

The Top 10 for Life Series #9
Cmdt. *8 – “The right Ambitions”

Thank you Dana, so very much.

As we closed our service last Sunday evening here, the final words we said in this place was simply those words from I Thessalonians where the scripture says; “He who calls you is faithful who also will do it.” How grateful I am today for the faithfulness of our great God and for the hope and encouragement that that gives every day, not just during the Christmas season, but every single day of the year.

You may notice that I am standing behind a desk that is a little bit different from the one that we had in the past. In the early days in which we were here at the beginning, someone made a gift, a donation, to be able to put a new pulpit here in the church in these new days of beginning in ministry. This pulpit arrived this week. It is a combination of the look of the clear lectern I have used the last few weeks in several services as well as our wooden desk that we have had. But I love this beautiful glass, it is glass. The thing I love the most is the etching of the cross and standing behind the cross of Jesus Christ and I have to tell you that there is symbolism in this desk for me and that symbolism is this: It is my prayer that every time we close the book and say the final amen that all that will be seen is not the man but the cross of the Savior. That is the deep desire of my heart and so I pray that with transparency and with humanness, like everyone in this building, I will be able to share both the good and the bad of my life. The smudge spots as well as the clear spots. But, most of all, that we will be able to bring the message of Christ to it. By the way, one of the neatest things was when I opened it up it came with its own bottle of Windex about this big. I thought that was very gracious. Anyway, I just thought I would let you know that we will do our best to be sure that every week it is clean and at least not smudged until after the service is over.

It is hard for me to believe this morning that we are going through the Christmas season here in Boca. I just sort of have to shake my head and realize that three months have passed just like that in my life and that we have made a major transition. Yet, we are very excited about these days of new beginning and having the opportunity to spend our first Christmas, as a family, here in the Boca area and have been enjoying the beautiful sights and sounds of Christmas and all that has been involved in that. But as I think back over these last few months, I realize that one of the most distinctive moments and one of the most lasting memories that has taken place thus far in my life, the life of my wife Connie, and our children, is something that happened not here in church but something that happened at the mall.

I had been here for about ten days when one Friday afternoon Connie and I went out to a mall and went shopping and spent a little bit of time together before the 3:00 dismissal from school. We allowed just about enough time to be able to leave the mall and get to the school to pick up the children. When we walked out the doors of a department store, right down the main aisle there, we got to the place where I thought I parked my car when suddenly I realized I did not see my car. Well, I thought for sure I was disoriented

at the mall. Has anybody here ever been disoriented at the mall before and confess it? Okay. You understand this. That is one of the fingerprints right there. We all have that experience, right? Nothing like coming out of a store, walking back to where you thought you went in, and suddenly you find yourself there and thinking is this the right place. We went over a few rows and I didn't see my car. Finally I saw a dark green-colored van. It surely didn't seem like I parked there but I went over there and when I got there surely enough it was a green van but it wasn't mine. I went back into the building and tried to be sure that was the doorway we entered and these were the displays. Everything checked out. We walked back out again, I went to the spot, I knew it was the spot but there was a different car parked there. One conclusion! Someone had taken our vehicle! I picked up my cell phone, called the police department and within just a moment the police officer's car came creeping through the lot. I found it interesting that I had given them a description of the van on the dispatch call and I noticed that the officer made about two or three rounds before he came to the curb where we were standing. There we were, standing with a few shopping bags in our hands. We spoke to the officer. He knew what was wrong and then he said. Do you know what he said? He said, are you sure this is where you came in? I went through the entire scenario on how much I had walked the lot, what I knew, what I understood, that I had been back to the spot, I knew that was the spot. He looked at me and he said you look like a competent person. I wanted to say, Sir, would you just put that on a piece of paper because I am a new pastor and within three or four months I want to pull that out and say a police officer in this county said, you look like a competent person! He took the report, asked about articles of personal effect that may have been in the car, handed me his card, and I was not ready for what happened next! He rolled up the window and said, have a good day, and he drove off! I stood there thinking, I don't have a car, I am stuck at the mall, and my kids are getting out of school, what am I supposed to do. Well, we managed to get the kids taken care of and we managed to get someone to come and to pick us up. It was quite an eventful beginning in the early days of moving here to South Florida.

I will never forget I called my insurance agent back up in Merritt Island and I said, remember to pray for your missionaries that it is dangerous on the mission field. He was teasing me about the claim of my car. I had never had a claim in six years in Merritt Island and been here for ten days and had a car theft. It was an interesting experience! Just the same it reminded me of something that is so true in our world today and that is that so many people in the world in which we are living are on the take. They are trying to get, to hold, to hoard, to have, and that so much of the motivational drama of life today is the process of people trying to get their hands on things that don't belong to them. They want them because of what they think they will do for them. I know immediately that when we start talking about getting, having, holding, taking, stealing, and theft, I know that immediately, in most of us in our minds today, we would think that really doesn't have anything to do with me. But I want you to know that while yes there is the petty theft, there is the car thief, there is even the armed robber, that when you open the Word of God you will discover that God describes and God pinpoints the issue of taking property that does not belong to us and then he applies it to many different areas of our lives.

So this morning, I want to invite you to take your Bible and open it to the 20th Chapter of the Book of Exodus where we look at God's Top 10 List for Life. There we discover that one of the specific items that God addresses in his Top 10 List, is the issue of taking that which does not belong to you. Again, I know in this building, you are saying, hey pastor, I am in church today. I am not someone who takes property that belongs to someone else. I am an honest person. But I want you to know that the Gallup polls across America seem to speak differently. In fact, Mr. Gallup has discovered that while religion has grown in popularity in America, that morality has been on the decline and that studies indicate that church goers are as prone to walk away with things as those who don't. So madam, you might want to pull your purse just a little bit closer to you this morning as you are here. These ushers that you see assisting us in the services, I know you think they are here just to receive the offering but I want you to know they have another function, it is to check for hymnals and Bibles that may walk out the door when you leave on Sunday morning. Of course, I am kidding. I know that all of us would say I am not a thief. But this morning I want you to see how clearly God addresses this issue. I want us to consider it in ways that maybe we never have before because the Word of God is very simple and very clear. What does it say? Exodus, Chapter 20, verse 15. Read it out loud with me if you will. "You shall not steal." Let us say it one more time. "You shall not steal." Now, just with the reading of that statement, and with the presence of that statement, in this building this morning, there is an understanding that God is indicating several things about property and property ownership that are important for us to understand.

The first is simply this; God affirms the legitimate ownership of property. If God says you shall not steal, on the other side he is saying there are things you may own, there are things you may possess, and the presence of this statement in the Bible affirms the legitimate ownership of property. It is not an American concept. It is not just a fundamental right of American citizenship to have the privilege of owning property, that is a Biblical concept. The reason that the forefathers in America emphasize the issue of owning property was because they understood that the Bible condoned and the Bible blessed the legitimate ownership of property. On the other hand, just as the Bible speaks of the legitimate ownership of property, this statement clearly forbids the illegitimate acquisition of property. It clearly forbids the illegitimate acquisition of property. You can gain property but you can do it in unacceptable ways. It can be acquired in ways that are deceitful and in ways that somehow violate this truth and principle of God. To put it in a simple word, you can steal.

If you were take a synonym finder today and were to open it and look up the word steal, you would find that there are over 130 different words used to describe stealing. I think it indicates to us the variety of ways that human beings have learned to take things that do not belong to them. So this morning, I want us to begin by doing a good job of diagnosing the problem. I want to be effective as a diagnostician this morning using the Word of God as a searchlight in our own lives. I want us to consider what I would call in the opening part of our message today, a discussion on the art of the steal because we have made stealing an art. We have learned how to do it in subtle ways not just taking

some thing but taking many things in a very unique fashion. I want us, this morning, to discuss the art of the steal and to consider, why is it that God has put this on his Top 10 list, and what are ways in which we, all of us in this building this morning, have a tendency to steal. Let me list several things for you. The art of the steal can first and foremost be seen in the taking of things. Obviously that is what immediately comes to mind. I take property that doesn't belong to me. I take money that doesn't belong to me. As was my experience, someone takes an automobile that does not belong to him, the taking of things.

I was fascinated this week to read that the postal service is beginning, yesterday, Saturday, to deliver 60,000 pieces of stolen mail that were as old as six years in the areas of Florida, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia. Apparently, a man in Atlanta has been sifting through the mail and for six years has been stuffing and hoarding pieces of mail. You may get a Christmas card this year from somebody you thought had forgotten you. Here you have been going around offended for years and some guy stole it up there in Atlanta and it just never got to you. You may have a Christmas present coming this week. Who knows how old it may be now. But, anyway, just the same it is interesting to see that people take things that do not belong to them. When we talk about stealing, obviously, we can think about things.

There is something else that is a part of the art of the steal. It is not only the stealing of things, it is the stealing of time. Did you know that it is possible for you to take something that does not belong to you if you take the time that is given to you, that is invested in you, to do nothing with it. This happens many times on the job. The Bible speaks to this matter specifically in Colossians, Chapter 3, and verse 22. In the New Testament the Bible says, "servants obey in all things your masters according to the flesh not with eye service as men pleasers but in sincerity of heart, fearing God." Literally, what the Bible is saying there is that if you are an employee and you work for someone don't you dare be that kind of employee. That is, if you claim to be a follower of Christ, don't be the kind of person who when the boss walks into the room you suddenly start trying to look like you are busy but, in reality, you are coasting.

Did you know you could be a thief if all you do is go to your office, sit at your desk, fold your hands, and do nothing all day? Because you are getting paid you are being entrusted with a responsibility with the job and if you do not do that job and you take of that time and of that income, it is the same as stealing. I believe that applies not only to the job, I believe it applies to our families. I believe it applies to our churches. If all we are doing is taking time that God has given us to live, time that needs to be divided to fulfill the responsibilities of our lives and we are squandering it, it is as though we are taking the life that God is giving and that we are stealing.

The art of the steal. Things. Time. Something else terms. What do I mean by terms? The Bible says in Psalm 37, verse 21, "The wicked man borrows and never pays back." If I agree to terms in a loan, in a contract, in a business negotiation that I never really intend to fulfill, if all I am doing is leveraging to take advantage and I know that I do not have the money, I know that I do not have the ability to pay back that which I borrowed,

then, frankly, it is another form of stealing. It is just delayed robbery. That is all it is. It is a very common practice in our world today, when people agree to terms that they do not intend to keep. I do not believe that the Bible absolutely forbids the borrowing of money. I know some may teach that. I do not believe that. What I believe the Bible teaches is the error of borrowing without any intent of paying back and without fulfilling the obligation. I don't think it is a good idea to borrow money. I don't think it is a good idea to be deeply in debt but I want you to know that what I believe the scripture teaches is that we are to honor our obligations. So, sometimes under the umbrella of the art of the steal, we have learned how to do it by leveraging without any intent of being responsible.

There is another place in which we find it. That is in the area of our trade. Listen to Proverbs, Chapter 20, verse 23. "Diverse weights are an abomination to the Lord and a false balance is not good." Amos, Chapter 8, verse 5 in a modern translation says they overcharge, they use false measures, and they fix the scales to cheat their customers. I can do a legitimate job but try to gain illegitimate profits. If I am twisting, if I am diluting, if I am distorting what I am representing to my customer then, basically, I am taking advantage and I steal it from him. The Bible even indicates that in our trade, if we do not give what is required based on an agreement, based on a goods or service, then we somehow have failed to honor the Lord and we have violated this commandment, you shall not steal.

There is another one. Are you ready to come up for air yet? Let's try one more, okay? This is a hard one at this time of year. Taxes. Taxes. Did you know that one of the ways you can steal is by failing to pay your taxes? The Bible says in Romans, Chapter 13, verse 10, "Render, therefore, to all they are due." Taxes to whom taxes are due. Customs to whom customs. Fear to whom fear. Honor to whom honor. You can steal by not paying your taxes. Listen to me very carefully this morning. I believe that tax avoidance is a good thing. We live in a country where there is a provision that in the event that you give, that you share what you have earned, then you can avoid a certain amount of taxes. There are all sorts of processes by which you can shelter investments and savings and gifts and charitable contributions. I believe that tax avoidance is good stewardship. I believe that tax evasion breaks the law. Consequently, tax evasion is when I fail to recognize that as a citizen I do have a responsibility and I must fulfill that responsibility. It is when I would take advantage of living in a country and the services of that country and the benefits of that government and I would not support it. The Bible is very clear. Pay your taxes! To fail to pay your taxes is to steal from your government, which is, ultimately, an authority that is established by God and, therefore, you are stealing from God. Again, thank God that we live in a country where there are benefits, where there are opportunities to avoid the maximum taxation. We need to be wise and we need to be skillful and we need to be careful but we need to understand that when the Bible says you shall not steal it includes the area of taxes.

How about the area of talents? Did you know that we steal from God and we steal from the church? When God has given us talents and abilities that are to be used in honoring him and being of benefit to others and we fail to use them and we fail to offer that service to the Lord, we are failing to use our talents and we are failing to use our gifts. One of

the greatest frustrations I have had through the years, as a pastor is how many people are caught up in the bench-warming syndrome in the church. Pew packers. They come to church on Sunday and their total extent of understanding what it means to be a follower of Christ is to pack the pew on Sunday but that is all you can ask of them. Now, I am not talking about people who come to a church, who are investigating the faith, who have questions, who have doubts, who are trying to understand what it is to have a relationship with Christ they don't necessarily need to be serving, they need to be learning, they need to come to a place where they discover Christ and the joy of serving. I am talking about people who say I am a follower of Jesus Christ but they never do anything but pack the pew and warm the bench. I believe there is a crucial demand upon every one of our lives to be faithful to give of that which God has given to us through our talents being invested. Do you remember the story that Jesus told? Over there in the book of Matthew, Chapter 25 a master, a rich man, took talents. These are not necessarily the kind of talents I am talking about but I will use that because of the story, so specifically, he took talents and gave ten to one and five to another and one to another. He told them to take the talents, the gifts he had given them and to invest them. This rich man went away. He came back after some time and the one who had ten he had increased his talents ten fold and to the one who had five he had increased his talents. But to the one who just had one talent he took it and hid it and put it away. The master called out the one who had hidden his talent, though it was the smallest talent, and he rebuked him and chastised him because he failed to be faithful with using the talent he was given. In the same way, ladies and gentleman, we must take the talents that God gives to us and we must use them for the sake of the gospel of Christ serving him and honoring him in this generation.

There is one other thing I want you to see before we leave this umbrella called the art of the steal and the discussion of what is in there. It is found over in the book of Malachi, Chapter 3. I want you to turn there just for a moment. Malachi is the last book of the Old Testament. It sort of looks like the Italian prophet, Malachi, and if you have not seen that you might want to look up Malachi, Chapter 3, just before you get to Matthew in the New Testament.

In Malachi, Chapter 3, the prophet of God is speaking to the nation of Israel and he was very pointed with his statement of rebuke and of challenge to the people. He says in Malachi, Chapter 3, verse 8 (listen to this very carefully), "Will a man rob God?" Whoa! Will a man rob God? Then he answers the question that we would ask, yet you have robbed me and you say in what way have we robbed you? In tithes and in offerings. Look at verse 10. Bring all of the tithes into the storehouse that there may be food in my house and try me now in this says the Lord of hosts. If I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it. God looks at us in his Word and he specifically says, test me. Check it out. Here is the demand. Here is the statement. Here is the rule of order. Bring your tithes to me.

Now what is a tithe? A tithe is a tenth. Beginning even prior to the Mosaic Law in the Old Testament, beginning with a priest by the name of Melchizedek in the Book of Genesis, we find that an offering of the first tenth of all earnings was brought to the Lord

and given to the Lord. Jesus referred to the tithe in the New Testament and I find it interesting that Paul in First Corinthians, Chapter 16, when he was talking to the church about giving, says, "I urge you to gather collections on the first day of the week and to store them up for the time when I will come." I find it fascinating that the idea of storing it up is found in First Corinthians and here the Bible speaks of storing it up in the storehouse. The scripture demands that every believer, now again this is a family talk, okay? I am not talking to people who have not yet claimed to know Christ, people who have not been followers of Christ. But if you claim to be a follower of Jesus Christ, I am simply saying to you there is an obligation for you to be a good steward of your money and your giving to the Lord. Now, I know immediately, people will say, "Whoa!" Maybe not quite so loud! Pastor that sure sounds like a law to me. You are right! That was the standard of the law. You say, pastor, we live under grace. You are right! We live under grace. But you show me one place in the Word of God where grace diminished the standard of the law. Everywhere you open the Word of God it increased the standard.

Let's just back up a few of these commandments in the Book of Exodus. Here the Bible says in Exodus 20, you shall not commit adultery. That is the law. What did Jesus say under grace? If a man even so much as looks at a woman, he commits adultery in his heart. Let me ask you a question. Which standard is higher, law or grace? The Bible says that we are not to commit murder. That is the law. But Jesus came over and said in the New Testament, if you so much as bear bitterness and hatred in your heart against your brother, you have the heart of a murderer. You have murdered that person in your heart. You see, grace never lowers the standard, it raises the standard. Don't ever get the idea that somehow, because you are under grace, that you can say I don't have to be disciplined I can just do what I want to do. If I give a little, if I give a lot, it is just grace. Don't ever buy into that. The Word of God is clear. God demands much of his people. God demands much of his followers. The problem in so many of our churches today, I said it last Sunday evening, I say it again this morning, is not that we have financial problems in the work of God today, we have spiritual problems, people who are trying to use grace as a cloak for failing to honor the standards of God in their lives. The issue here is that when we do not do that, when we fail to honor the Lord, when we try to somehow have first-rate stinginess and second rate sacrifice when it comes to God, when we fail to honor him with our tithes and with our offerings, we rob God! I know some of you this morning are sitting thinking, pastor, you preached on those people who were cussing and you told kids they ought to respect their parents and you preached to those murderers and adulterers. Pastor, now you have done gone to meddling, you just better be quiet. You are right. If I have offended you this morning than you can come up and apologize to me afterwards and I will be glad to forgive you. Okay?

Understand what is under the umbrella of the art of the steal when we take from God, when we take from others, when we fail to do what we are intended to do.

Obviously, if there is a sense in which we take that which is wrong, we should have an understanding of having that which we can have and using that which God has provided in our lives. I want to just quickly take a moment this morning and talk about

discovering how to acquire with a clear conscience. If we say that the Bible does legitimate the ownership of property, then the question is how can I gain things in my life. How can I own things and do it legitimately and do it with a clear conscience? Obviously, that has to be the other side of this coin. Let me just suggest to you several things that the Word of God indicates when it comes to the legitimate ownership of property and how that property is to be used in our lives and how it is to be gained in our lives. Probably you are still over there near the Book of Malachi. Keep going a little more deeply in the New Testament, into the Book of Ephesians. I love this because I think Ephesians, Chapter 4, lays out specifically the answer, the other side of the coin if you will, to the matter that is prohibited in the Ten Commandments. In Ephesians, Chapter 4, reading beginning in verse 28, I want you to see how clear the Bible is about what God's intended plan of prosperity is for me and for you. The Bible says in verse 28, "Let him who stole steal no longer." That kind of sounds like you shall not steal doesn't it? Let him who stole steal no longer. Read the rest of it. "But rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good that he may have something to give to him who is in need." What the Bible says is, if you want to prosper with a clear conscience, then work diligently. God intends to provide for you but one of the ways that God provides is through work. In fact, the Bible says if a man doesn't work, neither shall he eat. There is an emphasis on work in the Bible. God wants us to work diligently but not just working so we can get, so that we can have, so that we can hoard. We are to work and to see our work as the mechanism of God providing the needs of our lives but in turn, also, allowing us to meet the needs of other's lives. Because some of us are more profitable in our work than others. So there is an ability to meet the needs of everyone through the process of work. We are to work diligently. Proverbs 14:23 it says, "In all labor there is profit but idle chatter only leads to poverty." Proverbs, Chapter 13, verse 11 says, "Wealth gained by dishonesty will be diminished but he who gathers by labor will increase." You see, we are to work but not just for ourselves, we are to work for others.

Not only are we to work diligently, but we are to invest wisely. If you want to gain profit legitimately, if you want to acquire with a clear conscience, then invest wisely. Don't just look for a way to get rich quick. The Bible condemns that mindset. What the Bible does condone is being careful with the stewardship of what you have. Listen to Proverbs 21, verse 5, "the plans of the diligent lead to plenty, but those of everyone who is hasty surely leads to poverty." You see, if you are diligent, if you were careful to take what you have been given and to invest it wisely, it will have a manifold return. Will your heavenly Father whom loves you provide a snake if you ask for a fish? Certainly not! Our God is a God who provides at the point of every need. One of the things that God wants us to understand is our need to ask him and to be dependent upon him. That is why it really doesn't matter what your income is. It really doesn't matter what the bottom line is on your tax statement as it relates to your earnings. What matters is, in whom do you trust? Do you trust in your bank account or do you trust in God? God is the provider of all of your needs.

I have been so amazed in my life through the years to see how God has met needs in my life. I will never forget when I was in college. I had about a third or fourth level hand-me-down automobile when I got out of high school and when I started college. It had

been a family car. It was a Plymouth Fury III. It was big! Somebody yelled out in the first service this morning, "it was like a barge." They were exactly right. It was like a barge. It was like a float you would put in a parade. I mean, it was just so long. I remember I had this car and it was okay but it was wearing out. I just started praying. I was working, going to school, doing everything I could but I did not know how I could get another automobile. I just kept praying and asking the Lord. I just said, "Lord, I need another car and I need a smaller car." I went to a commuter campus, University of Memphis, 30,000 students. You should have seen me trying to park the float in those parallel parking spots, you know in those tight spots, when we were already overcrowded and parking was the biggest issue. One day I was leaving church, 18 years old, and one of the men in our church came up, put his arm around me, and said, David, I want you to know that I know you feel God's calling you to ministry. I want you to know I believe in you and I want you to know that I have a little Mazda sports car automobile. Not a sports car but just a little small compact car and he said I want you to have that car. I want you to have it as long as you need it. The only thing I ask is that when you get through with it, you give it back to me. I tell you, I will never forget what a lesson in faith that was for me. When I saw no possible way of buying another automobile and going to school and doing all of the things I was doing. I mean, just like that, God gave me a car. It was an incredible thing. I learned that God sees and God knows and God answers prayer.

There is another side of that story and before I finish it I want to give you my fourth and final way in which you need to be able to prosper with a clear conscience. That is not only to work diligently and to invest wisely and to pray earnestly, but to give generously. When you begin to become a channel through which you bless others through that which God has given to you, then you become the kind of person who God can entrust with more. You see, every time we give it is like pulling the plug on greed in our lives. One of the reasons we need to give regularly is so it will keep greed from clogging the drain of the heart.

So it was, over 12 years later, after I had enjoyed that car and given it back to the owner, that I was serving on staff at the church in Dallas, Texas. I had finished my doctoral studies and it had been a long hard journey. I never will forget that next year in ministry. The personnel ministry team called me in a room and said a part of what we are going to do for you in the year to come is that we are going to provide you with an automobile, a brand new car to pick out and to drive. I had never done that before in my whole life. That was the most incredible experience! But, you know, by that point in my life I had been in ministry several years and was able to meet the demands of my life and we actually had two decent automobiles. They were dated but they were decent. I went and picked out that new car and I began to drive it and I immediately thought, okay, take the car we have and put it in the classified ads or put a sign in it and sell it and put a couple of thousand dollars in the bank. Do you know what God said? He said somebody gave you a car one time why don't you give a car away. I can't give a car away? God said I have given you two why can't you give away one of them? You know what, we had a young man with four children, struggling on our staff, and I took that young man and I gave him that car. I tell you, every morning when I saw him driving that car into the parking lot, we waved. I have to tell you something. I may have given him the car but it

was still my car. It was my car in the sense that I had never known such joy in that car as seeing him drive it and God provided the blessing of it. I have to tell you guys, there is nothing as wonderful as learning the joy of giving. I can't believe that I can stand here this morning and tell you that has happened in my life. But it has! Not because I had financial ability, I have always lived a month at a time. But I tell you what; God has always been faithful. What God wants us to do is to learn what it is to give. But, you see, there is a problem. There is a reason why there is a tension between the art of the steal and the legitimate acquisition and it is a heart problem. There is a thief living inside of every one of us. Have you ever noticed that you don't have to teach children to steal? You have to teach them not to steal because, by nature, we are all selfish. By nature we all want to take what does not belong to us. There is a heart problem, a root problem called stealing and that stealing is something that dominates our heart and dominates our minds and our lives and if we are not careful, we find that we are constantly tripping over that heart problem. I deserve more. I deserve better. I ought to be able to give. I love what Adrian Rogers, my pastor, said growing up. He always said the heart of the human problem is the problem of the human heart.

The real issue that God is dealing with when he says you shall not steal is he is dealing with a heart problem. There is something wrong in us and what God wants to do in every life is to give us a new heart and to change us from being takers into making us givers. Do you remember what Jesus did with the little, short, Jewish, tax collector by the name of Zacchaeus? He spent his whole life taking, taking, taking. Twisting. Manipulating. Getting. But one day Zacchaeus met Jesus and when he met Jesus it totally changed his heart and he took everything that he had wrongfully taken and he began to divide it among the people that he had always plundered. The life lesson of Zacchaeus is that you give God your heart and he will put a whole new standard in you. When I tell you you shouldn't steal, I am not staying quit doing it. I am telling you you need a new heart. You need a whole new motivational source in your life and Jesus Christ is the one who brings that to your heart. Certainly if ever there was a man who understood that and knew it it was John Wesley the founder of modern Methodism. For John Wesley lived by this axiom, he said, make all you can, save all you can, give all you can. Make all you can, save all you can, and then give. Not just make and save so you can have and hoard and be greedy but so you can give and you can share and you can extend. What an incredible journey it is when you learn to live for that purpose.

It was our former pastor here, Dr. Torey Johnson, who used to say do your giving while you are living so you know when and where it is going. That is a great statement. God wants us to be givers. God doesn't want us to live our lives just trying to get because you know why? One day, just like that, it is all over and everything you have is still left. It just left, it is just vacated. The car you drove, the house you lived in, the clothes you wore, vacated, just like that. That is why Jesus said what profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his soul. We never know about tomorrow. For the last week every time you turned on news broadcast Joe DiMaggio, Yankee baseball player, at the point of death. Yesterday you turned on the news, Governor Lawton Chiles gone. You turn on the news, Joe DiMaggio, in a coma, makes a remarkable recovery. Isn't it strange? We just don't know, do we? I don't know how long Joe may live. Joe may be

definitely in his final days. Whether you are Joe DiMaggio who is lingering and suffering in an intensive care unit or whether you are like Lawton Chiles, the Governor of the State of Florida, walking in street clothes, just like that life can be over. Don't spend your life being a taker. Learn what it is to give because God loves you and God has given the greatest gift in the world to you. It is the gift of his Son. For God so loved the world he gave his only son that whoever believes in him would not perish but have everlasting life. The greatest thing that can ever happen in your life is for you to receive Jesus Christ.

Father, today thank you for using your Word to expose, to reveal, to convict at the point of the attitude of the heart that is so much the natural part of flesh to do my own thing, to live my own life. Father, some of us have stolen the greatest thing of all, that is we have stolen life. You have given us the gift of life and rather than giving you our lives in return we just live for ourselves. We have chosen to live without God. We said no to God. Father, I pray that if there is a man or woman, boy or girl who has had the door closed in their heart that right now they would quit taking the life that you have given them and that they would turn and give their life to Jesus Christ. I pray this morning for people to give their hearts to Christ, to release the things of this world, and to take hold of Christ and to learn the joy of really living, which is getting up every day and giving your life away for Christ. Father, I pray for others who have received your gift of life but who need to give themselves in commitment to a local church like this one, who need to serve you and invest their time and talents, their energies for Christ. I pray this morning that you would gather them here with us, to help to do what you have called us to do, to take and give the message of Christ in this community. So, Father, I thank you for what you are doing, even now, and what you will do in these defining moments of decision. I pray that people will not leave here and go to the parking lot disoriented like I found myself that day at the mall. I pray they would leave here with knowledge and assurance of life in Christ and purpose in tomorrow. I pray it in Jesus' name. Amen.

I want you to look up this way. In just a moment we are all going to stand together and we are going to sing a hymn of invitation. We are not going to sing long but the pastors of the church are going to be standing at the head of each aisle. Some prayer partners are going to make their way to the front and this morning if you have a need to talk with someone about the spiritual condition of your life, if you have a desire to receive Jesus Christ, you don't have to come forward to do that. But I want you to know the greatest thing you could do is just simply step out in a crowd full of people who love you and are praying for you and come today and say I want to receive Jesus Christ. Others of you need to get committed to this fellowship. You ought to be the ones to lead the way, to come and say, pastor, prayer partner, I want to be a part of this fellowship, tell me what I need to do and we will be glad to talk with you. But you lead the way so you can help take the edge off of for others who may be frightened or fearful.

Next Sunday morning, God willing, we are going to begin our service with a baptismal service and people who have put their trust in Christ are going to have the opportunity of going into the waters of baptism and being identified with Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection. If you have received Christ and you have never been baptized scripturally,

openly, then I invite you to come this morning and just let us know. Say, I want to be a part of that baptismal service next Sunday. If you can clearly share that you have known Christ as your Lord and Savior, then we will talk with you and schedule you and help you. Can you imagine a greater present to Christ at Christmas than Lord, here is my life, and I am going public for you. What a great moment! I pray that we will be able to share that together next Sunday.

I don't know what God wants to do but I know he is moving and working in hearts. I know his Word gets under our skin. If you are uncomfortable, that is okay. Our job is to be here and to help give the comfort of God. I simply want to ask that we stand together, pastors that you come move prayer partners that you come together, and that we sing this chorus. Come, follow Jesus Christ this morning, and give your life to him.

Preached by Dr. David McKinley
12/13/98