

# LORD

Our fall discipleship series focuses on the Ten Commandments. Not only what they teach us not to do, but what to do. Jesus is Savior and Lord. Once we know Him as Savior, it's time to begin to allow His lordship in every corner of our lives. I can easily recognize Jesus as "Lord" in some abstract way. He's Lord of the universe. He's Lord of all history. But it gets harder when I think about His lordship in my own life. Is He really my master when I'm thinking about my relationships with my family? Is Jesus my first consult and guide when I'm arranging my finances? So much of discipleship is simply about loving Jesus more—more than desires of the flesh, more than money, more than what my neighbor has. The Ten Commandments are a great measure of our hearts. Do we love Jesus more than these? Jesus is Lord.

I stole a box of Nerds. Not this one. I paid for this one. I have the receipt. But years ago when I was a kid, my house was in walking distance to that Albertsons that used to be there on Highway 115 and Cheyenne Mountain Boulevard. I walked up there one day after school to buy some candy. The problem was I didn't have all that much money in my pocket. As I stood there in the aisle, I realized I had enough to buy either a box of Nerds or a pack of Hubba Bubba, but not both. Yet, in my heart of hearts, I wanted both. So I took the box of Nerds and put it in my pocket. This was the perfect crime, I figured, because I was buying the gum so no one would suspect I was stealing something. I paid for the gum, a bead of sweat developing on my brow, and walked for the door. It's hard to describe this, but a box of Nerds in your pocket makes some noise when you walk. And a *stolen* box of Nerds in your pocket sounds like a pane glass window being smashed with every step you take! Crash! Crash! Crash! It may as well have been the tell-tale heart. I made it out the door. I ate those Nerds—but let me tell you, never has a boy eaten a box of Nerds that tasted so bitter! The Lord has said, "You shall not steal" (Exodus 20:15). One Barna survey reported 86 percent of adults claim they have completely satisfied God's requirement against stealing. Not a problem! I don't know. Here's the lesson I learned that day, long ago: Everything we gather to ourselves wrongfully steals life from us.

How's your relationship with your money? Money is so close to our hearts. It can easily grab us and drag us down. Jesus knows that very well, that's why He talked so much about money during His ministry—to people, who, let's face it, didn't have much of it! For us it is even more critical. Here are some messages we soak up these days about money and prosperity, and as I read, just ask yourself if any of these have soaked into your heart: "You deserve it. You can never have enough. More is always better. Your paycheck determines your worth and value. Take care of yourself first, then share from the leftovers. Happiness comes from wealth. Wealth equals success. Resources are scarce, so get what you can. Money equals security; pursue it at any cost. If you have money, God loves you; if not, you've done something wrong."\* Any of that ring true? Maybe you wouldn't say it out loud like that. I mean you wouldn't embroider any of those on a pillow, but when you make decisions these attitudes come into play, and they feed the impulse within us to gather to ourselves. Maybe that impulse grows so strong we

\*see Mark Scandrette, *Free: Spending Your Time and Money on What Matters Most* (InterVarsity Press, 2013).

look past godly gathering, we look past hard work and proper use of our gifts to add value, and we are more and more enticed by those temptations to gather to ourselves wrongfully. Everything we gather to ourselves wrongfully steals life from us. The way out is to look to Jesus as Lord of our resources.

The eighth commandment is a neighbor commandment; this is about how we treat one another, how we love our neighbors, and it is simple: "You shall not steal" (Exodus 20:15). But, as with the others, when we start to dig into it we realize it goes a lot further than we imagined. The Heidelberg Catechism from our Reformed tradition says the eighth commandment "forbids not only the theft and robbery which civil authorities punish, but God also labels as theft all wicked tricks and schemes by which we seek to get for ourselves our neighbor's goods, whether by force or under the pretext of right, such as false weights and measures, deceptive advertising or merchandising, counterfeit money, exorbitant interest, or any other means forbidden by God. He also forbids all greed and misuse and waste of his gifts. But what does God require of you in this commandment? That I work for the good of my neighbor wherever I can and may, deal with him as I would have others deal with me, and do my work well so that I may be able to help the poor in their need." Unlawful gain. Unjust treatment of others. Overcome by the impulse to gather to ourselves, it's any time that impulse pushes us past good ways to earn money and causes us to step on our neighbor, to jump across laws or policies or boundaries to get a little more for ourselves.

People used to use false measures—imagine buying a pound of flour on a scale, and the storekeeper has weights for the other side of the scale, and the weight has "One Pound" written on it but only weighs three-quarters of a pound. The Bible is full of verses about how God feels about that! Proverbs 20:23 for one example, "The Lord detests differing weights, and dishonest scales do not please him." Translate this into your own business. Do you ever put your finger on the scale? Ever allowed a business transaction to go through that brought in more than you deserved, more than was right? How did it feel to your conscience? Everything we gather to ourselves wrongfully steals life from us.

It's not only robbery, outright. The eighth commandment is broken when we are lazy or wasteful at work, when we slack off, when we fudge numbers or dip into the petty cash, or falsify an expense, or pad a mileage report. I know you've been in situations like these. It's not what you can get away with; it's not



about what has become normal in the company; it's about how God sees it. Ultimately it points to where your heart is. Where does this impulse come from and how does it grow so strong that we are willing to risk our reputation, or diminish and abuse our neighbor, to gather a little more? Well, it might be that hungry dragon, Greed itself, that satisfaction-less worm, voracious as a bottomless grave. Sure. But it might be more subtle. It might be the discontent brought on by an endless barrage of messages in our consumer advertising media—"you need this; this would make you happy; without this one cannot live." It might be some internal insecurity. But ultimately, it is a misplaced trust.

Jesus knew this when He confronted the Rich Young Ruler in Mark 10. A man comes up to Jesus and kneels down, almost making a show of how humble and respectful he is being. "O Great Rabbi." "Good teacher," he actually says. To which Jesus replies, don't you know "good" is a word people use for God? Then Jesus runs through the six commandments about how we deal with our neighbors. Remember the Ten Commandments comes in two parts, how we relate to God and how we relate to one another. Jesus gives him all the one-another commandments: "You know the commandments: 'You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, you shall not defraud, honor your father and mother'" (Mark 10:19). To which the confident, rich, young world-conqueror says, "Yup. Easy. No problem. Did it all since I was a kid." I guess there were no Albertson's back then or no boxes of Nerds to tempt otherwise righteous boys. Now verse 21: "Jesus looked at him and loved him. 'One thing you lack,' he said. 'Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me'" (Mark 10:21). You said I'm good; you said I'm God, so let Me direct all your resources and follow Me. I'm either God or I'm not. One thing you lack. Remember, they had talked about the second tablet of the Ten Commandments but not the first. They had talked about how to relate to others, but not how to relate to God. One thing you lack. It might be in that area. It might be how you relate to God. It might be that something has taken a seat in your heart, a place of honor, a place of trust and confidence and worship—a place that only God should be allowed. One thing you lack.

I want you to imagine the look on this man's face when Jesus says this. "One thing you lack." I can see a smirk. A sideways glance. A cocked head. Maybe even some snickering in the crowd. There is nothing

this guy lacks. One thing you lack? I'm the rich, young ruler. I'm young and successful, influential and full of promise, I'm the guy at the dinner everyone wants to meet. I'm the successful young victor every girl wants to marry. One thing you lack? Name it and I'll buy it tomorrow, buddy. Not the down-market brand either, but the real stuff. Corinthian leather, 1,000 thread, Egyptian cotton, 14-carat whatever! One thing you lack, says Jesus. Here it is: "'Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.' At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth" (Mark 10:21–22). What does he lack? His wealth is his lack. His having all is his having nothing. His relationship with money took up all the space. Have treasure in heaven? Are you nuts? Follow you? A penniless preacher from Galilee? His face dropped. His confidence drained out right in front of everyone and he turned away dejected. His greatest possession was his greatest void and emptiness. Jesus had put His finger right on the nerve. How's your relationship with money? How's your relationship with God? Will you have Jesus as Lord of your resources? The man turned away, said no to eternal life and yes to hoarding his wealth. I'm among those who hope very deeply that he was still within earshot when Jesus told the crowd, after his disciples asked about salvation, "With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God" (Mark 10:27).

But let's go back real quick, to the beginning. Was Jesus being mean? Look at verse 21 again: "Jesus looked at him and loved him. 'One thing you lack,' he said. 'Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me'" (Mark 10:21). Jesus looked at him, and loved him. Jesus loved him. That's why He said what He said. That's why He challenged him the way He challenged him. That's why He made him feel uncomfortable and humiliated and confused. Jesus loved him. What kind of love is this? It's the kind of love that wants to set you free when all you want is to keep your chains. It's the kind of love that wants to give you a new life when all you want is to stay in slavery. It's that kind of love. Everything we steal robs life; but everything we give adds life.

Over the next few weeks, we'll be talking about giving to First Pres. It starts with prayer. If you are going to move through this exercise, I'd like to ask that your first commitment be to pray for First Pres and the remarkable staff God has brought here. Pray for one week, every day. Then we'll move into the rest. Running this operation in 2019, including all we give away (which is a lot) will require just under \$2000 per

member for the year. This is a generous church. We give on average about \$3200 per family. But a lot of our giving comes from a very small group of people. I don't know all the ins and outs of what people give, and that's by design, but I can tell you that if you give more than \$19,000 you are among the top 40 givers in our congregation, and 32% don't give at all, even a small amount. But as we talk about giving and ask you to make a commitment to the Lord's work here, it's not about funding the church. It's about your heart. How's your relationship with money? How's your relationship with God? Do you trust Jesus to be Lord of your resources? The tithe. We teach the tithe as Jesus taught it; He assumed His followers were doing it. The tithe is the practice of giving ten percent of your income back to the Lord. The tithe is not a legalistic guilt machine; it is a safeguard and a method of freedom from greed. It is a gift and a blessing. When you put God first and trust God fully by giving a tenth of what you earn back to Him, not as leftovers but as a commitment of trust, you get free from the binding impulse to try to amass more and more and more, from the damaging impulse to do whatever it takes to gather more money to yourself. It's freedom.

We must encourage one another continually to practice tithing in freedom and joy. Just like the Sabbath reminds us that God determines our limits, the tithe frees us to rest in God's provision and escape the never-ending thirst for more. Because when that thirst takes hold, the temptations get strong and the love of money—not money, but the love of money—becomes the root of all kinds of evil. And everything we gather to ourselves wrongfully steals life from us. Jesus on the other hand—Jesus was not a hoarder. And Jesus wasn't just generous with leftovers. Jesus gave it all. He gave His whole life. How do you really satisfy what the law demands in the eighth commandment? Only Jesus does what the law requires. This stuff isn't just about stealing, or money or funding a church. It's about your heart. It's about your character and what you believe and trust is the character of God. What's your view of God? Generous giver or stingy and always holding back? Do we belong to a Kingdom of scarcity or a Kingdom of abundance? Do we need to hoard for ourselves, set up our own little kingdom or can we trust the King? "Jesus looked at him and loved him..." So He looks at you. So He looks at me. And so He offers once again to come and follow Him to a place of freedom and peace.

## STUDY GUIDE

### LORD • EXODUS 20:15; MARK 10:17–27

#### **UP:** Connect With God Through Spending Time in God's Word

Read aloud the passages for the week: Exodus 20:15 and Mark 10:17–25. Silently reflect on what you heard. Underline phrases that seem meaningful.

- This commandment extends to business ethics and manipulating the poor. What forms of "stealing" do you witness most often?
- How does this command suggest a new, fuller way of living for Israel? How is it a life-giving command for us today?
- Re-read Mark 10:21–22. Why do you think the man is saddened by Jesus's response? (Is he in love with his possessions? Is it crushed pride?)
- What are some markers of "success" in our culture (American culture as well as Colorado Springs)? What are some markers of "spiritual success" or "spiritual security" in American churches?
- Re-read Mark 10:23–24. What do you think about Jesus's declaration regarding the camel and the eye of the needle? Read Matthew 6:24. What does Jesus mean by this?
- In tithing, we return a portion of our income to God in an effort to loosen our grip on material things, to rest in God's provision and to escape the never-ending thirst for more. In what areas of your life do you currently need to rely on God's provision?

#### **OUT:** Connect With the World Around Us by Joining God in God's Mission

Pray God would make you aware of the places in your life where you cling to material goods. Pray for eyes to see the needs of those around you. Pray for God to reorder your desires so you would seek the welfare of others, not just yourself.

#### **IN:** Connect With the Family of God

How could you use your material possessions to bless others this week? (Donate clothing, money, or food? Drop a grocery gift card in the mailbox of a neighbor struggling financially?)