

AUGUST 5TH
YOUR NEIGHBOR MATTERS PART 1
“You shall not steal.” **EXODUS 20:15**

I can still picture it...the silver chalk holder. I saw Mrs. Pratt use it every day in our first-grade class. As she wrote on the board, she used the chalk holder to keep her fingers free from the random chalk dust of the board. To a first grader like me (I've always loved office supplies), the chalk holder represented royalty. Most people just had to deal with chalk dust all over their hands...but not Mrs. Pratt. She had...the silver chalk holder. Well, one day I had it made up in my mind that I was going to take the silver chalk holder. After everyone had left for the day and before I boarded the school bus, I swiped the silver object and quickly stashed it in my bag. I returned home that afternoon and took out the chalk holder in my bedroom. I didn't possess a home chalkboard, but I took it out anyway. Later that evening, my mother received a telephone call. I guess I wasn't the professional thief that I thought that I was. Mrs. Pratt had seen the whole act and contacted my mother about it. You don't have to guess what my next actions were...I returned the chalk holder the next day with a quiet apology to my teacher. You'd think I would have learned my lesson, but since I'm a sinner, I stole something else in 7th grade...this time it was my classmate's homework. I hadn't finished mine the night before, and I copied down my neighbor's work (which he conveniently slid over to me). Remember that I'm not a good thief? Little did I know that Mrs. Howdysheal was behind me watching the whole thing. I believe that this act of stealing got me one week's worth of detention after school. What was I thinking? Well, that's exactly the point, isn't it? As sin crouches at our door, we lose sight of our God. What does God teach us here with the command to not steal?

Do you remember that each command comes from the character of God? As God commands His people to not steal from others, He reminds us of His gracious, giving nature. Kent Hughes is wise to point out this fact in his "Disciplines of Grace." He writes, "Stealing contradicts the generous, giving essence of Christianity and enthrones self as the center of one's universe. The essence of true Christian living then, is giving, as compared to the essence of thievery, which is getting." God doesn't take, because He doesn't need anything or anyone. God gives grace to all of humanity out of His abundant love. This sets this command on the proper footing. As we see ourselves, our sinful tendency is to look at what we don't have. Instead, God sets the tone by showing us that it's Him. Because He has given freely, we are called to give freely. Real joy comes from a heart of giving rather than a false sense of taking.

Even as we can nod our heads as God's men to His giving nature, we still can overlook our temptation to take. Let's pose a question: how honest are you about your income tax each year? In his book, "God Owns It All," Ron Blue describes owing taxes as a blessing from God because it means that God has provided for us throughout the year. Wow...never considered that before! The temptation to lie on taxes betrays a deeper problem...we take because we don't trust God. God hasn't given us enough, so we have to manipulate the process to fatten our wallets. Men, this is only one example that we can gloss over and miss. However, the root problem is that taking from someone else shows that we don't trust what God has given. God isn't enough for us. He isn't giving enough, so we take it into our own hands. Maybe you don't struggle with this, or maybe you do. For all of us, we must take this moment to thank God for providing. As we admit how gracious He is, it will change our entire outlook.

Spend some time thanking God for providing for your needs. Ask Him to help you become more grateful this month for what He's given.

For Further Reading: Ephesians 4:17-32

