

Series: "God's Top 10"

For Message: Exodus 20:15; Malachi 3:8-12; Haggai 1:3-4; Matthew 6:19-21, 24

Message Title: "I've Been Stolen"

Introduction: Good Morning BMZ! I'm so glad you are with us today as we WRAP UP our WORSHIP SERIES called "GOD'S TOP 10"! Over the past number of weeks, we have ATTEMPTED to look at the 10 COMMANDMENTS from a little different ANGLE than maybe we normally do.

"OH, NO ... MORE RULES!!" Well, I hope you will stick around through this series to DISCOVER ONCE AGAIN how MUCH GOD WANTS you and me to have a FULFILLING LIFE HERE and an ETERNITY in PARADISE! Through these COMMANDMENTS of GOD, we are going to DISCOVER some PURPOSE and MEANING to LIFE. Again, I hope you will BE HERE as much as possible.

So as we wind down to the last few COMMANDMENTS, we are challenged again by GOD'S WORD to LIVE LIFE ... DIFFERENTLY than the REST of the WORLD.

As long as there are TWO or more people on this planet ... we will need the 8<sup>th</sup> COMMANDMENT! Every FAMILY and/or ROOMMATE proves it when they yell, "WHO TOOK MY SHAMPOO?!?" or "Who took my PEN?!?"

You know, we might say that MATERIAL POSSESSIONS are NOT that IMPORTANT ... certainly NOT AS important as our RELATIONSHIPS with each other and/or our RELATIONSHIP with GOD, right?? BUT, our possessions DO MATTER! Our possessions are an EXTENSION of US! PROPERTY is IMPORTANT to us and it MATTERS because our STUFF is the result of our WORK and our INTELLIGENCE and sometimes has some attachment to us by our MEMORIES ... some THINGS have SENTIMENTAL value!

If someone STEALS something FROM ME ... they are stealing a part OF ME! That's why we feel so VIOLATED when we realize that SOMEONE ELSE took something of MINE!

I remember when Sarah and I were still just a COUPLE and we lived in an apartment ... we would COOK OUT on a little hibachi grill outside of our apartment building. Well, one night I left the grill out on the community picnic table in the back of our apartment to let it cool off. After we ate, I went back out to pick it up; it was GONE! It was an inexpensive little table-top gas grill ... BUT, I felt VIOLATED! Like ... really ICKY inside!

Our POSSESSIONS are IMPORTANT, not because we are materialistic, but because our stuff is so much a part of our VERY PERSON ... our memories ... our ACCOMPLISHMENTS and our DREAMS!

If you have your Bible with you, turn with me to EXODUS 20 ... if you don't; no worries. All of our Scriptures for today will be up on the screen and much of what we are doing is in your program. If you don't own a Bible and would like one, please stop by Java Jct/Blessed Bean and someone will get you set up with your own Bible. Speaking of which...

*If you haven't already, I invite you to take out your message notes and Connection card... On one side you will see our Scripture for today and on the other you will find a brief outline walking us through our Scripture. You will see that there are blanks to fill in ... Please take the time to do so. Grab a pen and write down whatever else you think is important to you and your faith journey. After worship, drop off your CONNECTION CARD and take your notes home and refrigerate them. Please Re-read the Scripture and the notes to keep growing and learning. For those of you watching on-line, hit the button for notes and for CONNECTION CARD and stick with us. If you are watching/listening later, or IPODing; you can download the outline off of our website so you too can take notes.*

Let's pray and then we will press on with where we are going today... **LET'S PRAY (turn off marked lights during prayer)!**

You know, back in MOSES' day, there was not a whole lot for the PEOPLE to STEAL. There was GOLD and SILVER and LIVESTOCK ... YEP, that's about it!

Nonetheless, God felt a need to LET the people KNOW that to TAKE another person's ANYTHING was NOT OKAY with GOD! Here it is: Exodus 20:15 = <sup>15</sup> *"You must not steal.*

I believe that in our day, the 8<sup>th</sup> COMMANDMENT is even MORE IMPORTANT to look at CAREFULLY. Do you know why? Because in 2015, STEALING is COMPLEX!!

Think about ALL of the WAYS that we STEAL in our culture. We can still STEAL GOLD and SILVER and LIVESTOCK; but, there is so much MORE ... and so MANY WAYS and CATAGORIES. Today, thieves STEAL CARS, COMPUTERS, PHONES, SHOES ... CASH is still fair game ... and CREDIT CARDS.

In MOSES' DAY, THEFT was just that ... THEFT. Today, we have terms like "Petty Theft", "Fraud", "Grand Larceny" and "Embezzlement"... with many variations of each!

A TRADER can STEAL from thousands of people at once by manipulating the stock market. A PUBLIC OFFICIAL can find ways to GAIN PERSONAL BENEFITS. The AUTO MECHANIC who tells the SWEET little old WIDOW that she needs parts replaced on her car that are not broken. PHONE SOLICITATION!

I wonder how many people think that the GOVERNMENT is stealing from THEM, so they decide to get them back by CHEATING on their TAXES. Is that STEALING?

I wonder how many people STEAL from their EMPLOYERS?!? People clock in for 40 hours/week, but I wonder if the EMPLOYER received 40 HOURS of WORK for their MONEY? How much time was spent on COMPANY TIME that would NOT be CONSIDERED WORK?!

And, sometimes we are ENCOURAGED to DO LESS with our TIME! When I worked at a church in TEXAS, I was called into the SENIOR PASTOR'S OFFICE. He told me to SLOW DOWN at my WORK because I was making HIM LOOK BAD! Now, do I listen to my BOSS, or do I give a HARD DAY'S WORK for my INCOME?!?

What about the CONSEQUENCES of THEFT? When someone TAKES something that is NOT THEIRS, we ALL PAY for it! RETAIL OWNERS estimate that the PRICE of products are RAISED 2-5% in order to COVER the COST of SHOPLIFTING and EMPLOYEE theft.

When someone gets INSURANCE money back for a BOGUS CLAIM ... insurance RATES go UP for EVERYONE!

If someone gets a SETTLEMENT from the IRS, the Government has to MAKE UP for that loss somewhere! NO ONE is an ISLAND. We don't get to be ISOLATED. All of our ACTIONS affect EVERYONE around us!

In our CULTURE, COMMANDMENT #8 is VERY CHALLENGING and COMPLEX. Would you AGREE? AND, it's going to get MORE COMPLEX before we are done today...

Throughout HISTORY, social agents have argued that the BEST WAY to CUT DOWN on THEFT is to END POVERTY. BUT, the truth is, we would be naïve to think that ENDING POVERTY would END CRIME!

## **I. Need or Greed**

Our history tells us that to cut down on POVERTY does NOT mean a CUT in THEFT-RELATED CRIMES. During the GREAT DEPRESSION, when our country was at its most IMPOVERISHED overall, STEALING was a much less a problem than it is TODAY!

Today, we still have people who STEAL for NEED; but the breaking of the 8<sup>th</sup> COMMANDMENT is way more often driven by GREED! Why do the people who work on WALL STREET manipulate FINANCES for personal gain?? Why do middle to upper class women SHOP LIFT?! Why does the COMMUNITY LEADER weasel out of a \$25 parking ticket? Is it because their KIDS NEED SHOES?!? NO!!

Most of the STEALING that goes on in our day is an ILLNESS. Let's call it, "SIN"! I believe it has A LOT TO DO WITH our SOUL and our CHARACTER! See the reason that GOD gave us the 8<sup>th</sup> COMMANDMENT was because God understood that GREED was part of our NATURE. We often want more than we already have!

AND, we are willing to GO AFTER what we WANT at the expense of the PEOPLE we LIVE with and WORK with and carry out life with. Back in the 300s, about 1700 years ago ... BASIL of CAESAREA put it very BLOUNTLY ... *"When someone steals a man's clothes, we call him a thief; shouldn't we give the same name to one who could clothe the naked and does not?"* – Basil of Caesarea

IOW – What do I OWE to LIFE?? What do I owe to other humans? IF I have ENOUGH (I understand that word is loaded), don't I have SOME OBLIGATION to those who DON'T?!?

How dare I say that what is MINE is MINE, when in REALITY, I got what I have through so many others?!? Did you get a PRIMARY EDUCATION?? GREAT! Someone paid TAXES for you to go to SCHOOL! How GREEDY of us to say we won't pay TAXES for the NEXT GENERATION to receive a GOOD EDUCATION?! If I don't pay; is that STEALING?

How can I go to a park or a museum or a concert hall or a church without at least feeling a little thankful for the people who GAVE to make that place possible? If I don't contribute ... is that STEALING?!

Think about RICH PEOPLE whose whole lives revolve around their money. They have plenty of money, but not the SLIGHTEST SENSE that they should SHARE IT!

Then the question comes: "Why should I have to SHARE IT? I EARNED IT!"

## II. Giving is Godly

DID YOU?!? Did you have CONTROL over your INCOME?!? Maybe you INHERITED some MONEY / PROPERTY ... would you say that you EARNED THAT MONEY or was that GIVEN to you?! Did YOU make sure you were BORN into THAT FAMILY?!? Well, if YOU DIDN'T ... WHO DID?!?

Even if you DIDN'T INHERIT any MONEY ... did YOU make sure you were born into this TIME in HISTORY?? Did YOU give YOU the CAPACITY to EARN MONEY?? Did YOU make sure your BRAIN was SMART ENOUGH to think through all that you have to so that you can EARN a WAGE?! Did YOU make sure you were in a position to get a GOOD EDUCATION?? YOU DID THAT?!? YOU EARNED EVERYTHING YOU HAVE?! YOU made sure you were BORN HEALTHY so that you could DO what you DO?! That was YOU?!?

YOU are AWESOME! Maybe I should be THANKING you for what I HAVE if you are CAPABLE of COMMANDING ALL THAT TO HAPPEN!!

Is ANYONE here catching MY SARCASM?!? GOD is GOD and WE are NOT! Do you understand?!? And GOD SAID ... *"You must not steal!"*! BTW – That INCLUDES STEALING from GOD!

Malachi 3:8-10 = <sup>8</sup> *"Should people cheat God? Yet you have cheated me! "But you ask, 'What do you mean? When did we ever cheat you?' "You have cheated me of the tithes and offerings due to me. <sup>9</sup> You are under a curse, for your whole nation has been cheating me.*

*<sup>10</sup> Bring all the tithes into the storehouse so there will be enough food in my Temple. If you do,” says the Lord of Heaven’s Armies, “I will open the windows of heaven for you. I will pour out a blessing so great you won’t have enough room to take it in! Try it! Put me to the test!”<sup>1</sup>*

God teaches here through the prophet Malachi that we are NOT to STEAL. God reminds us that GOD has GIVEN to us ALL that we NEED ... and MORE! God says that he will GIVE us ENOUGH so that we can GIVE BACK and SUPPORT what GOD wants to DO in the WORLD.

So, God set up a GUIDELINE so that we WOULDN’T GET CONFUSED! God says, I’ll make it easy for you ... I’ll even make sure it’s a ROUNDED NUMBER! 10%. Our Bibles teach that the TITHE is 10% of our INCOME. And, guess what?!? GOD KNEW that GOD was going to ASK for 10% of OUR INCOME ... SO, I believe that GOD makes sure we have ENOUGH to give back to GOD that 10%.

And, WHERE do we GIVE that 10%?!? To the TEMPLE STOREHOUSE ... or as it says in Deuteronomy 26 ... the PLACE WHERE YOU WORSHIP / WHERE The NAME of GOD will be HONORED! If you worship at a BMZ Campus, then you GIVE BACK to BMZ Church. And, then you PRAY that BMZ will be the CHURCH that God wants us to BE and we will DO what GOD wants us to DO in our world!

Some of you are saying ... well, I’m not giving to BMZ because I don’t think that THIS or THAT is what GOD WANTS! Listen to me ... THEN YOU NEED TO GO SOMEWHERE ELSE TO WORSHIP and QUIT MAKING BMZ YOUR EXCUSE TO BE DISOBEDIENT TO GOD! GO WHERE YOU KNOW THAT YOUR TITHE (because you don’t want to keep CHEATING and STEALING from GOD!) WILL BE USED for GOD’S KINGDOM!

REMEMBER, our GOD gets our INCOME and our OUTGO and still says, “If you don’t GIVE back to your PLACE of WORSHIP, you are STEALING from ME!” There is WAY TOO MUCH in the BIBLE about GIVING BACK to GOD to IGNORE IT!

AND, don’t miss that the LORD said through MALACHI that “IF YOU WILL BE OBEDIENT in the TITHE ... “I will open up the windows of heaven for you. I will pour out a blessing so great you won’t have enough room to take it in!” God says that HE will BLESS our OBEDIENCE ... BUT, God can’t if we don’t “TRY IT!” This is the ONE PLACE in Scripture that God says ... PUT ME TO THE TEST!!

According to the PROPHET HAGGAI, The LORD gets REALLY BLOUNT about this... Haggai 1:3-4 = <sup>3</sup> *Then the Lord sent this message through the prophet Haggai: <sup>4</sup> “Why are you living in luxurious houses while my house lies in ruins?”<sup>2</sup>*

So, let me ask ... will you BE OBEDIENT to GOD and PUT GOD to the TEST?!? As your PASTOR, I don’t want you to MISS OUT on GOD’S BLESSINGS! I’m asking you to take a “4 MONTH TITHE CHALLENGE” ... for the next 4 MONTHS, will YOU put the LORD to the TEST?!? That’s GOD’S WORD ... NOT MINE!

For the next 4 months ... will you ... with a CLEAN HEART and a DESIRE to be OBEDIENT to GOD ... TITHE (10% of your income) to this CHURCH?!? Will you MARK that in your NEXT STEPS PLEASE?!? Right NOW!!

Again, if you can’t here ... GO SOMEWHERE where you can be OBEDIENT to GOD! BUT, please STOP trying to HEAD-FAKE GOD and FOOL GOD or CROSS your FINGERS BEHIND your BACK as you SAY you are FOLLOWING GOD through JESUS CHRIST!!

This is what I mean when I say “STEWARDSHIP is DISCIPLESHIP”. It’s about putting our FAITH in our GOD with our WHOLE LIVES! ***We CANNOT be FULLY-DEVELOPING***

<sup>1</sup> Tyndale House Publishers. (2013). *Holy Bible: New Living Translation* (Mal 3:8-10). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.  
<sup>2</sup> Tyndale House Publishers. (2013). *Holy Bible: New Living Translation* (Hag 1:3-4). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

***FOLLOWERS of JESUS WITHOUT being FULLY-DEVELOPING STEWARDS of what GOD HAS BLESSED US WITH!***

Listen, again ... I'm not doing this TITHE CHALLENGE because I, as YOUR PASTOR, want something FROM YOU ... I want SOMETHING FOR YOU! Don't miss the BLESSINGS of OBEDIENCE to our GOD!

**III. Commission vs. Omission**

So, as you write down "COMMISSION vs. OMISSION" ... All this that we're talking about today has to do with STEALING. It can be a PASSIVE ACT as well as an ACTIVE ONE.

Here it is: *The SIN of COMMISSION is to TAKE MONEY that BELONGS to SOMEONE ELSE. The SIN of OMISSION is to KEEP MONEY that I OUGHT to GIVE to ANOTHER.*

This COMMANDMENT to NOT STEAL is not just a PROTECTION for our stuff and our SOCIETY ... it also PROTECTS the ESSENCE of WHO we ARE!

So, **When we Steal...** (And I'm TALKING about Commission and Omission ... Taking what Belongs to Another as well as KEEPING FROM ANOTHER PERSON that I might be able to HELP ... BOTH are part of STEALING!)

**A. Pay with Character**

When we STEAL ... from other PEOPLE or from GOD, either TAKING or NOT GIVING; we pay with a piece of our CHARACTER. We give up some of our SELF-RESPECT. We may NOT get CAUGHT by someone else ... but, WE WILL KNOW what we TOOK or how we DIDN'T HELP when we could have. We PAY with our ONE CHARACTER ... can't get that back.

**B. Lose Relationship with God**

When we STEAL ... we LOSE relationship with GOD. When I take from another or DON'T GIVE in a GODLY WAY; GOD KNOWS that He CAN'T TRUST ME! It's hard to have a GOOD RELATIONSHIP WITHOUT TRUST!

Jesus taught us ... Matthew 6:19-21 = <sup>19</sup> *"Don't store up treasures here on earth, where moths eat them and rust destroys them, and where thieves break in and steal. <sup>20</sup> Store your treasures in heaven, where moths and rust cannot destroy, and thieves do not break in and steal. <sup>21</sup> Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be. <sup>3</sup>*

In order to be in a GOOD RELATIONSHIP, we GIVE our WHOLE HEARTS to that RELATIONSHIP. God WANTS for us to have a GOOD RELATIONSHIP, so Jesus teaches us HOW! Your HEART follows your TREASURE ... AIM your TREASURE toward ME! That's why we do a 4 MONTH TITHE CHALLENGE! It's NOT about CHURCH BUDGET!

AND, WE LOSE RELATIONSHIP with GOD when we ATTEMPT to DIVIDE our LOYALTY! Matthew 6:24 = <sup>24</sup> *"No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other; you will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money. <sup>4</sup>* See?? JESUS draws a LINE in the SAND and says ... CHOOSE a CHOICE! It's YOUR CHOICE!

**C. Weakens our Conscience**

When we STEAL ... we take ONE STEP TOWARD making our ACTIONS OKAY! You know, over time we start to struggle with BALANCE / CONGRUENCE. Every time we CHOOSE to be DISOBEDIENT to GOD, we STRUGGLE with our BALANCE between our BELIEFS and our BEHAVIORS!

<sup>1</sup> Tyndale House Publishers. (2013). *Holy Bible: New Living Translation* (Mt 6:19-21). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

<sup>4</sup> Tyndale House Publishers. (2013). *Holy Bible: New Living Translation* (Mt 6:24). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

The more we BEHAVE outside of our BELIEFS the LESS we STRUGGLE with letting GO of our BELIEFS! The more you DON'T HELP those in NEED, the EASIER it is for us to JUSTIFY WHY we DON'T! The more we STEAL from GOD by NOT TITHING; the EASIER it becomes to JUSTIFY ROBBING GOD!

Too often we are WAY MORE WILLING to GIVE UP our BELIEFS than we are to GIVE UP our BEHAVIORS!

#### **D. Hurts Relationships with Others**

When we STEAL ... it hurts our relationships with others! When we STEAL, we become NERVOUS around other people because we are afraid that we might get CAUGHT! Not only that, but it makes us MORE SUSPICIOUS of OTHERS as well. We think ... IF I am a THIEF, maybe THEY ARE TOO! We become LESS and LESS TRUSTING of the people around us...

When we REFUSE to GIVE and HELP people in NEED; we start to ASSUME that EVERYONE ELSE is UNCARING and SELFISH as well! It's hard to be in RELATIONSHIP with people we DON'T TRUST and people we THINK MUST be SELFISH!

#### **IV. A Step Above Kindness**

With all that in front of us ... I would say that the BEST THINGS in LIFE are the things that LAST and BLESS OTHERS ... things like CHARACTER and a CLEAR CONSCIENCE and some SELF-RESPECT and a RIGHT RELATIONSHIP with GOD. When we STEAL either by COMMISSION or OMISSION ... we STEAL from our OWN LIVES!

The Apostle Paul offered a BETTER WAY to live out LIFE. He often talked of "KINDNESS" ... but, the "KINDNESS" Paul talked about doesn't translate very well into the English language. Paul's word was "CHRESTOTES". It meant KINDNESS and GOODNESS and REAL CARING for ANOTHER PERSON.

One DEFINITION of CHRESTOTES is that the word meant "TO DESIRE FOR OTHERS WHAT ONE DESIRES MOST FOR ONESELF"! Think about that. True kindness is to be AS HAPPY or HAPPIER if SOMEONE ELSE GETS what WE WANT for OURSELVES!

Think about your DEEPEST DESIRES of MATERIAL things, ACCOMPLISHMENTS, RECOGNITION and/or PERSONAL FULFILLMENT. Then, IMAGINE EVERYONE around you being BLESSED in THOSE WAYS ... and, you are NOT JEALOUS ... you are THRILLED for THEM!

Do you see how that is a GODLY way of looking at the OPPOSITE of STEALING?!? When we STEAL, we WANT what the OTHER PERSON HAS. When we practice CHRESTOTES, we WANT the OTHER PERSON to HAVE what WE WANT! Get it!! It's like KINDNESS on STEROIDS!

You want a FULFILLED LIFE?? Do you want to TRULY LIVE?? Well, that's the point of the 8<sup>th</sup> COMMANDMENT. The person who chooses NOT to STEAL may not have what they want IMMEDIATELY; but, over time that PERSON becomes RICH in what is IMPORTANT ... and ETERNAL!

See ... God DOES WANT to BLESS us with WHAT is BEST FOR US! And, if we live that way ... we are NOT going to CARE about or ACCUSE others of STEALING our SHAMPOO!

Take the 4 MONTH TITHE CHALLENGE and let me know how GOD BLESSES YOU!

NEXT SUNDAY: John Kvigne will be with you and will be talking about FAITH. Please pray for me and my family as we cart 2 daughters off to college down in Kentucky...

## LET'S PRAY and COMMUNION!!

Next Steps:    *I will memorize Matthew 6:24*  
                  *Sign up for August 23<sup>rd</sup> Believers Baptism Event*  
                  *Start a Bible Reading Program*  
                  *I will take the 4 Month Tithe Challenge (through November)*  
                  *Sign up for Automated Giving*

“Truth without Grace is Fundamentalism (Brutality). Grace without Truth is Sentimentalism (Hypocrisy).”  
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