

New Life Teens Bible Study Lesson

THE DEVIL'S WORKSHOP #5 – STEALING

DAILY READINGS:

- ◆ **Monday:** What does God say about stealing (Exodus 20:15; Leviticus 19:11; Mark 10:19)?
- ◆ **Tuesday:** Read about the consequences of Achan's theft (Joshua 7:1-26).
- ◆ **Wednesday:** God warns against stealing what is rightfully His (Malachi 3:8-9; Jeremiah 23:30).
- ◆ **Thursday:** Stealing begins in the heart (Matthew 15:18-20; Mark 7:21-23).
- ◆ **Friday:** Bible examples of restitution (Exodus 22:1-15; Luke 19:1-10).
- ◆ **Saturday:** How to overcome the sin of stealing (Psalm 51:10; Ephesians 4:28; Hebrews 13:16).

MEMORY VERSE: "Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth." —Ephesians 4:28

Is Stealing Always Wrong?

A children's story portrays a hero (Robin Hood) stealing from the rich and giving it to the poor. In this story, the rich people are corrupt and cruel, and the poor people are oppressed and starving. Robin Hood comes to the rescue of the common people by giving them stolen money. One poem says, "He was a good outlaw, And did poor men much good" (Robin Hood Ballad). Today songs, videos, and movies often depict stealing as a good thing, especially if everything works out in the end. When the justice system convicts and punishes people for embezzlement while the entertainment industry makes stealing look necessary and appealing, it is sending a mixed message to society. It is no wonder that too many people believe stealing is not always wrong.

There are many words used to replace the word "stealing," which do not sound as harsh, such as: divert, keep, swipe, misappropriate, pinch, petty theft, borrow, and pilfer. Too often when you hear the word "stealing," you think of someone wearing a mask and holding a gun while demanding money from a bank teller. However, some types of stealing are much less obvious than the bank robber. People who would never consider shoplifting or taking someone's wallet or purse do not give a second thought to other forms of stealing. This tool of the devil is used in a sly and crafty manner.

What Is Stealing?

Many retail stores have posted signs that state, "Shoplifting is stealing" or "Shoplifting is a crime." Has society come to the place where people must be reminded of this basic truth? Perhaps it is because too often stealing is lessened or made acceptable by excuses, such as: "I need it more than they do" or "I am underpaid" or "The prices are too high" or "They will never miss it." Also, today stealing has become more complicated. In Bible times, stealing usually

involved cattle, property, and people. Now stealing can involve less obvious things like ideas, digital files, and electronic funds. The best source to understand the truth about stealing is God's Word.

God's will concerning stealing is found in the Ten Commandments: *"You shall not steal"* (Exodus 20:15). Ephesians 4:28 tells us God's will concerning the thief: *"Let him that stole steal no more."* The Bible gives serious examples of people who stole. Achan stole from the city of Jericho (Joshua 7:20-21). Judas, who was in charge of the money bag, was called a "thief" (John 12:6). The two men who were crucified with Jesus were both called "thieves" (Matthew 27:38). If you read these Bible stories, you will learn that every one of these people paid a high price as a result of stealing. God is also displeased with people who steal from Him by failing to give God what is rightfully His (Malachi 3:8-9). God's Word warns against what is perhaps the most serious form of theft—false ministers who rob the people of hearing the truth (Jeremiah 23:30).

Stealing Takes Many Forms

Why did Paul tell the Christians in Ephesus to "steal no more" (Ephesians 4:28)? Stealing would seem to be a problem only for sinners, not God's people. However, the devil knows just how to tempt the Christian to steal in ways that are not obviously wrong. Keeping the definition of stealing in mind, ask yourself who is being stolen from and what is being stolen in the following examples: continually showing up late for work; not paying back money you borrowed; damaging or losing someone's property and not making it right; downloading music without paying for it; receiving too much change at the store and keeping it; lying about your age to get a discounted ticket; and plagiarism ("to steal and pass off the ideas or words of another as one's own"; Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary). Ruining someone's good reputation by telling lies or gossiping about them is another form of theft. Reputations take years to build but can be ruined (stolen) by careless, thoughtless words.

Stealing often involves covetousness, greediness, laziness, and lying. An old proverb says, "Lying and stealing are next door neighbors." It is often difficult to have one without the other. All of these sinful traits are the opposite of what God desires for His people. God does not consider stealing to be a small thing. In Jeremiah 7:9 He groups it with terrible sins, such as murder, adultery, and idol worship. Regardless of how small the theft, if others say it is acceptable, if it goes unnoticed, or if you never get caught, God is against it!

How to Overcome Stealing

Mark 7:21-23 lists "thefts" as one of the evil things that come from the heart. If God is showing you areas in your life where some "thefts" have been taking place, first you need to understand that stealing is prompted by wrong spirits (greediness and selfishness). Then you need to ask God to "create in [you] a clean heart" and "renew a right spirit" (Psalm 51:10). When you are tempted to steal, look to the Bible for the strength to resist the devil. If you are tempted to steal things you cannot afford, read verses about being content with what you have (Philippians 4:11; Hebrews 13:5) and read verses about trusting God to supply all your needs (Philippians 4:19). If you are tempted to steal because you have failed to work for what you need, read verses about being lazy (Proverbs 6:6; 2 Thessalonians 3:10). If you are tempted to steal by failing to take

responsibility for your actions (such as paying back a debt or replacing something you broke), read verses about being accountable (2 Corinthians 5:10) and about making things right (Exodus 22:14; Ezekiel 33:15-16).

God might ask you to make restitution. In the Old Testament an animal was to be repaid at least double (Exodus 22:3-4). Stolen pastures and vineyards were to be repaid (Exodus 22:5), as were borrowed animals that died (Exodus 22:14). Perhaps the best example is found in the story of Zacchaeus, a tax collector, who promised to repay his debts "fourfold [four times more]" (Luke 19:8).

After Paul told the Ephesian Christians to "steal no more," he gave them advice on overcoming stealing—work and give. Instead of getting, God's people should have a spirit of giving. Instead of taking advantage of others, God's people should want to help the disadvantaged. "But to do good and to communicate [share with others] forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased" (Hebrews 13:16).

1. Why was it wrong for Robin Hood to steal from the rich to help the poor?
2. What are some of the ways that stealing is made glamorous or acceptable in movies, books, songs, and videos?
3. There is an old saying, "Finders keepers, losers weepers." What does this mean and is it a form of stealing? Why or why not?
4. What are some excuses often made for stealing?
5. What was the high price paid for stealing by Achan, Judas, and the two thieves who were with Jesus?
6. What form of stealing does the lesson list as possibly the most serious of all?
7. What are some less obvious forms of stealing?
8. What other sins are often involved with stealing?
9. What are some ways you can overcome the sin of stealing?
10. What is restitution?