

Ten Values that Build Strong Families: Prospering with Integrity

Based upon a Sermon Series by Rick Warren / Exodus 20:15
Katie Lowe Lancaster, St. Mark's Faith & Life Center, 13 July 2008

1st Reading of the scriptures today: 1 Chronicles Chapter 29 verse 17

17 I know, my God, that you test the heart and are pleased with integrity. All these things have I given willingly and with honest intent. And now I have seen with joy how willingly your people who are here have given to you.

2nd Reading comes from Ephesians Chapter 4 verses 27-29

27 and do not give the devil a foothold. 28 He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need.

29 Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.

Message:

Intro: When I was first presented with the opportunity to share a message with you today I of course asked, on what topic? And the answer was – Exodus Chapter 20 verse 15 – four words (*using the voice of Charlton Heston*) "Thou Shall Not Steal". Of course I thought this would be a slam-dunk! How could I go wrong? In my mind I would stand up and say, (*in big voice*) "Thou Shall Not Steal" and then follow that up with – so if you are stealing – stop doing that – and if you haven't been stealing – good for you!

Truly I was thinking that I would be a star – worship service would get out with 10-15 minutes to spare and everyone would carry me out on their shoulders saying, Katie – way to go – Don't Steal – sounds great – and have a nice day.

Then I found out the title of the message was actually "Prospering with Integrity" - This title would require a bit more – oh – preparation and maybe more than the one-minute Charlton Heston imitation. Above all, I had to get my heart around what we were going to talk about today and I realized there was no way I could speak on my own. I needed God to be the provider of every word and thought.

So, let's pray together...(Katie prays)...ending with "may the words I speak be the word you have selected for your message today..."

My name is Katie Lowe Lancaster. A quick glimpse into my home life...I basically live in a world of controlled chaos raising six children.

In your life you may be in a different season...you may be on your own or you may have wisdom to share as if speaking to your grandchildren...while others of you are in the thick of the early years of diapers and naps...some may be living on the high energy of teenagers or on the brink of life without children at home. Whatever stage of life you are in, I hope that today's message is uplifting to you.

I want to share with you a parenting moment that came to mind – you know when you actually say something to your children or you hear someone say something to theirs that never in a million years did you imagine you would say out loud. I'm not thinking of the obvious – "hold mommy's hand" or "call me when you get there so I know you are safe." I'm thinking the other things.

For example...I'm a nut about holidays – I love to decorate the house for every fun day throughout the year...so keeping up with my own traditions one night around St. Patrick's Day I had placed green clovers on our dinner table. The decorations were an assortment of cloth and paper clovers with tiny little Leprechauns made up as confetti. Without realizing it the confetti was disappearing – I had lost control when I slammed my hands down on the table and yelled out – stop spitting out leprechauns at each other. It was silent – until the nervous laughter of the children started up – as they wondered – were they in trouble for spitting at the table – or spitting Leprechauns at each other?

I wonder if God sighs with today's lesson - don't steal...just don't.

As my life lessons generally come from my own home-based laboratory – also known as my family – someone shared the following list with me when we had young children - I loved it – it is OWNERSHIP Rules - in the eyes of a Toddler...

1. If I like it, it's mine.
2. If it's in my hand, it's mine.
3. If I can take it from you, it's mine.
4. If I had it a little while ago, it's mine.
5. If it's mine, it must never appear to be yours in any way.
6. If I'm doing or building something, all of the pieces are mine.
7. If it looks like mine, it's mine.
8. If I saw it first, it's mine.
9. If you are playing with something and you put it down, it automatically becomes mine.
10. If it's broken, it's yours.



Just like toddlers - We want what has been given to us, we also want what others have, we want it all and then when things are either broken or no longer amuse us – we are ready to give them back.

God knows the lives of toddlers – and knows our minds too and makes the rule simple...Don't steal.

So let's talk about wanting it all – let's talk about Stealing.

How do we steal?

A pastor in California said he got out his dictionary and found over 138 synonyms for the word – stealing. From what he read he summed it up with six basic lists that explain stealing.

1. Deceiving Customers

- a. The prophet Amos tells us in the Book of Amos in chapter 8 verse 5, "...they overcharge, use false measures, and fix the scales to cheat the customers."
- b. We are hearing – beware homeowners! Companies may be trying to falsely represent themselves to be able to do repairs on the recently damaged homes or businesses – this is also stealing because they can't do it – they don't have the skills or experience.

2) By Defrauding Employers

- a. A joyful heart at work! God asks us in the Book of Colossians, chapter 3 verse 23, "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as reward."
 - i. We steal when we pad an expense account or take home supplies that belong to the company. Somehow we may feel entitled because of bad work conditions, but it is simply stealing. What about when we waste time on the job? You come in late, leave early, take extra coffee breaks, and before you know it you have wasted the day away with nothing to show for it; God says that is stealing, too.

3) By delaying payments

- a. *I was just saying that we don't refer to Leviticus very often to someone this week, but this is really interesting...*in the Book of Leviticus in Chapter 19 verse 13 it says "Do not defraud your neighbors or rob them. Do not hold back the wages of a hired worker overnight." There is a lot of responsibility for business owners. It is our job to be faithful to God by honoring others by making our payments on time.

4) By defaulting on loans.

- a. This definition of stealing really hits home with all of us that are juggling rising prices and yet still trying to keep our lifestyles the same. Maybe we're taking a vacation we really can't afford or purchasing items we wouldn't have bought if we had to pay with cash instead of a credit card. The Bible says in Psalms Chapter 37 verse 21 "The wicked man borrows and never pays back..." We can see in the housing markets across the nation that this hits home both in *truly honest mistakes* but also in distorted views of our financial worth.

5) By defrauding or deceiving the government

- a. "The authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. Pay what you owe them, pay your personal and property taxes." That's what is written in the Book of Romans in Chapter 13 verses 6-7.
- b. Disagree with politics, vote for your candidate of choice, but obey the law and pay what is owed to the authorities.
- c. *There have been long lines of people that truly are needing help right now. They need the basics, they need to get back on their feet, they need to be first in the line for refunds and assistance. There was an article in the newspaper of a person that was filing for refunds and/or assistance that did not qualify for any of it. There are truly needs and we don't want that great opportunity to share with our neighbor to get in the mess with those that are going to steal whenever and wherever they can.*

6) Don't defraud the Lord

- a. In the Book of Malachi chapter 3 verse 8, "...Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me! But you ask, How do we rob You, God? By withholding tithes and offerings." We know as Christians that we would have nothing if it weren't for the gifts that we get from God. God has asked for the first 10% -- God could have asked for it all, but God said I just want you to give me 10% and then the rest keep for your own bills. Paying the 10% is a privilege to pay God for our blessings that God provided for us in the first place.

Recently in a seminary class we were talking about the commandments of God. The question was – why do we follow God's Commandments? And my classmates and I were quick to say we follow the laws so that we can be obedient to God – we obey and therefore that is pleasing to God.

Our professor agreed but then challenged us further. Yes, it is critical to be obedient to God, but not so that we can be obedient in isolation but so that our obedience is in a relationship with God and with our world. It helps us from hurting each other...it helps us to just plain get along with each other.

I re-read Jesus' words in Matthew chapter 22 starting at verse 34, "...One of them, an expert in the law tested him with this question: 'Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?' Jesus replied, 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself...'"

For a few moments I would invite you to imagine that you were one of the people in the recent tornado or one of our neighbors sitting right here in the room today whose home or business was flooded - what you would do if you were in their shoes and someone said, you have 30 minutes to grab whatever you can and maybe never look back, what would you grab? I'm sure those who really had to face this life changing moment have a few suggestions - but for the rest of us let's just reflect.

What's on your list?

We cannot imagine what it means to lose everything in our home or business...the sadness, regret and profound loss. Sometimes it is just plain impossible to understand how God is providing for us - we can't see it - we can't feel it - we may even feel empty...

But God promises to provide for God's people. And God did provide - not only through material possessions... God has provided for us to receive forgiveness through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We do need not need to steal.

God says to you - I want you to be obedient to me for it pleases me. Just as importantly it is how God and God's creation will be in relationship and HOW we will care for one another as neighbors in God's world.

Martin Luther says...in the Small Catechism...the 7th Commandment... You shall not steal. What does this mean for us? We are to fear and love God so that we do not take our neighbor's money or property, or get them in any dishonest way, but help our neighbor to improve and protect our neighbor's property and means of making a living.

It means not only don't steal - but care for one another so that we prosper in God's world. The High School youth are preparing to live out the commandment in a mighty way as they volunteer to serve others on their upcoming Mission trips...and in our home town as the many people help every day with Flood Relief and Recovery...caring for our neighbors.

Seems pretty straight forward, "Do Not Steal - Don't take what is not yours - and care for one another - lifting each other up."

So, your invitation today says, Lord, I can't do this without you - please forgive me when I mess up. And God promises to answer back with I love you and forgive you beyond your own understanding.

Don't steal; care for one another as God cares for you...this is how we prosper with integrity.

Let us pray.