

Ten Commandments -- #8 Steal No More

8	Do not steal.	Receive God's blessing through his appointed channels – hard work, gifts, self-denial, and providence.
---	---------------	--

Do not steal. (Exodus 20:15 NLT)

God wants everyone to live in His kingdom and enjoy the benefits of a rich and full life. He is very clear about those who have the opportunity to do that and those who don't. Thieves make the list of those who will not share in the Kingdom of God. ... *thieves, greedy people, drunkards, abusers, and swindlers—none of these will have a share in the Kingdom of God. There was a time when some of you were just like that, but now your sins have been washed away, and you have been set apart for God.* (1 Corinthians 6:10-11 NLT).

Property crime is an essential way of life for maintaining an active addiction. Most addicts have stolen and stolen repeatedly. Whether it is boosting and reselling goods, credit card crime, borrowing with no intention to repay, snatching purses, scamming money, breaking and entering, or even threatening in order to get money, theft is a way of life for addicts. At the same time, there is an underlying rationalization many hold that property crime does not hurt the victim in the same way that physical assault does.

In the early days of Jewish society under God, rules were established to help order society and protect individuals. God treated theft with grave importance. He realized the huge amount of damage to relationships that resulted from property theft and so His way to bring about reconciliation and to demonstrate real repentance was that the amount stolen was to be repaid multiplied times over.¹ Talk about making financial amends!! *A fine must be paid by anyone who steals an ox or sheep and then kills or sells it. For oxen the fine is five oxen for each one stolen. For sheep the fine is four sheep for each one stolen.* (Exodus 22:1 NLT)

So much trust is broken in relationships where theft occurs that it takes an amazing amount of rebuilding to bring full restoration. We are responsible for all kinds of theft and therefore we are responsible for the hard work of rebuilding in relationships until full restoration is achieved. Multiple occasions of broken trust will likely require multiple expressions of faithfulness and dependability. This is not just part of making amends, but God's command to us for how to live as a person in His Kingdom.

We cheat, steal and scam in order to get things that we are unwilling to work for or wait for. We all consciously or unconsciously look for a way to get something for nothing. How many times have we lied to a financial aid worker or a family member in order to get money because we'd blown the rent or food money on our addiction? Even worse, how many times have we been angry with that person because they refused us? One of the ways we steal, in recovery, is

to cheat and demand in order to get the money we believe we need today and blame others if we don't get it. This is not the way someone who says they are living in God's kingdom. God promises that He will provide for all our needs if we will put His way first. *So don't worry about having enough food or drink or clothing. Why be like the pagans who are so deeply concerned about these things? Your heavenly Father already knows all your needs, and he will give you all you need from day to day if you live for him and make the Kingdom of God your primary concern.* (Matthew 6:31-33 NLT)

When we come into recovery our lives are usually a financial wreck and we have to accept responsibility for being the one who caused the wreck. There are consequences, and sometimes painful ones, that are the direct result of our choices. No family member or welfare worker got us in this mess and it is not their responsibility to get us out. It will take hard work and patience in order to rebuild from the ashes of our past. God is more than willing and abundantly able to help us. We have to get honest with God, with ourselves, and with those around us. No one owes us anything. We owe many people a lot. It's time to live truthfully and put ourselves in a place where God can bless us – through honest work, gratitude, and blessing.

If you are a thief, stop stealing. Begin using your hands for honest work, and then give generously to others in need. (Ephesians 4:28 NLT)

We are always in a hurry. One of the greatest addictive habits to break in our lives is the need to have something now and our unwillingness to wait. Many others did without because we stole from them. We may have to do without for a while as we build new life habits into our lives, study hard and work hard to change our attitudes and to learn new work skills.

This commandment invites us to live in contentment when we have lots or when we have only a little. *Not that I was ever in need, for I have learned how to get along happily whether I have much or little. I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything. I have learned the secret of living in every situation, whether it is with a full stomach or empty, with plenty or little. For I can do everything with the help of Christ who gives me the strength I need.* (Philippians 4:11-13 NLT) Are we willing to quit stealing?

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. How am I living with a stealing mentality?
2. Where am I challenged in this process of rebuilding relationships where I've broken trust?

¹Gil Stieglitz CD series on the Ten Commandments