conclusion**

Don't you want that kind of freedom? Freedom from the bitterness that makes you tempted to take what's not yours? Freedom to give generously? Freedom to be content, and joyful?

It's available in Christ Jesus, who has made you rich in himself, at the price of his own life. The free life you can have in him is not free or even cheap for him. But it *is* free for you. Receive the Father's 8th Good Word. His name is Jesus.