



**August 2022**

**Words of Life**  
**The Ten Commandments 2**

**Readings, Reflections, Prayers**

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## Monday, August 8: 1 Thessalonians 5:12-26 (Command #5 – Honour your parents)

Yes, believing in Jesus is about knowing the truth about God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, and other theological principles. It is also about knowing Jesus personally. Following Jesus is a way of living. It is about living in a new way, filled with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit changes the way we see everything and everyone ... and, thus, how we live in relationship with everything and everyone.

This passage, the conclusion of Paul's letter to Christians in Thessalonica, talks about relationships. Note Paul's concern about honour, respect, and treating others well. Thessalonica was a city where a mob tried to lynch Paul and Silas ([Acts 17:1-9](#)). Some Thessalonians followed Paul to Berea to cause more trouble ([17:10-15](#)). Citizens of Thessalonica had serious problems being civil, respectful, and honourable. What counsel is God giving me in 1 Thessalonians 5? How will I put it into practice today?

To the Galatians, Paul writes, "*You are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus. And all who have been united with Christ in baptism have put on Christ, like putting on new clothes*" (Galatians 3:26-27). When you "put on new clothes" you look different. You act differently ...

How do we, as people who love and follow Jesus, act differently than others in our community? How can we more than just civil, respectful, and honourable, but genuinely model new life in Jesus?

Our prayer today is composed of two selections from Joe Bayly's *Psalms of my Life*. We introduced Joe Bayly a couple of weeks ago: Among other challenges, he endured the deaths of three of sons. He wrote several books including *Heaven* and *Psalms of My Life*. "*Christians won't escape the pain and hardship of being human,*" he wrote. "*The difference comes in the way they appropriate God's strength and live His will even in times of tears and loneliness.*"

*I cry tears to you, Lord.  
Tears because I cannot speak.  
Words are lost among my fears, pain, sorrows, losses, hurts – but tears.  
You understand my wordless prayer.  
You hear.  
Lord, wipe away my tears.  
All tears.  
Not in distant day, but now.  
Here.  
  
Lord, my heart fears.  
I know you have said, "Fear not," but my heart fears.  
Thoughts flash across the track of my mind:  
thoughts of evil not good,  
loss not gain,  
suffering not joy.  
My thoughts are out of control.  
They exhume the past, bury the future,  
make the present a heavy burden.  
Lord, I cannot control these fears, these thoughts.  
I cannot look at the future with peace.  
But I trust you.  
These fears run wild,  
careening thoughts of evil may make it seem that I don't,  
but I do.  
  
Lord, I do trust you.  
Amen.*

Joe Bayly (1920-1986)

## Tuesday, August 9: Deuteronomy 5:17, Genesis 1:26-30 (Command #6 – Don't murder)

Today we consider the sixth commandment. We need to understand exactly what the commandment says. In Hebrew, the commandment is only two words long: לֹא תִרְצַח – "Lo tiretsah." The best literal translation would be "No murdering." Short. To the point. No ambiguity.

You may have memorized the original King James translation of this commandment, "Thou shalt not **kill**." However, the Hebrew word used really does refer to specific kinds of killing – (a) intentional, premeditated murder, (b) killing out of revenge, and (c) unintentional manslaughter. Most modern translations, including the New King James Version, more accurately translate the commandment, "You shall not murder."

Why is this qualification important? If you have read the Old Testament, you know God does permit killing in times of war. This is a thorny theological quagmire. Killing in war raises challenging issues. Many people of God believe that in a "just war" (like stopping Nazism in WW2) killing is OK. In these circumstances, killing in war is the lesser of two evils. Killing is necessary to protect the vulnerable (women, children, persecuted peoples). In this case, it is argued, it is better to sacrifice a few lives to save more lives. But what makes a war "just" or not? Others would argue that killing, even in times of war, breaks this command. Killing is never OK. Passivism is the only legitimate option. The theological debate goes on.

The basis of this commandment is our biblical understanding of who people are (rooted in Genesis 1). You and I – and each other person we meet – are seamless tapestries of body-soul-spirit, created by, given life by, and infinitely precious to God. Each of us is unique. Each of us is deeply loved by God. Each of us is of inestimable value in His sight. Each of our lives is created and treasured by God ...

So, when Cain kills Abel (Genesis 4), the Lord punishes Cain severely. After the flood, when God blesses Noah and his children, the only warnings God gives His people are about not eating meat with blood still in it (for health reasons) **and** "I will require the blood of anyone who takes another person's life. If a wild animal kills a person, it must die. And anyone who murders a fellow human must die. If anyone takes a human life, that person's life will also be taken by human hands. For God made human beings in his own image." (Genesis 9:5-6). God takes human life VERY seriously.

Genesis 9:5-6 has been used as justification for capital punishment. We need to be careful simply transposing Old Testament punishments to today. Noah and his descendants were not "settled people" with judicial systems, prisons, and the like. They were migratory shepherds. They didn't have the capacity to deal with offenders the way our contemporary culture can. As we'll see Thursday, parallel Old Testament capital punishment commands exist for wayward kids, adulterers, and false teachers. That's problematic.

Today, try to see everyone you meet as a dearly beloved, precious creation of God. C.S. Lewis once remarked that we never meet an "ordinary person." There is no such thing. Instead, we need to see each person as they might be in heaven – beautiful, renewed, with all their God-given dignity restored. Try to see each person you meet today as God's beloved child. Try to see them for who God created them to be ...

*Thank you, Lord, for being there for me.  
Thank you for allowing me to cry out to you in my times of need.  
It is amazing to me that the Lord of the Universe  
would take time to listen to me and to care about what I say.  
God, there are things happening around me right now I do not understand.  
Some of these things make me feel weak, helpless and afraid.  
Even in the midst of this, I know that you are the Lord.  
I know that the situation is in Your hand. I trust You.  
I beg you for strength and for wisdom that I would be able to endure this situation  
and be able to handle it in a way that would bring glory to Your name.  
Amen.*

Unknown

### **Wednesday, August 10: Psalm 139 (Command #6 – Don't murder)**

A Blackfoot saying goes like this: *"What is life? It is the flash of a firefly in the night. It is the breath of a buffalo in the wintertime. It is the little shadow which runs across the grass and loses itself in the sunset."* On the one hand, life is brief and fleeting. On the other hand, we know it is infinitely precious.

Our biblical understanding of who we (and other people) are – as precious, beloved, unique, treasured children of God – challenges us. We need to wrestle with a variety of social and political implications of this. As we noted yesterday, the command specifically speaks to issues of murder, killing out of revenge, and manslaughter. We understand (I hope) those are wrong. That is straightforward enough. But there are other tough questions to think about in our society. Does this command speak to them?

Psalm 139 provides a helpful background. It reminds us of who we are – and who other people are – as we think about these issues. Each one of us is God's precious creation. We are His beloved children.

How do we treat people well and genuinely value the life of each person?

- What about people with emotional, mental health, or physical disabilities or challenges? How can we support and help them have full, meaningful, dignified lives?
- What about First Nations people? How can we advocate for and help them receive justice?
- What about people who face discrimination based on their ethnicity or skin colour? How can we encourage, bless, and support them?
- What can we do to help protect and support the physical and mental health of those in our family, neighbourhood, church, and community?
- What about people who feel marginalized in our community (or even our church) for a variety of reasons? How can we care for them?
- How do we care for refugees, from ALL traumatic situations (Ukraine, Afghanistan, Syria, South Sudan, Myanmar)?

May we, as the people of God be people of compassion, hope, and active love to live out God's love. May we find ways to support ALL people, in ALL their challenging life-situations.

*O Lord, you have examined my heart and know everything about me.  
You know when I sit down or stand up.  
You know my thoughts even when I'm far away.  
You see me when I travel and when I rest at home.  
You know everything I do.  
You know what I am going to say even before I say it, Lord.  
You go before me and follow me.  
You place your hand of blessing on my head.  
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too great for me to understand.  
I can never escape from your Spirit.  
I can never get away from your presence.  
If I go up to heaven, you are there; if I go down to the grave, you are there.  
If I ride the wings of the morning, if I dwell by the farthest oceans,  
even there your hand will guide me, and your strength will support me.  
I could ask the darkness to hide me and the light around me to become night –  
but even in darkness I cannot hide from you.  
To you the night shines as bright as day.  
Darkness and light are the same to you.  
Amen*

Psalm 139:1-12

## Thursday, August 11: Acts 17:16-31 (Command #6 – Don't murder)

Paul is helping the people of Athens understand who God is. He also wants us to know who we are, as well.

**GOD** is the One who made the world and everything in it, the Lord of heaven and earth. He doesn't live in human-made temples. He gives life and breath to everything. Human hands can't serve His needs, for He has no needs. He Himself satisfies our every need. It is good for us to remember who our **God** is. This is the awesome **God** who formed each one of us, uniquely, before we were born, who gives His life for us, and who loves each us of dearly. Wow.

How about **US**? He calls **US** His children. "**We ARE His offspring.**" We are His beloved daughters and sons. In Him we live and move and exist. Celebrate and be thankful.

As we think about the sixth command, let's keep this in mind. One of the social and political implications of this command is around capital punishment. Old Testament texts suggest that murderers should be executed ([Genesis 9:6](#)). However it says the same for rebellious children ([Exodus 21:15](#), [Leviticus 20:9](#)), unfaithful husbands or wives ([Leviticus 20:10](#)), and false prophets and teachers ([Deuteronomy 13:5](#)). If we are to make a case for capital punishment using the Old Testament as our rationale, we may find ourselves in uncomfortable territory. Some of this reflect cultural issues at the time which are different now.

What if we take a positive view of this command? What if we see this command as about nurturing life? Yes, we need to protect society from murderers. Yes, we need to guide wayward children. Yes, we need to promote healthy marriages. Yes, we need doctrinal integrity. But how can we work to create a just society where murders do not happen? How do we create safe, inclusive, loving communities? How do we create homes and schools where children are loved, cared for, and are likely to behave well? How do we nurture healthy marriages? How can we foster life in the people around us? We pray, *your kingdom come and your will be done* – how can we try to see that happen? These are questions we need to ask, too.

God "*commands everyone everywhere to repent of their sins and turn to him*" (Acts 17:30). That is the good news – the great news in Acts 17 – no-one is beyond the reach of God's Spirit and His love. Pray for those you know who need His love ...

How can we create healthy, nurturing, caring, respectful, supportive communities?

May God give us wisdom to know how we can build a community of love, honour, respect, and equality.

### ***Martin Luther's Morning Prayer:***

*My Heavenly Father, I thank You, through Jesus Christ, Your beloved Son,  
that You kept me safe from all evil and danger last night.  
Save me, I pray, today as well, from every evil and sin,  
so that all I do and the way that I live will please you.  
I put myself in your care, body and soul and all that I have.  
Let Your holy Angels be with me, so that the evil enemy will not gain power over me.  
Amen*

### ***Martin Luther's Evening Prayer:***

*My Heavenly Father, I thank You, through Jesus Christ, Your beloved Son,  
that You have protected me, by Your grace.  
Forgive, I pray, all my sins and the evil I have done.  
Protect me, by Your grace, tonight.  
I put myself in your care, body and soul and all that I have.  
Let Your holy angels be with me, so that the evil enemy will not gain power over me.  
Amen.*

Martin Luther (1483-1546)

## Friday, August 12: Matthew 5:21-26 (Command #6 – Don't murder)

Jesus speaks directly to the 6<sup>th</sup> commandment. Right after Jesus says, "I did not come to abolish the law of Moses or the writings of the prophets; no, I came to accomplish their purpose" (Matthew 5:17), He speaks to this specific commandment, explaining it more fully for us (5:21-26).

It's a fascinating commentary, isn't it? What is Jesus saying?

He is telling us that while we may not actually pull the trigger and kill someone, we can have a "murderous" attitude or intention in our hearts simply by being angry ...

This bad attitude may show itself in **how you feel**. Do you nurse a lingering grudge against someone? Whenever you think of or see a particular person, do you get angry? Does someone make your blood boil?

Paul says, "You must make allowance for each other's faults and forgive the person who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others" (Colossians 3:13).

Jesus' teaching is plain. We pray, "Forgive us our sins, as we have forgiven those who sin against us" (Matthew 6:12). Then He elaborates, "If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins" (Matthew 6:14-15).

Yes, this can be very difficult to do. Especially when the person with whom you are angry has hurt you or (worse) has hurt someone you love. But the discipline of forgiveness is worth it. When you hold on to a grudge, it really doesn't hurt the other person at all – they probably don't know (and/or don't care) that you are still angry with them. Holding on to your anger certainly doesn't punish the other person.

But nursing resentment and anger does hurt YOU. You are the one who gets grumpy and upset. You are the one who gets the ulcers. You are the one who gets acid reflux. You are the one who loses sleep.

Be good to yourself. And bless other people. Let it go.

*Oh Lord, I am so tired.  
It seems like the lists of to-do's get longer each day,  
the frenzy in my home each night gets wilder.  
It seems like the summer has barely started but it's August.  
I'm so far behind.  
Help me, dear Jesus.  
Let me feel your loving arms wrap me tightly in the warm embrace of your endless love.  
Teach me to make wise choices about my time.  
Help me remember what is important this season.  
Let me say "NO" whenever my "Yes" would take me away from your peace.  
Fill me with patience,  
love,  
and a sense of humor.  
Remind me of your deep love for me.  
Let the fire of that love be something I can share with everyone around me.  
Amen.*

Creighton University Online Ministries

## Saturday, August 13: Romans 12:9-21 (Command #6 – Don't murder)

Have you ever said unkind things about someone? Have you intentionally hurt another person? Have you ever done some little thing deliberately to aggravate or irritate a person? Are you plotting revenge (consciously or subconsciously)? Have you, by your words or gossip, been responsible for "assassinating" another person's character? The Bible is merciless on gossipers ([Proverbs 16:28](#), [25:23](#) etc., [Romans 1:29](#),

[2 Corinthians 12:20](#), and many more). What is God saying to you?

How much energy are you spending on this? Does it make you feel better – really?

We are called to **speak in love**, always. We are called to **act in love**, always. *"Since God chose you to be the holy people whom he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. The most important piece of clothing you must wear is love. Love is what binds us all together in perfect harmony. We are called to **act in love at all times**" (Colossians 3:12, 14-15).*

Romans 12 gives us great advice for life (like 1 Thessalonians 5, August 8). All this wisdom is great to hear ... verses 17-21 are particularly relevant to your reflection on the 6<sup>th</sup> commandment ...

- Reflect on Romans 12:9-16: what is God saying to you?
- Reflect on Romans 12:17-21: what is God saying to you?

*My God and my Chief  
I give myself to You in the morning.  
My God and my Chief,  
I give myself to You this night.  
I am giving You my mind.  
I am giving You my will.  
I am giving You my wishes and desires,  
My soul, and my body.*

*May You be the chieftain of my life.  
May You be the master of my heart.  
May You be the shepherd of my soul.  
May You be the guardian of my mind.  
May You be the herdsman of my thoughts.  
May You be the guide of my paths.  
May You be always with me,  
O High Chief of chiefs –  
O Father who created me,  
O Saviour who died for me,  
O Spirit who cleanses me.  
Amen.*

Scottish Prayer

### **Sunday, August 14: Psalm 27**

What do we do when people attack us, assassinate our character, or undermine our reputation? We're not supposed to take revenge ... So what do we do?

We turn to God. Psalm 27 is "*A psalm of David.*" David knew all about people who were out to get him, who maligned his name, and who (literally) wanted him dead. King Saul tried to kill him, mercilessly hunting him down. Foreign enemies would have loved to assassinate him. His own son, Absalom, led a revolt to overthrow David as king, wanting his head.

Despite David's intense struggles, how does his deep faith in God come through in this Psalm?

Read it through a couple of times. Which phrases resonate with you?

Pray about what God teaching you.

*O Father of the Son, who has awakened us from the sleep of our sins,  
You call us to become yours.*

*To you, the supreme truth, we pray, for all truth that is, is from you.  
You are the highest wisdom, through you all who are wise derive their wisdom.  
You are the supreme joy, and from you all who are happy derive their pleasure.*

*You are the highest good, and from you all beauty springs.  
You are the intellectual light, and from you we derive our understanding.*

*To you, O God, we call and speak.*

*Hear us, O Lord, for you are our God and our Lord,  
our Father and our creator,  
our ruler and our hope,  
our wealth and our honor,  
our home, our country,  
our salvation, and our life.*

*Hear, hear us, O Lord.*

*Few of your servants comprehend you, but at least we love you.*

*Yes, we love you above all other things.*

*We seek you. We follow you. We are ready to serve you.*

*We desire to remain under your power, for you are the Sovereign of all.*

*Command us as you will,  
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord.*

*Amen.*

Alfred the Great (9<sup>th</sup> century)

### **Monday, August 15: Deuteronomy 5:18 and Romans 13:8-14 (Command #7 – No adultery)**

As we transition from the 6<sup>th</sup> to the 7<sup>th</sup> commandment, let's remember that we can think about each of the Ten Commandments negatively ("*You shall not ...*") or positively ("*You shall ...*").

For instance, last week we considered the command, "*You shall not murder.*" That can be understood as a positive command – "*Protect life.*" "*Honour one another.*" "*Speak the truth in love.*"

Paul, in Romans 13:8-11, captures this positive reorientation: "*Pay all your debts,*" says Paul, "***except the debt of love for others.*** *You can never finish paying that. If you love your neighbour, you will fulfill all the requirements of God's law. For the commandments against adultery and murder and stealing and coveting – and any other commandment – are all summed up in this one commandment: 'Love your neighbour as yourself'*" (Romans 13:8-9).

*"The whole law can be summed up in this one command,"* Paul says to people who love Jesus in Galatia, "*Love your neighbor as yourself*" (Galatians 5:14).

We have seen how "honouring" other people, especially one's parents and immediate family, helps us live out this command. As we do so, we build strong communities of respect, support, care, and love.

Respecting life is about more than just not murdering people. Through managing anger and forgiving others, we live out this command and build positive communities of respect, support, care, and love.

Honouring marriage and sexual faithfulness also helps us live out this command ... and build positive communities of respect, support, care, and love.

*"Clothe yourself with the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. And don't let yourself think about ways to indulge your evil desires,"* Paul challenges us. What does it mean to "*clothe yourself with Christ?*"

How can seeing your life in these terms protect you from walking away from Him and His call on your life?



*Your light is the only light I need,  
as I travel through life's mystery.  
Your word is the only voice I hear,  
that still small voice that leads me  
to the place where I should be.  
Your presence is the only company I need,  
as I walk this narrow road.  
Your fellowship is the warmth I crave,  
to help me on my way.  
Amen*

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## **Tuesday, August 16: Psalm 119:1-16 (Command #7 – No adultery)**

Here's a timeless question: "How can a young person live a clean life?" (Psalm 119:9). How can **any** person of **any** age live a pure life? It's not just younger people who struggle. We all do.

The answer:

- *By carefully reading the map of your Word.*
- *I'm single-minded in pursuit of you; don't let me miss the road signs you've posted.*
- *I've banked your promises in the vault of my heart so I won't sin myself bankrupt.*
- *Train me in your ways of wise living.*
- *I'll transfer to my lips all the counsel that comes from your mouth.*
- *I delight far more in what you tell me about living than in gathering a pile of riches.*
- *I ponder every morsel of wisdom from you; I attentively watch how you've done it.*
- *I relish everything you've told me of life, I won't forget a word of it.*

(Psalm 119:9-16 *The Message*)

Psalm 119 is a treasure trove of prayers for wisdom and spiritual strength. If you are struggling with temptations, inappropriate desires, and sin, read Psalm 119. Take it to heart. Live it out.

Remember God loves you. As you confess your sin, He freely forgives you. "If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth. But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness" (1 John 1:8-9).

He desires you know you are His precious child. He wants the best for you. And He has a purpose for you – to be part of building His Kingdom.

Pray for wisdom as you seek God's leading in your life ... And commit to following His word ...

*O God, listen to my prayer, bend your ear to my voice.  
Let my prayers come before your throne.  
Come, King of Glory, to protect me from all evil.  
You are the King of life and mercy –  
You are the Saviour of all who trust you –  
You are the Spirit of truth and grace, more than able to protect me with power.  
Since I came into the world, I have deserved your wrath.  
Grant me forgiveness, merciful God of all, God of all grace.  
Anything that is evil in me or may witness against me when I come before you:  
show it to me; banish it from me; root it out of my heart.  
God, be with me on this your day and all days, Amen.  
To me and with me, on this your day and all days, Amen.*

Gaelic prayer based on 'Achanaich Choitcheann' and 'Dhe bi Maille Ruinn,' *Carmina Gadelica*

### **Wednesday, August 17: 1 Corinthians 6:9-20 (Command #7 – No adultery)**

Adultery is defined as "voluntary sexual intercourse of a married person with one who is not his/her lawful spouse." This is not to say all OTHER forms of sexual activity are permissible. Deuteronomy 22-25 emphasize that sexual activity is appropriate only in the context of marriage. While this command focuses on marital infidelity, any sexual intimacy outside of marriage is not acceptable in God's eyes.

Why? The basic biblical understanding of human sexuality is that **physical** intimacy is designed to express the **emotional** and **spiritual** intimacy that comes through the covenant of marriage. It is one of God's good gifts for those committed to one another in marriage (Proverbs 5:15-20).

Repeatedly, the Bible emphasizes sexual purity by warning against sexual sin (1 Corinthians 6:9-13, Galatians 5:19, Ephesians 5:3, Colossians 3:5), and by emphasizing the blessings of faithfulness in marriage (1 Corinthians 7, 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8, Hebrews 13:4).

Sexual activity outside of marriage, then, is **physical** intimacy without equal **emotional/spiritual** intimacy.

- At best, it is a physical act without the deep emotional commitment God intends to go with it. It is a shadow of what God intends it to be. It is like seeing a picture of a Hawaiian beach compared with actually being on the Hawaiian beach.
- At worst, it misdirects our ability to have genuine emotional intimacy. Sex outside of marriage can leave emotional scars in the vacuum intended for emotional/spiritual commitment. Paul, in 1 Corinthians 6, speaks specifically about the curious practice of having relations with temple prostitutes in Greek religions, but his advice applies well to all non-marital relationships.

In *The Message* translation, Eugene Peterson helpfully gets at Paul's core meaning: *There's more to sex than mere skin on skin. Sex is as much spiritual mystery as physical fact. As written in Scripture, 'The two become one.' Since we want to become spiritually one with the Master, we must not pursue the kind of sex that avoids commitment and intimacy, leaving us more lonely than ever – the kind of sex that can never 'become one.' There is a sense in which sexual sins are different from all others. In sexual sin we violate the sacredness of our own bodies, these bodies that were made for God-given and God-modeled love, for 'becoming one' with another. Or didn't you realize that your body is a sacred place, the place of the Holy Spirit? Don't you see that you can't live however you please, squandering what God paid such a high price for? The physical part of you is not some piece of property belonging to the spiritual part of you. God owns the whole works. So let people see God in and through your body.* (1 Corinthians 6:16-20).

Our sexuality is a key part of our spirituality. Lord, help us to be people who celebrate who you created us to be, in purity and in truth. As we confess our struggles, grant us your grace, love, and forgiveness. As we wrestle with our sexuality, give us the strength we need to be pure in our thoughts and actions.

*The true adventurer is willing to walk through sunshine or rain,  
when the going is good, or ground slips away from beneath their feet.  
The true adventurer delights in the glory of each mountain peak,  
yet does not fear the danger of forest or swift flowing stream.  
The true adventurer listens to the words of one who knows the way,  
intimately, having already walked the path they travel on.  
Lord, I come you as my Guide, my Companion, and my Wisdom for the way.  
Lead me and strengthen me for the great adventure that is life.  
Amen.*

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### **Thursday, August 18: Matthew 5:27-30 (Command #7 – No adultery)**

In the same way that Jesus spoke to the command about murder ([Matthew 5:21-26](#)), He speaks to this command. Sexual sin, Jesus warns, begins in the mind.

He gives an "interesting" solution. Historically, some people have literally taken this advice and crippled their bodies. Jesus, in fact, is using the literary device of *hyperbole*, exaggerating to make a point. He's talking about self-control. If you struggle with lust, do something about it. Put a filter on your internet service, turn off the TV, don't fantasize through unrealistic romance novels/movies ... Be careful what you watch and think. What you feed your mind affects your thoughts.

We do have powerful sexual drives. That's the way we are. The media knows that. They exploit that, using sex to sell everything from beer to cars, from fragrances to vacations, from clothing to movies. C.S. Lewis astutely observes, *"There are people who want to keep our sex instinct inflamed in order to make money out of it, because a man with an obsession is a man who has very little sales resistance."* The media also plays to our sexual drives by pushing the limits of morality. Media normalizes promiscuity and "interesting" sexualities, promising that sexual "freedom" is so much more satisfying than sex in marriage.

Jesus challenges us to be honest about our sexuality. It's part of being human. It's a good gift from God. We need to talk about it. Honestly. Respectfully. Wisely. Even in the church. Especially in the church.

Being honest about our sexuality, our thoughts, and our emotions is not a license for sin. Martin Luther once observed, *"You can't stop birds from flying over your head, but you can stop them nesting in your hair."* Be honest. We are all tempted to sin on occasion. The challenge is, will we turn away? Or will allow ourselves to begin to think ...? When we begin to think about things we ought not to think about, we become miserable. And when we begin to think, we can begin to act ...

When we find our minds going places they ought not, choose to find healthy, holy things to think about.

How do you handle temptations? Pray that God would give you strength to resist. Pray that God would help you find healthy ways to reflect on things that build up us, our relationships, and our faith in Jesus.

*Creator God,  
from the moment your spirit  
hovered over the waters of this earth,  
we were part of a vision held lovingly within your heart.  
From the moment you spoke  
and separated darkness from light,  
you created space where we might one day walk.  
From the moment your joy spilled out into green and living things,  
your beauty was revealed for us to taste and see.  
Creator God, we praise your mighty name  
for this world,  
beauty and majesty,  
passion and artistry,  
a green and pleasant place.  
You are the God who formed us,  
The God who knows us,  
The God who loves us,  
The God who leads us,  
The God who feeds us,  
The God who blesses us,  
The beginning and end of all that we are,  
and hope to be.  
Worthy of our praise.  
Amen.*

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## Friday, August 19: 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8 (Command #7 – No adultery)

For married folks, the best prevention for adultery is healthy marriage. For non-married folks, the best way to have a healthy sexuality is through having good friendships and family relationships as well. When we have good friendships/relationships, we are less tempted to wander places we shouldn't.

For married folks, God's command is "*Guard yourself; always remain loyal to your spouse*" (Malachi 2:16). Self-control is key (Paul emphasizes this again and again). Building strong relationships (marriage or friendships) means doing some things, practically, to make your relationship stronger. These principles can make **ANY** relationship better ... apply them to your relationships with parents, kids, and close friends:

- **Communicate. Communicate. Communicate.** If we can communicate with those closest to us about our joys and frustrations, hopes and fears, successes and disappointments ... then we build strong relationships. My pastoral experience is that lack of communication is one of the biggest problems in struggling marriages, friendships, or parent-child, or other close relationships. Keeping communication growing in ANY relationship is SO important.
- **Take Time Together.** In our culture it is easy for spouses, close friends, or parents/kids to be like "ships passing in the night." When we never spend time with each other, problems result. Communication and relationship growth happens when we spend quality time. Go for a walk, go shopping, go on a date, do the dishes by hand, go for a drive, play games ... together.
- **Make Jesus central in your relationship.** What part does Jesus play in your relationship? When we **choose** to make Him important in our marriage/friendship/family relationship, good things happen. Make opportunity to pray, read Scripture, talk about your faith. It may be hard at first if it has not been your experience. But you will discover things begin to change. Even if only one spouse/friend/family member makes the commitment to grow spiritually, good things can happen as you pray for the other person, forgive them, and experience God at work in your life.

In your family relationships (with parents/kids/siblings) ... in your close friendships ... (if you are married) in your marriage ... how are you doing at (1) communicating? (2) making time for the person/people that matter most to you? (3) making Jesus a/the key part of your relationship?

What might God be saying to you?

*How often when weary do we sigh,  
'The spirit is willing, but the body is weak.'  
How often when in prayer are thoughts distracted by sounds or circumstance.  
Our prayers are diverted by trivial concerns.  
We carry baggage with us rather than leave it at your feet.  
How often do we find ourselves apologising to you  
for our abbreviated prayer life.*

*Yet you draw us still to be in your presence,  
as you did the disciples at Gethsemane.  
You want us to share in your life and work in the world.  
You told your disciples to watch and pray,  
so they might not fall into temptation.  
Do you ask the same of us?  
Do we also fail you, each time we whisper,  
'The spirit is willing, but the body is weak'?*

*Grant us the strength, Lord, of body and of spirit,  
To stay awake and to stay faithfully with you, always.  
To offer you the sacrifice of our lives  
Amen.*

## Saturday, August 20: Ephesians 5:1-21 (Command #7 – No adultery)

Last week we read Ephesians 4. It was one of Paul's "so-how-do-I-apply-my-Christian-faith-to-my-life" passages (like Romans 12, Galatians 5, 1 Thessalonians 5, and others). Ephesians 5:1-21 is a continuation of this theme. While we often focus our concern for righteousness on sexual morality, Paul emphasizes that there are many other issues in our lives that we need to keep holy and pure.

Read this passage in *The Message* translation:

*"Watch what God does, and then you do it, like children who learn proper behavior from their parents. Mostly what God does is love you. Keep company with him and learn a life of love. Observe how Christ loved us. His love was not cautious but extravagant. He didn't love in order to get something from us but to give everything of himself to us. Love like that.*

*"Don't allow love to turn into lust, setting off a downhill slide into sexual promiscuity, filthy practices, or bullying greed. Though some tongues just love the taste of gossip, those who follow Jesus have better uses for language than that. Don't talk dirty or silly. That kind of talk doesn't fit our style. Thanksgiving is our dialect.*

*"You can be sure that using people or religion or things just for what you can get out of them—the usual variations on idolatry—will get you nowhere, and certainly nowhere near the kingdom of Christ, the kingdom of God.*

*"Don't let yourselves get taken in by religious smooth talk. God gets furious with people who are full of religious sales talk but want nothing to do with him. Don't even hang around people like that.*

*"You groped your way through that murk once, but no longer. You're out in the open now. The bright light of Christ makes your way plain. So no more stumbling around. Get on with it! The good, the right, the true—these are the actions appropriate for daylight hours. Figure out what will please Christ, and then do it.*

*"Don't waste your time on useless work, mere busywork, the barren pursuits of darkness. Expose these things for the sham they are. It's a scandal when people waste their lives on things they must do in the darkness where no one will see. Rip the cover off those frauds and see how attractive they look in the light of Christ.*

*"Wake up from your sleep, climb out of your coffins; Christ will show you the light!*

*"So watch your step. Use your head. Make the most of every chance you get. These are desperate times!*

*"Don't live carelessly, unthinkingly. Make sure you understand what the Master wants.*

*"Don't drink too much wine. That cheapens your life. Drink the Spirit of God, huge drafts of him. Sing hymns instead of drinking songs! Sing songs from your heart to Christ. Sing praises over everything, any excuse for a song to God the Father in the name of our Master, Jesus Christ.*

*"Out of respect for Christ, be courteously reverent to one another."*

- What does it mean for you to "live as a child of light" (5:8)?
- What does it mean for you to do "what pleases the Lord" (5:8)?
- What does it mean for you "to be filled with the Spirit" (5:18)?
- How can you "sing and make music in your heart to the Lord" (5:19)?

Try, today, to "always give thanks to God for everything ..." (5:20)

*Into the daily cycle of our lives,  
when all seems well with us and with the world,  
when our yoke is easy and the burden light,  
You break in, and scatter our complacency.*

*Into the daily cycle of our lives,  
when we are comfortable and at our ease,  
when the fire is lit, but eyes are closed,  
You break in, and challenge our dependency.*

*You break into our daily prayers:  
humble our hearts,  
lay bare our souls.  
You break in, You break in.*

*You break in  
when defences are down,  
with an Angel's shout or the quietest sound.  
You break in, You break in.*

*And we change,  
and all things change,  
when you break in.  
Break in to my heart, Lord Jesus. Break in.  
Amen*

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### **Sunday, August 21: Colossians 3:1-17 (Command #7 – No adultery)**

This is yet another of Paul's "so-how-do-I-apply-my-Christian-faith-to-my-life" passages.

What is Paul's counsel to you in 3:1-3? Here it is in *The Message* translation: "*So if you're serious about living this new resurrection life with Christ, act like it. Pursue the things over which Christ presides. Don't shuffle along, eyes to the ground, absorbed with the things right in front of you. Look up, and be alert to what is going on around Christ—that's where the action is. See things from his perspective. Your old life is dead. Your new life, which is your real life – even though invisible to spectators – is with Christ in God. **He** is your life.*" What does this look like in practice? How can you work on this?

What does it mean for you to "clothe yourself" with the virtues in 3:12-14? In *The Message* translation: "*So, chosen by God for this new life of love, dress in the wardrobe God picked out for you: compassion, kindness, humility, quiet strength, discipline. Be even-tempered, content with second place, quick to forgive an offense. Forgive as quickly and completely as the Master forgave you. And regardless of what else you put on, wear love. It's your basic, all-purpose garment. Never be without it.*"

When you wear nice clothes, people see them, right? Do people see these godly virtues in you? Which do you need to work on most?

- What does 3:15 say to you? "*Let the peace of Christ keep you in tune with each other, in step with each other. None of this going off and doing your own thing. And cultivate thankfulness*" (*The Message* translation). How can you put it into practice?
- What does 3:16 say to you? "*Let the Word of Christ – the Message – have the run of the house. Give it plenty of room in your lives. Instruct and direct one another using good common sense. And sing, sing your hearts out to God!*" (*The Message* translation). How can you do this?
- What does 3:17 say to you? "*Let every detail in your lives – words, actions, whatever – be done in the name of the Master, Jesus, thanking God the Father every step of the way*" (*The Message* translation). How can this become true of your life?

*Glorious Trinity,  
make your presence known in this place,  
through our worship,  
our prayer,  
the reading of your Word.  
Father, Son, Holy Spirit,  
within whose unity lies all that is you,  
perfect love,  
justice,  
peace,  
and power.*

*As we gather here today,  
your body, your church throughout this world,  
fill our outstretched hearts with your Spirit,  
encircle us with your love,  
make yourself known to us  
in new ways,  
exciting ways,  
challenging ways.  
Empower us,  
Inspire us,  
Glorious Trinity,  
Father, Son, Holy Spirit.  
Amen.*

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### **Monday, August 22: Deuteronomy 5:19 and Luke 10:25-37 (Command #8 – Don't steal)**

This commandment is straightforward: Don't steal. Don't take what belongs to someone else. In Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan (told to illustrate what it means to "*love your neighbour as yourself*"), He talks of bandits who attack and rob a traveler. The bandits steal. We know that's wrong. And it is. We should never take what does not belong to us.

In the prophets, God also accuses people in Israel for stealing in other, more subtle ways:

- by using dishonest weigh scales,
- for cheating people out of property,
- for stealing people's freedom by taking advantage of their debt to demand servanthood ...

Jesus even teaches us that taking tax money that rightfully belongs to the government is stealing (Luke 20:20-25).

We can take other things than material goods from people –

- like their **good name**. In *Othello*, Shakespeare writes, "*He that filches from me my good name robs me of that which not enriches him and makes me poor indeed.*" How do we do steal someone's good name? By gossip? By innuendo? Through social media?
- like their **dignity**. If we favour certain people over other, we treat some people as less worthy than precious creations of God, we deny them their birthright as children of God, creating in His image. Do we treat some people better than others based on their race? Ethnicity? Income? Ability?

In what other ways can we steal? Lord, help us to be people of integrity, grace, compassion, and love ...

*God, give us grace to accept with serenity  
the things that cannot be changed,  
courage to change the things which should be changed,  
and the wisdom to distinguish the one from the other.  
Living one day at a time,  
enjoying one moment at a time,  
Accepting hardship as a pathway to peace.  
Taking, as Jesus did, this sinful world as it is,  
Not as I would have it.  
Trusting that You will make all things right,  
if I surrender to Your will,  
so that I may be reasonably happy in this life,  
And supremely happy with You forever, in the next.  
Amen*

Reinhold Niebuhr (1892-1971)

## **Tuesday, August 23: Matthew 15:10-20 (Command #8 – Don't steal)**

In the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7), Jesus speaks directly to the commandments about not murdering or committing adultery. He emphasizes that what is in our heart – not just our outward actions – is important. If we call our neighbour "an idiot," we are guilty of the same emotion in our heart as a murderer. If we look lustfully at a person, we may not commit adultery outwardly, but the desire is there.

In [Matthew 15:1-9](#), which we read a few weeks ago, Jesus speaks to the command about honouring our parents. Following Jesus is more than just "not-doing" certain evil things. His point is consistent – our hearts must be pure. Living with Jesus is a matter of keeping our hearts pure before God (through prayer, confession, repentance) **and** actually **doing** the right thing, genuinely loving our neighbour as ourselves.

In Matthew 15:10-20, Jesus emphasizes the importance of disciplining our hearts to be pure. Jesus lists the sins with which we struggle most as: *"evil thoughts, murder, adultery, all other sexual immorality, theft, lying, and slander"* (Matthew 15:19). Significantly "slander" (stealing someone's good name) and "theft" are listed alongside murder and adultery as two of the most serious sins.

Self-discipline and getting a handle on our thoughts are some of the most difficult spiritual disciplines. It is easy to become discouraged. Keep at it.

When you are being tempted, pray. Ask God for strength. Grit your teeth. Don't give in. Paul says, *"Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise"* (Philippians 4:8). Be accountable and honest with a trusted friend. This is hard work. But it is worth it. Over time you will find it easier to deal with temptation ...

*Come, Holy Spirit, and bring from heaven a ray of your light!  
Come, Father of the poor, giver of gifts, light of the world,  
blessed Comforter, dear guest of the soul, and its sweetest refreshment!  
Our rest in labor, our coolness in heat, our comfort in affliction!  
O most blessed Spirit, fill full the hearts of your faithful people!  
Without your influence, there is nothing in us which is not weakness and guilt.  
Oh, cleanse those who are filthy. Refresh those who are dried up.  
Heal those who are wounded. Bend those who are stubborn.  
Cherish in your heart those who are cold. Guide those who are wandering.  
Grant your servants, who put their trust in you, your righteousness.  
Give them final salvation. Grant them eternal joy!  
O Lord, hear our prayer, and let our cry come to you.  
Amen.*

Bernard of Clairvaux (12<sup>th</sup> Century)



### Wednesday, August 24: Malachi 3:6-18 (Command #8 – Don't steal)

Malachi was the last of the Old Testament prophets. Like all the prophets, he speaks in two ways:

- He speaks directly to contemporary issues that were evil in Israel (a **forth**-telling role). This really is most of what the prophets write about most of the time.
- He looks forward with hope to the coming of the Messiah (a **fore**-telling role). This is actually a small component of what the prophets speak about (FYI specific "end-times" prophecy – when Jesus returns again – is a VERY, VERY, VERY small amount of what the prophets deal with).

According to Deuteronomy 14, Israelites were to give the **FIRST 10%** of all they produced to the Lord. They were to give other gifts/offerings beyond that minimum to God, as well. These gifts were to be the **BEST** of their produce or flocks. By the time of Malachi, people still brought offerings to God. Sort of. When a gift of a lamb was required, they went through their flocks and found blind, crippled, or diseased ones that had no commercial value. These, worst of the worst, they gave to God. *"Try giving gifts like that to your governor and see how pleased he is!"* blasts God (Malachi 1:8). The people were stealing from God ([Psalm 24:1](#) reminds us everything we have is really the Lord's anyway).

We can argue, *"But that 10% rule is Old Testament law – and we're under grace not the law in the New Testament (Galatians 3)."* You're right. We are not under that 10% legalism. But most Christians I know who make that point claim their "freedom" in Christ because that means they can get away with giving **less** than the Old Testament law required. I have met a handful of people (yes, I have met some) who have said, *"As a Christian, I am free from the 10% law – now I can give **much more** to the Lord."*

The whole point of the New Testament is that God loved us so much that He gave us **everything** – Himself, His only Son. He held nothing back. He did not only give us 10% (or less) of Himself. He gave us 100+%.

Ought we not be willing to give everything back to God (not just a paltry 10% or less, if we have a bit left over after all we want for ourselves)? If we have experienced God's grace, we ought to give more generously, not less. We give to bless and thank God. When we give to God, we honour Him. *You say, "God, all my money is a gift from you anyway, and I give it to you with a glad heart."* Through our giving we show we love Him in deed as well as in word. We don't tithe and give just to meet a church budget.

Can I give generously to Lord's work? Try giving Him the **first** percentage of your income, not the crippled and lame bits left over.

My experience is those who give generously are truly wealthy, in the true riches of a great relationship with God and other people. Financially they have all they really **need**, too.

*"Try it. Let me prove it to you."* says the Lord. *"All the nations will call you blessed, for your land will be such a delight."* (Malachi 3:10-12).

*Grant us the confidence, Lord, to step out in faith,  
and become the people we are meant to be,  
unapologetic in our love for you,  
uncompromising in our love for our neighbours,  
wanting to be change-makers,  
bringers of hope, love, and grace  
into a world that has no little hope, little love, and little grace.  
Help us show that our friends and family that all they seeks is found in you.  
Grant us the confidence, Lord  
to step out in faith and become the people we are meant to be.  
Grant us the confidence, Lord, to follow Jesus.  
Amen*

## Thursday, August 25: 2 Corinthians 8:1-15 (Command #8 – Don't steal)

We could think of Greece as the Canada of the ancient world. It was a bit less well-off than its bigger, powerful neighbour, Rome (for us, the USA). Corinth was the Alberta of Greece, the wealthiest region in the country. Instead of having natural resources like Alberta, Corinth was a transportation, shipping, and business hub. They were doing well, though they found lots to grumble about (like some Albertans). The Corinthian Christians, wealthy as they were, were sure they couldn't afford to tithe or give God anything.

Other early Christians, in very poor parts of the Empire, were starving and persecuted (in what are now Israel, Lebanon, Turkey, and northern Greece (Macedonia)). The rich Corinthians wouldn't help.

The Corinthians **had** started a collection for suffering folks in Jerusalem, but nothing came of it. Enthusiasm waned. People would not give. In contrast, Christians in Macedonia gave generously (Macedonia was a **much, much** poorer region of Greece than Corinth).

Read Paul's counsel in 8:12-15 carefully. For a fresh perspective, here it is in *The Message* translation: "*Once the commitment is clear, you do what you can, not what you can't. The heart regulates the hands. This isn't so others can take it easy while you sweat it out. No, you're shoulder to shoulder with them all the way, your surplus matching their deficit, their surplus matching your deficit. In the end you come out even. As it is written, 'Nothing left over to the one with the most, nothing lacking to the one with the least.'*"

What is Paul saying to the Corinthians? What is he saying to you?

*Today and all days  
embrace us in a love that knows no end.  
Today and all days  
fill us with a power that overcomes.  
Today and all days  
encourage us with a word that nourishes.  
Today and all days  
inspire us with a hope that sustains.  
Today and all days  
comfort us with a peace that endures.  
Today and all days  
bring wholeness of body, mind and spirit.  
Today and all days  
help us to live your love with grace and mercy.  
Today and all days  
Empower us to be peacemakers and justice-bringers.  
Amen*

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## Friday, August 26: 2 Corinthians 9:6-15 (Command #8 – Don't steal)

Remember the story of the Good Samaritan ([Luke 10:25-37](#))? A non-Jewish Samaritan comes upon an unfortunate traveler and helps him. He understands what a Jewish priest and Levite fail to grasp: we delight to pass on God's blessings to other people, when we appreciate all we have is God's good gift to us.

God has a heart for people. When we give to the Lord, we give to people. We give to people here in our city who need the help and hope our church can provide. We give to children and teens, who can hear of God's love for the first time. We give to people overseas by supporting missionaries and projects who bring practical aid (food, education, shelter), good news, and spiritual hope. We give to the children, youth, families, singles, seniors of our community. We give to the Lord ... and His people ...

- "You must each make up your mind as to how much you should give." We are free from Old

Testament law. Our giving doesn't save us. It doesn't earn us favour with God. But we should approach our giving thoughtfully, prayerfully, generously, and with discipline ("disciplinedly"?). Remember, God so loved us, He gave us 100+%. He gave us ALL of Himself. How then should we respond? Not at all? Grudgingly? With the lame, blind lambs of our life? Or with our best?

- *"Don't give reluctantly on in response to pressure. For God loves the person who gives generously."* This is our spiritual act of worship and devotion; it's between us and the Lord. Pray through your giving with Him. Give with a thankful heart.
- *"And God will generously provide all you need. Then you will always have everything you need and plenty left over to share with others ..."* Don't be afraid. Have faith. God will provide for you.
- *"For God is the one who gives seed to the farmer and then bread to eat. In the same way, he will give you many opportunities to do good, and he will produce a great harvest of generosity in you. Yes, you will be enriched so that you can give even more generously."*

God calls us not just to be active in ***not doing evil*** – not stealing. He invites us to be active in ***doing good***. What is God saying to you?

*We have heard your glorious whisper,  
almost silent, yet insistent,  
breaking through the chatter of many voices,  
the clatter of background noises:  
wind and rain,  
storm and hurricane.*

*Through all of this,  
Your voice remains unchangeable,  
cuts through to heart and soul, unmissable:  
"Come follow me ...  
"Pick up your Cross ...  
"My burden is no burden at all,  
it is simply love poured out  
for you, and through you,  
sustaining, empowering ...  
Come follow me."*

*The world has ears, yet fails to hear.  
But we have heard your glorious whisper ...  
As for me, I will follow you, Jesus.  
Amen*

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### **Saturday, August 27: Psalm 34 (Command #8 – Don't steal)**

Trusting God with the important things in life – our decisions, families, health, and finances – sounds easy. In practice, it can be very difficult. Part of our humanity resists giving control to anyone, even to God. It can be when we're forced to trust Him that we finally allow Him to have any say in our lives.

Can I trust God? David, fleeing for his life from a murderous King Saul, ends up in Gath. A few years earlier David killed and beheaded the hometown hero from this same city (Gath), Goliath. Now, with Goliath's sword at his side, David is in Goliath's village. Gath is not a safe place for David to be. Not surprisingly, he fears for his life. Rightly or wrongly, David pretends he is insane, so the King of Gath doesn't kill him.

Amid the stress of fleeing for his life from Saul and fearing for his life in Gath, David is pushed to trust in God. He has no choice. Psalm 34 is his prayer.

Are you in a tough place? Do you wonder if you can really trust God? Read Psalm 34 a few times.

- What phrases speak to you?
- What is God saying to you?

*Creator God, we glimpse your beauty  
in setting sun, mountain top, eagle's wing.  
We sense your power in thunder crash,  
lightning flash and ocean's roar.  
Creator God we praise you.*

*Precious Jesus, we see your love  
stretched out upon a cruel cross.  
We stand in awe at your sacrifice,  
pure love poured out for humankind.  
Precious Jesus we praise you.*

*Holy Spirit, we see your power  
in lives transformed, hearts on fire.  
We listen for your still, small voice,  
comforting, guiding, calling.  
Holy Spirit we praise you.*

*You are the God who formed us,  
The God who knows us,  
The God who loves us,  
The God who leads us,  
The God who feeds us,  
The God who blesses us,  
The beginning and end of all that we are and hope to be.  
Worthy of our praise.  
Amen*

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### **Sunday, August 28: Psalm 145 (Command #8 – Don't steal)**

Nobel peace prize winner, Albert Schweitzer (1875-1965), was a brilliant theologian, organist, musicologist, writer, philosopher, and physician. He left a fantastically successful, comfortable life in Europe to go, at his own expense, to work as a physician in the Paris Missionary Society's mission at Lambaréné, on the Ogooué River, in Gabon, Africa. Through concerts and other fund-raising, he raised money to equip a small hospital. He stayed, served, died at age 90, and was buried in Gabon. Among his many thought-provoking quotes, he said, *"Those who thank God much are the truly wealthy. So our inner happiness depends not on what we experience but on the degree of our gratitude to God, whatever the experience."*

It's interesting that mental health researchers continue to emphasize the benefits of gratitude. Amy Morin, a psychotherapist and author, identifies 7 proven benefits of a thankful spirit:

1. Gratitude opens the door to more relationships. Showing appreciation can help you win new friends.
2. Gratitude improves physical health. Grateful people experience fewer aches and pains.
3. Gratitude improves psychological health. Gratitude reduces a multitude of toxic emotions, from envy and resentment to frustration and regret.
4. Gratitude enhances empathy and reduces aggression. Grateful people are "nicer" people.
5. Grateful people sleep better. Jotting down a few grateful sentiments before bed, helps you sleep better and longer.
6. Gratitude improves self-esteem by reducing the tendency to compare and compete.
7. Gratitude increases mental strength. Gratitude not only reduces stress, but it may also play a major role in overcoming trauma.

Many psalms, like Psalm 145, invite us to be thankful. Psalm 145 is one of David's "thanksgiving lists" – a long litany of ways in which he has seen God at work in his life. Read through it a couple of times. What phrases resonate with you?

What are you thankful for? Take some time, today, to jot down some things that you are thankful for ...

Write down how you have seen God at work in your life ... Give thanks with a grateful heart ...

*You have gifted the Church  
through the goodness of your Grace  
to be your hands and do your work,  
to be your voice and share your words,  
to bring healing to a fallen world  
and broken lives make whole.  
Thank you, Jesus.*

*You have gifted your people  
with the blessings of your Spirit,  
the power to transform lives  
and make all things new.  
Thank you, Jesus.*

*Now may our hearts receive,  
our mouths proclaim,  
our hands prepare for service,  
that the love that we have known  
might overflow the lives we live  
and pour into the hearts of others,  
that all might receive your Grace,  
your renewing Spirit and your love.  
Thank you, Jesus.  
Amen*

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### **Monday, August 29: Deuteronomy 5:20 and Proverbs 6:16-19 (Command #9 – Don't give false testimony)**

Like the past few commands, this one is straight forward: don't give false testimony. We can broaden its scope to say, "Don't lie." Or we can make it positive: tell the truth – always, completely, with integrity.

If we recall our series on Proverbs a few years ago, we may remember God has a lot to say about speaking the truth and not lying. Of course, lying can take a variety of forms:

- We can lie/say untrue things to other people.
- We can lie to/deceive ourselves (rationalizing things we know are wrong; choosing to see only one side of the story).
- We can lie to God (trying to pull the wool over His eyes). Do you think this really works?

We can debate about what exactly a lie is. What I consider a lie may not be what you consider a lie. However deep in our hearts we all **know** what a lie is. A U.S. Supreme Court Judge once said of pornography, "I may not be able define it, but I know it when I see it." The same is true of lying, isn't it?

Lies/untruths never come from God. God is absolutely truthful. Jesus describes the devil as "a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:44). Truth-telling is an important part of who we are called to be. An old Irish proverb quite correctly advises, "Tell the truth and shame the devil."

*We are a chosen people,  
A family people,  
Chosen for love and to share love,  
Chosen for joy and to spread joy,  
Chosen for friendship and for befriending,  
Chosen for blessing and to bless,  
Chosen for fruitfulness,  
Chosen for harvest.  
We are a chosen people,  
A family people,  
Your family,  
Our family.*

*As we adventure with you today  
be the compass that guides us,  
the light that shines on our paths,  
the only one I follow.*

*As we adventure with you today  
be the word that encourages,  
the hand that reaches out,  
each time we stumble.*

*As we adventure with you today  
let us glimpse our destination,  
and appreciate the places  
through which you lead us.*

*As we adventure with you today,  
be the strength we need to follow,  
and as the day draws to a close  
let us rest in your embrace.*

*Amen*

John Birch

## **Tuesday, August 30: Proverbs on speech (Command #9 – Don't give false testimony)**

Here is some wisdom from Proverbs:

- *"A gossip goes around telling secrets, so don't hang around with chatterers."* (20:19)
- *"A gossip goes around telling secrets, but those who are trustworthy can keep a confidence."* (11:13)
- *"A troublemaker plants seeds of strife; gossip separates the best of friends."* (16:28)
- *"Wrongdoers eagerly listen to gossip; liars pay close attention to slander."* (17:4)
- *"Don't betray another person's secret. Others may accuse you of gossip, and you will never regain your good reputation."* (25:9-10)
- *"Fire goes out without wood, and quarrels disappear when gossip stops."* (26:20)
- *"The lips of the godly speak helpful words, but the mouth of the wicked speaks perverse words."* (10:32)
- *"The LORD detests lying lips, but he delights in those who tell the truth."* (12:22)
- *"The lips of the wise give good advice; the heart of a fool has none to give."* (15:7)
- *"Let someone else praise you, not your own mouth - a stranger, not your own lips."* (27:2)

*"If you instruct the wise,"* writes Solomon, *"they will be all the wiser"* (Proverbs 21:11). You can grow in wisdom as you learn from these proverbs.

How is God speaking to you today? How do you need to live differently?

*We pray for families  
torn apart by explosion of missile or artillery round,  
and those living in fear of rocket launch or terrorist fire -  
wherever they might be,  
whoever they might be -  
for they are united in their adversity and distress.  
Bring comfort, peace, and refreshment  
for those whose hearts are dry.*

*We pray for leaders  
who have no regard for the sanctity of human life,  
in pursuit of ideologies or political ambition -  
wherever they might be,  
whoever they might be -  
for they are united in their arrogance and wilfulness.  
Bring wisdom, love, and repentance  
for those whose hearts are cold.  
For your love is far greater than the hatred of this world,  
far greater than the sorrows of this world.  
Infuse this world with your love.  
Let there be peace and justice on Earth, Lord,  
and let it begin with us, we pray.  
Amen*

John Birch

### **Wednesday, August 31: Ephesians 4:17-32 (Command #9 – Don't give false testimony)**

This is one of those so-this-is-how-you-should-live passages we've been considering. Let's take another look at it in terms of what it says about truth – knowing the truth and telling the truth:

*"Live no longer as the ungodly do, for they are hopelessly confused. Their closed minds are full of darkness; they are far away from the life of God because they have shut their minds and hardened their hearts against him. **They don't care anymore about right and wrong**, and they have given themselves over to immoral ways. Their lives are filled with all kinds of impurity and greed. But that isn't what you were taught when you learned about Christ.*

***"Since you have heard all about him and have learned the truth that is in Jesus, throw off your old evil nature and your former way of life, which is rotten through and through, full of lust and deception.***

*"Instead, there must be a spiritual renewal of your thoughts and attitudes. You must display a new nature because you are a new person, created in God's likeness--righteous, holy, and true. **So put away all falsehood and tell your neighbor the truth because we belong to each other.**"*

Paul's point is that we **know** the truth, because Jesus has revealed it to us.

- We know the truth about ourselves (we all have sinned and fall short of God's glory).
- We know the truth about God (that He is holy and pure – truth – but also that He loved us so much He gave us His Son that whoever believes in Him has eternal life). Jesus is the truth (*"I am the way, the truth and the life ..."*)
- We know the truth about others (that we are to love them as we love ourselves).

If we **know** the truth, we ought to **live** the truth. **"Speak the truth in love."** is Paul's command (Ephesians 4:15). Some people would rather hide the truth than speak it – you're OK, I'm OK, we're all OK, let's just pretend there's no problem with any of us – and call it love. Other people are so truthful they'll

beat you up with their "truthfulness" and call it love. Speaking the truth in love is a balancing act where we hold to the **truth** without compromise **and** hold to unconditional **love** without compromise. Speaking the truth in love is concerned with bringing out the best in the other person, not showing up their faults.

Paul gives more advice for speaking the truth: *"Don't use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them. Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of malicious behavior. Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you"* (4:29, 31-32).

When we allow the truth of Christ to shape our lives, we begin to live it out in our lives. And it bothers us when we "slip up," and make mistakes. It's not easy to live truthfully, with integrity.

President Jimmy Carter once promised the American people, *"I won't lie to you."* Instantly everyone was determined to catch him out. If we want to be people of the truth, people may look for our slip-ups. We may blow it occasionally. When we do, we confess it. We start over. And we try to do better next time.

*Rejoice in the Lord always.  
Shout out his name.  
For God is with us,  
Our God is with us,  
The God of our salvation,  
In whom alone we trust.*

*Rejoice in the Lord always.  
Shout out his name.  
For God is our Father,  
He draws us home,  
By streams of living water,  
Where we shall thirst no more.*

*Rejoice in the Lord always.  
Shout out his name.  
He knows our thoughts,  
Understands our hearts,  
And enables us to become  
The people we were meant to be.  
Amen*

John Birch

#### **Thursday, September 1: Acts 5:1-11 (Command #9 – Don't give false testimony)**

Being truthful to one another is important. So is being honest with God. I definitely cannot fool God. I might as well be totally honest with Him:

- About my mistakes and sins ... He knows them all anyway. Rather than trying to fool God by pretending I'm perfect, it's much more helpful to confess my shortcomings. Then God can forgive me and help me move on ...
- About my promises and devotion ... When I'm in a jam, I may say, *"Lord, if you get me out of this I'll go to church every Sunday ..."* I may promise God the moon. In truth, I cannot deliver. I need to be honest about that. I need to rely on His help, mercy, and grace not my own efforts. God is not impressed by my rash promises: He does love faithfulness ... even when I make mistakes.
- About what I am going to give. Last week we read about the Corinthians, who struggled in the



generosity department. Paul simply said *"make up your mind as to how much you should give ..."* God desires honesty not grand promises we will not or cannot follow through on. The Corinthians had great intentions to give generously, but never followed through.

This is the good news: God knows we will promise more than we can deliver; we will exaggerate our devotion to impress people; and we won't be totally honest with Him or one another about our frailties. He still loves us anyways. He will forgive us as we are honest with Him. We can start over. Again. And again.

David writes, *"I confessed all my sins to you and stopped trying to hide my guilt. I said to myself, 'I will confess my rebellion to the LORD.' And you forgave me. All my guilt is gone"* (Psalm 32:5). It is good to confess our sin to the Lord. He does forgive. Always.

*This world I live in,  
this town I live in,  
this street I live in,  
this house I live in,  
may each be the focus of my prayer.*

*Those I live with,  
those I rub shoulders with,  
those I work with,  
those I don't get on with,  
may each be the focus of my prayer.*

*Those who laugh,  
those who cry,  
those who hurt,  
those who hide,  
may each be the focus of my prayer.*

*Prayers centred less on self  
and more on others,  
less on my circumstances,  
more on the needs of others.*

*May my life be likewise centred  
less on self and more on You,  
and through You to the world  
in which I live and move.*

*Amen*

John Birch

## **Friday, September 2: Leviticus 19:1-19, 30-36 (Command #9 – Don't give false testimony)**

Leviticus is a book of wisdom. It has a lot of good, commonsense guidelines for life. As you read through these verses, note how they dovetail perfectly with the two great commandments: *"Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength"* and *"Love your neighbour as yourself."* Note, too, that most of the Ten Commandments are directly quoted here, again.

Verse 11 is a blunt retelling of the ninth commandment: Don't lie. Verses 35-36 speak about dishonest business practices: lying in a more sophisticated sense.

Reflect on these quotes:

- *"Every violation of truth is not only a sort of suicide in the liar, it is a stab at the health of human society."* Ralph Waldo Emerson
- *"In an age of universal deceit, telling the truth is a revolutionary act."* George Orwell

- "A fact will fit every other fact in the universe, and that is how you can tell it is a fact. A lie will not fit anything except another lie." (Robert Ingersoll)
- "O, what a tangled web we weave when first we practise to deceive!" (Sir Walter Scott)
- "If you tell the truth, you don't have to remember anything." (Mark Twain)
- "No legacy is so rich as honesty." (William Shakespeare)
- "Whoever is careless with the truth in small matters cannot be trusted in important affairs." (Albert Einstein)
- "Honesty and integrity are absolutely essential for success in life – all areas of life. The really good news is that anyone can develop both honesty and integrity." (Zig Ziglar)
- "I believe that in the end, truth will conquer." (John Wycliffe)

What is God saying to you?

*Almighty, merciful God, heavenly Father, your compassion is boundless.  
You are patient, gracious, and rich in love and faithfulness.  
You forgive rebellion, trespasses, and sin.  
We have sinned and done evil in your sight,  
and have often angered you.  
But Lord, do not think about our past misdeeds.  
Let your great mercy be on us.  
We confess and repent, O God.  
Help us, God of our Salvation.  
Redeem us and forgive our sins  
for the glory of your most holy name,  
and for the sake of your beloved Son, our Savior Jesus Christ,  
who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one true God, now and forever.  
Amen*

Johannes Bugenhagen (1485-1558)

### **Saturday, September 3: Deuteronomy 5:21, Exodus 20:17 (Command #10 – Don't covet)**

Today we look at Command #10. Don't covet ... anything. It's not rocket science, is it? Why do you think this command is one of the ten?

In some Christian traditions this command is broken into two separate commands. There are two complete sentences here, each beginning with a parallel phrase: "*Do not ...*" Because each sentence begins this way (as do most of the other commandments), some commentators feel they should be considered as distinct instructions. (To keep the total of ten commandments, these commentators then combine commands 1 and 2: "*Do not worship any other gods*" and "*Do not make idols of any kind ...*" They would suggest these two commands are more or less saying the same thing. What do you think?)

It is interesting that God separates one item out from all the others (the first sentence). Is it because this is a bigger temptation than the others?

- In Deuteronomy 5:21, it is coveting your neighbour's **wife** that comes first.
- In Exodus 20:17, it is coveting your neighbour's **house** that comes first. "*Your neighbour's house*" does not just refer to their bungalow. In Old Testament culture this referred to "your neighbour's estate/wealth" – land, house, flocks, family, possessions – the whole kit-and-caboodle.

The truth is that both sexual desires and the love of money/possessions/stuff can trip us up. They are both common sources of temptation (and trouble) in our lives.

Covetousness – wanting what **you *don't* have** and what **someone else *does* have** – is something we all struggle with. We all want a little bit more something: money? Power? Prestige? Friends? Stuff? What is

it that you covet?

What is the danger of coveting? What can you do about it?

*You are the everything we desire,  
the everything we do not deserve.  
You are the love we have yet to find,  
the peace beyond imagining.  
You are the breath of life,  
enlivening the hardest heart.  
You are the vibrant colour,  
illuminating the darkest dawn.  
You are the truth that calls,  
in quiet whisper and through storm.  
You are the precious moment,  
we reach out and touch the divine.  
For those days when we forget,  
forgive us.  
When life distracts and focus shifts,  
forgive us.  
When self imposes its own will  
forgive us.  
When our praise and worship fail to please,  
forgive us.  
Embrace us once again, we pray,  
in sweet and loving fellowship with you.  
Amen.*

John Birch

#### **Sunday, September 4: Mark 7:1-23 (Command #10 – Don't covet)**

The last few commandments have been about **actions**: lying, committing adultery, murder. God knows our actions rarely happen "out of the blue." Our actions come from attitudes. From our thoughts. Our hearts. The tenth commandment is specifically about **attitude**. An attitude that can lead to bad actions.

Remember Jesus' comments on other commandments ([Matthew 5:21-48](#))? He is concerned about **attitude** and **what is in our hearts**. Mark 7, similar to [Matthew 15](#) (which we have already read), describes a heated exchange between Jesus and the Pharisees. Jesus points out that their concern for **outward appearances** and actions was commendable, it wasn't enough. Our **inner** attitudes/thoughts/hearts also matter. Jesus quotes Isaiah: "*These people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far away*" (Mark 7:7). Have you ever known someone of whom that might be true? Has that ever been true in your life?

Jesus concludes saying, "*It is the **thought-life** that defiles you. For from **within**, out of a person's **heart**, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, wickedness, deceit, eagerness for lustful pleasure, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. All these vile things come from **within**; they are what defile you and make you unacceptable to God*" (Mark 7:20-23). We can look good on the surface, but on the inside, we can be anything but good.

Does it really matter? If we don't actually **do** anything wrong, does it matter if we fantasize about it?

Yes. It does matter. It matters because the fantasy affects us – not just how we think, but also what we do. When I start thinking about how nice it would be to have a new car, it affects me. I spend time obsessing about the car – time I would otherwise spend doing other things. I become restless and dissatisfied with my present car. I may start to ignore its maintenance. I have to buy a new one.

This can lead to another problem: our thoughts can affect those around us. Imagine I coveted my neighbour's brand-new car. I think about it. I want one just like it, so I ignore my old car's care; it begins to suffer. My family's safety begins to suffer, too. This begins a downward spiral through which I eventually convince myself I need a new car because the old one is now in such rough shape. My fantasy has created a reality: my thoughts have allowed the car to deteriorate. Now I have to spend money I didn't need to.

The same thing can happen with relationships. Maybe things are not perfect at home. We begin to think, "What if I were with another person ..." And, although we **do** nothing wrong, we spend time imagining, "What if ..." And we spend less and less time thinking about and making the effort to improve things in our relationships. As time passes, our home-life deteriorates further. And in a downward spiral, as things get worse, we may convince ourselves that escape is the only way out. Our thoughts have caused our relationship to deteriorate to the point it is in serious jeopardy.

It is our "thought-life" that defiles us.

How is your thought-life? God knows your every thought ... is that a good thing? Or a problem?

*Lord, I offer to you all my sins and offences,  
which I have committed before you,  
from that day I first could sin, even to this hour.  
Consume and burn them, one and all,  
with the fire of your love.  
Do away all the stains of my sins,  
and cleanse my conscience from all offences.  
Restore to me your grace, fully forgiving me all,  
and admitting me mercifully into your perfect peace.*

*I offer up also to you all that is good in me,  
though it is very small and imperfect,  
that you may amend and sanctify it,  
that you may make it good and acceptable to you.  
Perfect it more and more.*

*Bring me also, slothful and poor creature as I am,  
to a good and blessed end.  
For your glory, forever and ever,  
Amen.*

Thomas à Kempis (1380-1471)

### **Monday, September 5 (Labour Day): Psalm 1 (Command #10 – Don't covet)**

Psalm 1 is about attitude. It draws a stark contrast between a person who guards his heart and mind ... and a person who doesn't.

- What does the godly person actively DO?
- What does the godly person NOT do?

Notice the results of each person's choices. Like it or not, who we are is often a matter of choices we make: who we choose to hang around with, what we read, what we choose to view on the internet or TV, how we spend our leisure time, and what we allow our minds to think about ...

Reflect on the godly person in Psalm 1. Does this describe you? How can you put these principles into practice? What do you need to do to continue to grow more and more like Jesus?

It will take self-discipline ... are you up for it?

*O Lord our God, you are great, eternal,  
and wonderful in glory.  
You keep your covenant and promises  
for those who love you with their whole heart.  
You are the Life of all,  
the Help of those who flee to you,  
the Hope of those who cry to you.  
Cleanse us from our sins, secret and open,  
and from every thought displeasing to your goodness.  
Cleanse our bodies and souls,  
our hearts and consciences.  
May we venture confidently and fearlessly to pray to you,  
with a pure heart and a clear soul,  
with perfect love and calm hope.  
Through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Amen.*

Liturgy off St. Basil (4<sup>th</sup> Century)

## **Tuesday, September 6: 2 Samuel 11 (Command #10 – Don't covet)**

David breaks at least three of the Ten Commandments in one tragic event: he covets another man's wife; he commits adultery; he arranges for a murder. Later, he will break a fourth command: he will lie about it.

Where does the problem begin? *"In the spring of the year, when kings normally go out to war ... David stayed behind in Jerusalem."* In those days, through the winter months, nomadic peoples, gangs, and marauders often camped in remote areas. In the spring, kings would lead their armies on border patrols: to clear out the outlaws, to show their military strength and demonstrate their sovereignty, and to raid their neighbour's towns. These tours were as much a show of power, demonstration of kingship, and public-relations tour as anything else. The king liked to be seen in all his finery at the head of his troops (not unlike the big military parades/shows some politicians still have). The king sees and is seen by all.

David should have been doing his job – leading his army against marauders, establishing sovereignty, being seen as king. Instead, he is home. Bored. Looking. Lusting. Fantasizing. Scheming. Acting (badly).

There's an old proverb that says, *"The devil has work for idle hands."* Sure enough, David, with too much time on his hands, he gets himself into serious trouble.

He sees something – someone – he wants. But she belongs to someone else. David covets. In this case, he covets another man's wife, Bathsheba (interestingly, Uriah, Bathsheba's husband, is out doing what David SHOULD be doing – defending his country). David thinks about her. He cannot get her out of his mind. He imagines himself with Bathsheba. And then he begins to think about how this could happen. His thoughts lead to actions. He goes from seeing, to thinking, to doing ... and things spiral out of control.

The progression is familiar to all of us:

1. We see something we don't have.
2. We want it.
3. We think about it – again and again.
4. We begin to scheme how we can get it.
5. We cross the line and do something wrong.

It is our thought-life that defiles us.

How do we stop the progression? The earlier we stop the better. So ...

1. Be careful what you allow yourself to see. If your weakness is buying things... don't go window shopping. If your weakness is sexuality, increase the filter on your internet. Don't allow yourself to SEE what tempts you, then you won't think about it. Keep yourself busy doing other things.
2. Be satisfied with what you have. Cultivate a thankful attitude. Rather than obsess on what you don't have, be amazingly grateful for what you do have. Be the most thankful person you know.
3. If you find yourself thinking about something you want, over and over again – fight it. Pray. Find other things to think about. Get your mind doing other things. Get busy doing something healthy. Make yourself accountable to a trusted friend.
4. If you find yourself scheming – STOP. Don't allow yourself to think those thoughts. Discipline.
5. And NEVER cross the line. If Jesus would not do it – neither should you. Be ruthless with yourself and scrupulous about your integrity.

*You have given us a world of beauty,  
and we have spoilt it.  
A world to feed us,  
and so many go hungry.  
A world of riches,  
and we are unwilling to share.  
A world to care for,  
and we think only of ourselves.*

*Forgive us, gracious God,  
for those times your heart is saddened  
by our selfishness.  
For those times we have no thought  
for others, no cares but ours.*

*Enable us to see this world anew  
as a gift from you,  
to be shared and nurtured,  
and those who live upon it  
to be loved and cared for.  
We ask this that your name  
may be glorified,  
through the beauty of this world,  
and the service of our lives.  
Amen*

John Birch

### **Wednesday, September 7: 2 Samuel 12:1-14 (Command #10 – Don't covet)**

We cannot hide our sins from God: "You may be sure that your sin will find you out"(Numbers 32:23). David finds this out the hard way.

Public humiliation is brutal.

The death of a child is worse.

David's decisions led to disaster for himself and those he loves. Think about the choices he made:

- to not do his job and keep busy (a bad decision)
- to look at Bathsheba and not turn away (a worse decision)
- to allow himself to think and fantasize about her (an even worse decision)
- to scheme and manipulate circumstances and people (a still worse decision)

- to do several things wrong – seduce Bathsheba and arrange for Uriah’s death (horrible decisions)

Think about the times you have made choices you knew were wrong ... did they really turn out well? The lie the devil tells us is that we can cross the line and still be content, joyful people. It’s not true. We pay a price. The only way to live joyfully, fulfilled, and at peace is when we make the right choices ... every time.

*"Integrity is doing the right thing, even when no one is watching,"* says C.S. Lewis.

Martin Luther King, Jr. comments, *"The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy."*

How can we be people of integrity in all circumstances?

*O my dearest Lord Jesus Christ,  
you know my poor soul and my great transgressions.  
I cry out to you alone, with an open heart.  
I am sorry that I do not have will or intentions as I should.  
I fall behind daily, for I am a poor, sick sinner.  
You know that I want to have good will and good intentions,  
but my foe strikes and leads me captive.  
Redeem me, a poor sinner, according to your divine will.  
Deliver me from all evil and all afflictions.  
Strengthen and increase in me true Christian faith.  
Give me grace to faithfully love my neighbor as myself with all my heart,  
and to love him as a brother.  
Give me patience and perseverance in all persecution and trouble.  
You told St. Peter not to forgive only seven times,  
and you have called us to come to you for consolation.  
So I come with the assurance of what you have pledged,  
and I cry to you as my true Pastor and Bishop of my soul in all my needs.  
You alone know how and when I need your help.  
Your will be done,  
and your name be praised forever.  
Amen.*

Martin Luther (1483-1546)

### **Thursday, September 8: Psalm 51 (Command #10 – Don’t covet)**

Poet, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, once commented, *"It takes less time to do a thing right, than it does to explain why you did it wrong."* Do you think David might agree with this sentiment, in hindsight?

*"The time is always right to do what is right,"* advises Martin Luther King, Jr. "What is right" to do may be to be honest, own your failures, confess your sin, and move forward.

We don’t like to that. Instead, we make excuses. We blame other people. We try to distract people from our mistakes. Roman emperor and philosopher, Marcus Aurelius, tells us bluntly: *"If it is not right, do not do it. If it is not true, do not say it. Waste no more time arguing what a good man should be. Be one."* May God help us do what is right. Say what is right. And simply BE good people.

In yesterday’s reading, David confessed to Nathan, *"I have sinned against the LORD"* (2 Samuel 12:13). That’s the short version. Note the subtitle to Psalm 51: *"A psalm of David, regarding the time Nathan the prophet came to him after David had committed adultery with Bathsheba."* This is a record of David’s prayer of confession to the Lord.

We all have sinned against the Lord. Spend some time in honest confession. Nathan's assurance is this: when we confess our sins, "*The LORD has forgiven you.*" Praise the Lord.

*Lord God,  
Father of our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ,  
your name is great,  
your nature is wonderful,  
your goodness is inexhaustible,  
you are God and Master of all things,  
and are blessed forever.  
You sit between the cherubim,  
and are glorified by the seraphim.  
Before you stand thousands of thousands  
and ten thousand times ten thousand,  
the hosts of holy angels and archangels.  
Sanctify our souls and bodies and spirits,  
calm our fears  
cleanse our consciences,  
and drive out every evil thought,  
every selfish desire,  
envy, pride, hypocrisy,  
falsehood, deceit, anxiety,  
covetousness, arrogance, laziness,  
malice, anger, grudges,  
blasphemy, deeds or thoughts  
that are contrary to your holy will.  
O Lord, since you love us all,  
give us the strength to boldly call on you  
in the freedom of Christ,  
without condemnation,  
with a pure heart and a contrite soul,  
with undivided attention and with sanctified lips,  
as our holy God and Father in heaven.  
Amen*

attributed to James, brother of Jesus, died 69 AD

### **Friday, September 9: Mark 10:13-31 (Command #10 – Don't covet)**

Think about the children in this passage. What is it about the children that leads Jesus to say, "*The kingdom of God belongs to such as these*" (Mark 10:14)?

Now think about the rich young man. I wonder if the young man had just heard that conversation and is asking himself the same question. So he asks Jesus, "*What must I do to inherit eternal life?*" (Mark 10:17). In other words, "*What do I have to do to be like those children who are in the kingdom?*"

Jesus lists several of the Ten Commandments – those dealing with relationships with other people (I added their numbers in parentheses): "*Do not murder (#6), do not commit adultery (#7), do not steal (#8), do not give false testimony (#9), do not defraud (a version of #8-9), honor your father and mother (#5).*" The man can say, with integrity, "*All these I have kept since I was a boy.*" Isn't that great?!

Which commandment is missing?

Jesus doesn't ask him about "*Do not covet*" (#10). Do you notice this command is the one that is holding



this fellow back? The problem is NOT that this man is wealthy. Possessing money, in and of itself, is not a problem. Many godly people have many financial resources.

In this case, this man's problem is that his wealth possesses him. He will not/cannot let any of it go. It is the most important thing in his life. It runs his life, to the point that he is willing to sacrifice his own peace of heart and eternal destiny to hold on to every penny of his wealth.

The rich young man goes back to his vault and sits, alone, with his money bags. His face is long. His heart is sad (Mark 10:22). He has lots of "stuff" but no joy, no sense of blessing, no peace.

Paul warns us, *"True godliness with contentment is itself great wealth. After all, we brought nothing with us when we came into the world, and we can't take anything with us when we leave it. So if we have enough food and clothing, let us be content. But people who long to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many foolish and harmful desires that plunge them into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. And some people, craving money, have wandered from the true faith and pierced themselves with many sorrows"* (1 Timothy 6:6-10). How is this appropriate for this young man?

The kids in this passage take time from whatever else they are doing to be with Jesus. They come to Jesus. He is the most important person in their lives. Their greatest enjoyment is being with Him, right now. They are blessed by His presence. They are joyful. And that leads Jesus to say, *"The kingdom of God belongs to such as these"* (Mark 10:14). How are these children so different from the wealthy man?

Jesus promises to meet all our needs ([Matthew 6:24-34](#)), so we can enjoy being with Him right now, too ...

Where do you fit in these stories?

*Loving Father  
all the fancy words in the world,  
expressed in eloquent prose,  
decorated with emotion,  
spoken with conviction,  
cannot compete with a heartfelt 'sorry.'*

*There are times  
when we are all too aware of our limitations,  
conscious of sin and the distance it creates between us.  
Sometimes 'sorry' is all the heart can bear to say aloud.*

*Only you who can read and understand the language of our hearts.  
Only you who can translate our 'sorry'  
into the prayer we would have prayed if we had the words within us.  
Then you forgive, and having forgiven, surround us in an embrace of love,  
drawing us close to your heart as it was always meant to be.  
Thank you, Loving Father, that you listen to hearts as well as voices.  
Thank you.  
Amen*

John Birch

### **Saturday, September 10: Mark 10:32-45 (Command #10 – Don't covet)**

In Mark 10:33-34, Jesus gives his disciples a disturbing foreshadowing of what is to come.

In Philippians, Paul helps us more fully understand who Jesus is, why He has come, and what His servanthood/leadership looks like: *"Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a*

*man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross.” (Philippians 2:5-8)*

But Jesus’ friends don’t get it. They are obsessed with power, prestige, and being admired by those around them. Coveting is not always about money – it can be about status, being part of the “in group,” being seen in the right place wearing the right clothes with the right people. What else can we covet?

Have you ever really wanted to be part of “the group”? To belong? To have power? To be seen?

Are you part of a group that other people would love to be part of, but you would rather keep it just the way it is, only with people you know and like? Are you aware of other people who would like to be part of your circle, but you prefer to keep them at a distance? (We call this a clique ... it’s never a good thing)

*“Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant,” says Jesus, “and whoever wants to be first among you must be the slave of everyone else. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Mark 10:43-45)*

Greatness for Jesus is found in service and love for others. Maturity means moving from being caught up in our concerns to engaging with the needs of others. Greatness of the soul involves expanding our vision, so God and the concerns of God become first in life. This is what we see in the life of Jesus. He continually gives Himself for others and finds refreshment in his relationship with his Father.

Charles Stanley writes, *“The time you spend alone with God will transform your character and increase your devotion. Then your integrity and godly behavior in an unbelieving world will make others long to know the Lord.”* As we pray and ask God to help us become more and more like Jesus, He changes us.

Can you be open and aware of people around you who need encouragement and a helping hand? Can you be more and more like Jesus?

*Lord God,  
you have called your servants  
to ventures of which  
we cannot see the ending,  
by paths as yet untrodden,  
through perils unknown.  
Give us faith to go out  
with good courage,  
not knowing where we go,  
but only that your hand is leading us  
and your love supporting us,  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Amen.*

Eric Milner-White (1884-1963)

### **Sunday, September 11: Deuteronomy 30:11-20**

This Fall, we’ll think about what the Spirit of God is saying to us, His church. We will think about what it means to live as the people of God, people who take His Word seriously, and seek to make it the foundation of their lives.

Sometimes in life we get to be spectators. A few years ago, my son, Iain, and I had the privilege to go to an airshow in Britain. Seeing the pilots doing their high-speed, near-miss maneuvers, I was quite happy to be a spectator on the ground. I would not want to be in the air. If I were to get into the cockpit of a fighter jet, the results would be disastrous. During an air show, being a spectator is good.

In other parts of our lives, we can’t just spectate. We need to get in the game. At work, if we just watch

everyone else doing their thing, that will not go well. In our families, if we just sit back and let everyone else do all the work or we don't engage with people – not good. With our friends, if we think we can just relax and they'll meet our every need ... our friendships won't last very long.

The same is true in our relationship with God. We can choose to be "spiritual spectators" – watching other people living out their faith, getting involved, and serving. Or we can just watch the livestream (we don't have to even have to "go to church" anymore). We can watch others volunteer. We can go through the (minimum of) motions. We can be "Christian" but not really do anything much about it.

Just spectating is not a lot of fun. Our relationship with Jesus is dull, lifeless, and not very fulfilling or satisfying. We may be empty and miserable.

Or we can choose to get involved. We can take God's Word seriously. We can try to live by His ethics. We can care for people. We can love our neighbour (and our enemy). We can do what is right, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God. We can live lives characterized by love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. We could go on and on with things we can do ... It may be a struggle. But we will also discover a deeper joy, a renewed purpose, a profound hope, and a contentment we never imagined possible before ...

In Deuteronomy 30, Moses, at the end of his life, challenges us to do more than spectate. To get involved. To choose life – to choose to live for God, heart, soul, mind, and body.

As we think about what God is saying to us, His church, I hope we'll want to get into the game of life – out of the stands – onto the field – and live our faith. It's one thing to be a spectator, but it is so much more meaningful and fulfilling to get engaged. It's going to be challenging ... but also really, really exciting.

*"Today I have given you the choice between life and death, between blessings and curses," says Moses. "Now I call on heaven and earth to witness the choice you make. Oh, that you would choose life, so that you and your descendants might live. You can make this choice by loving the Lord your God, obeying him, and committing yourself firmly to him. This is the key to your life" (Deuteronomy 30:19-20). Choose life.*

*Good morning, heavenly Father,  
good morning, Lord Jesus,  
good morning, Holy Spirit.*

*Heavenly Father, I worship you as the creator and sustainer of the universe.  
Lord Jesus, I worship you, Savior and Lord of the world.  
Holy Spirit, I worship you, sanctifier of the people of God.*

*Glory to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit.*

*Heavenly Father, I pray that I may live this day in your presence  
and please you more and more.*

*Lord Jesus, I pray that this day I may take up my cross and follow you.*

*Holy Spirit, I pray that this day you will fill me with yourself and cause your fruit to ripen in my life:  
love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.*

*Holy, blessed and glorious Trinity, three persons in one God,  
have mercy upon me.  
Amen.*

John Stott (1921-2011)