



grow. pray. study.



Words of Life: Reading the Ten Commandments through the Eyes of Jesus

“Contentment: You Must Not Envy”

Scripture: You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife. You shall not set your desire on your neighbor’s house or land, his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor. *Deuteronomy 5:21*

Others are like the seed scattered among the thorny plants. These are the ones who have heard the word; but the worries of this life, the false appeal of wealth, and the desire for more things break in and choke the word, and it bears no fruit. *Mark 4:18-19*

Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. The commandments, “You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet”; and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, “Love your neighbor as yourself.” Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law.

Romans 13:8-10

Questions in this GPS marked with an arrow bullet point are particularly recommended for group discussion. Group leaders may add other discussion questions, or substitute other questions for the marked ones, at their discretion.

This week we are memorizing:

Do not desire your neighbor’s possessions.

Do not “desire” any of your neighbor’s stuff MONDAY Exodus 20:17, Deuteronomy 19:14

On its surface, the 10th Commandment is about “property rights.” (Yes, ancient Israel viewed wife and servants as “property.”) But scholar John Goldingay pointed out that this commandment fit with Jesus’ later teaching. “They are to look to the inner attitude that lies behind many of those outward acts. Their neighbor’s wife may be better at managing the household ...his servants may be more hardworking; his animals may be sturdier. You could do your job much better if you had them. Be content with and do your best with what you have, says the command.” *

- It’s not a sin to admire someone else’s nice things (or relationships). But have you ever found admiration turning into an almost obsessive wish that you could have something (or someone) who “belongs” with someone else? How can that damage you and others, even you don’t act on it? In what ways has God helped you learn to pull away from that kind of excessive, destructive wanting?
- Even in medieval Europe, we read about disputes in which someone moved a boundary stone (the only way for someone to mark property, in the absence of formal written or electronic records). The same kind of action seems to have been an issue for ancient Israel. What might be some modern (and perhaps more subtle) equivalents of tampering with “your neighbor’s property line”?

Prayer: Father of all, it's so much harder to just check the 10th Commandment off my "good deeds" list, because it's about my wishes and thoughts. Teach me how to avoid wishing obsessively for someone else's good things. Amen.

** John Goldingay, *Exodus and Leviticus for Everyone*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010, p. 82 (emphasis supplied).

Wanting your neighbor's property run amok TUESDAY Micah 2:1-2, 1 Kings 21:1-16

The prophet Micah pronounced spiritual doom on "very powerful" people who "covet fields and seize them, houses and take them away." 1 Kings 21 recorded a sad historical incident in which Israel's King Ahab (egged on by his foreign queen Jezebel) did exactly that. In Israel's culture, Naboth had a much stronger reason to refuse to even trade his property to Ahab than we'd have today when property sales happen regularly. "Each Israelite family viewed the land as their little piece of the covenant," * that is, as an inheritance from God.

- Jezebel chose, and Ahab agreed with, violating last week's study about false witness. Naboth hadn't "cursed God and king." He died for no reason except that Ahab wanted to add Naboth's vineyard to his (likely many) royal lands. But Ahab wouldn't have violated the 9th commandment if he hadn't given in to his inner yearning for Naboth's land. In what ways does his story help to show how the 10th commandment identifies the inner spiritual state that lies behind almost all violations of the commandments?
- Micah's prophetic word made it plain that Ahab's action was not an isolated instance. It had not just economic but spiritual implications. "Inheritance in the land was a key part of not only agricultural life but also religious participation in Israel....selling of land was akin to renouncing the promises and protection of Yahweh." ** Can you think of ways that "very powerful" people today might seek to ignore people's family and faith for their own profit?

Prayer: O God, I try to be modest about whatever power I hold over others. But however much or little power I have, teach me how to use it to bless others, not to exploit them. Amen.

* *NIV, Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible*, eBook (Kindle Locations 78601-78602). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

** *Ibid.*, Kindle Locations 208002-208003.

The spiritual hazard of envying others' lives WEDNESDAY Psalm 73:2-14, 21-23

Envy is practically a synonym for wanting what someone else has. Thomas Aquinas reportedly said that envy grieves when something good happens to our neighbor. This psalmist said envy warped his perceptions, and nearly led him to spiritual ruin. It made the lives of others seem ideal—they seemed to have no troubles at all (verses 3-5). It looked only at current conditions, and made serving God seem futile (verses 11, 13). But God never abandoned him (verse 23)!

- For this psalmist, "the prosperity of the wicked" nearly caused him to give up faith in God. But envy can also strike when we compare ourselves to any others who seem to have more than we do (see [Mark 10:35-41](#)). At what times in your life, if any, has the "success" of the wicked led you to ask, "Does the Most High know anything?" (verse 11) Whose position, possessions or prospects do you envy? How much does it matter to you how you or others reach "success"?
- The traditional King James Version translated [Psalm 23:1](#) as "I shall not want." Modern versions say, "I have all I need," or "I lack nothing." Because that psalm seemed to reflect David's young days as a shepherd, rather than his later status as King of Israel, how do you believe it defined "need"? How often can you honestly say you feel that you have all you need?

Prayer: Yes, Lord—I’ve had times of envying the apparent success of “the wicked,” however I defined that. Thank you for never leaving me, and for guiding me toward a wiser understanding of the long-term benefits of serving you. Amen.

Through Jesus’ eyes: desire God’s kingdom THURSDAY Matthew 6:25-33, 22:34-40

The 10th commandment spoke, not to outward actions, but to the heart. It said God cares not just about what we do, but about what we wish, in a serious way, that we could do. In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus applied all the commandments even more broadly. He said the citizens of his kingdom were to control the thoughts and wishes of their hearts. “Desire first and foremost God’s kingdom and God’s righteousness,” he said. In Matthew 22 he summed up the Ten Commandments in two other verses drawn from the Mosaic law.

- People widely used the phrase “the law and the prophets” in Jesus’ day to mean all of the Hebrew Scriptures. (In [Luke 24:44](#), Jesus expanded the phrase to “the Law from Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms,” including the later Old Testament portion the Hebrews called “the writings.”) How can Jesus’ statement of the “greatest commandments” guide you in understanding the core message of the Old Testament writings, including the Ten Commandments?
- Scholar William Barclay wrote that Jesus called us to love God “not with a nebulous sentimentality but with that total commitment which issues in devotion to God and practical service of men.” * What are some signs that show your commitment to a task at work, to your mate or your kids, or to another important part of your life? In what ways is your commitment to trusting in, loving and serving God shaping your life around meaning, joy and peace?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, save me from “nebulous sentimentality,” from thinking that serving you is all about “warm fuzzies.” Guide me into the hard, practical work of living your commandments in day-to-day life. Amen.

* William Barclay, *Daily Study Bible Series: The Gospel of Matthew—Volume 2, Chapters 11–28* (Revised Edition). Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1976, p. 279.

How the 10th Commandment awakened Paul spiritually FRIDAY Romans 7:7-12

[Mark 10:17-27](#) told about a rich young man who asked how to obtain eternal life. Jesus pointed to at least some of the commandments. Scholar N. T. Wright said actually they were all in there: “Jesus’ basic demand is not for some...extra observance....It is for idols and covetousness to be thrown to the winds: sell up and give to the poor! ...Jesus’ new movement is indeed a radical revision of what it meant to be God’s people, to follow the law of Moses.” * The apostle Paul, a rigid, rigorous Pharisee before he met Jesus, said the 10th commandment made him realize that he, too, was a sinner.

- A mirror can show us things about ourselves we couldn’t otherwise see, but no one washes their face with a mirror. Jesus’ brother James compared God’s law to a mirror (cf. [James 1:23-24](#)). In Romans 7, Paul said the tenth commandment showed him that he needed a Savior, nomatter how proud he was of his Pharisaic outward righteousness (cf. [Philippians 3:4-7](#)). When have you had moments of insight into things that needed to change inside you?
- The young man who spoke to Jesus decided he didn’t want eternal life badly enough to give awayhis possessions to the poor. Jesus shocked his disciples by saying, “It will be very hard for the wealthy to enter God’s kingdom!” That was not because wealth was bad in itself, but because too often people have become wealthy by making wealth their central life goal. How did the 10th Commandment, Jesus’ great commandments and Paul’s testimony show the importance of making God’s kingdom, not earthly wealth, the driving force in your life?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, am I gripping anything so tightly that it is keeping me from a willingness to go “all in” to follow you? If so, help me find the way to let go of that obstacle, and to follow you with all my heart. Amen. * N. T. Wright, *Mark for Everyone*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004, p. 137.

“The secret to being content” SATURDAY Philippians 4:11-14, 1 Timothy 6:6-10

With stock market ebbs and flows, trade wars, “Brexit” affecting most European economies and other changes, the financial news is full of words like “uncertainty,” “worry” and “fear.” Yet the itinerant preacher and craftsman ([Acts 18:1-4](#)) who wrote today’s readings had little money and owned no real property.

“Being happy with what you already have” and being “content in any circumstance” sound different from today’s usual thinking. Paul used the same Greek word (*autarkēs*) as many Stoic philosophers. But he used it differently: “The Stoic said, ‘I will learn content by a deliberate act of my own will.’ Paul said, ‘I can do all things through Christ who infuses his strength into me’....The Stoic was *self-sufficient*; but Paul was *God-sufficient*....Paul could face anything, because in every situation he had Christ.” *

- Paul, content even in prison, did not say, “I have a naturally contented heart.” No—in Philippians 4:11, he said, “I have learned how to be content in any circumstance.” Paul learned the same attitudes we can learn. “Gratitude turns your attention to what you do have instead of what you don’t, Philip Watkins, an Eastern Washington University psychologist, suggests.... People who recognize the blessings they have tend to think they’ll get happiness from things like fulfilling relationships—which, research shows, are the real sources of satisfaction.” ** Under what conditions, good or bad, do you find it a struggle to remain contented in God’s company? What experiences or examples have helped you learn to make choices or take actions that lead you toward accepting God’s gift of contentment?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, it’s my goal, but I’m not really there as far as being content in any circumstance. Keep teaching me and guiding me to that place of secure contentment. Amen.

* William Barclay, *The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians and Thessalonians (Revised Edition)*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1975, p. 85.

** From Lauren Aaronson, “Make a Gratitude Adjustment.” *Psychology Today*, March 1, 2006, found at www.psychologytoday.com/articles/200603/make-gratitude-adjustment.

Family Activity: Encourage your family to practice gratitude and contentment every day! Read Psalm 100. Create a collage of thanksgiving. Gather a piece of colored poster board, some magazines, a few markers and some glue or tape. Write a verse or two of Psalm 100 on the poster board. Invite everyone to draw pictures and write words representing what they are thankful for on the poster board. Add some cut-outs from magazines, too. Leave some blank spaces so family members can add onto it through the month. Each day take a moment to thank God for all your blessings and celebrate each day!