Stealing is taking what doesn’t belong to you. Legally it includes larceny, burglary, embezzlement, and theft. I saw this video on Facebook of pets stealing food…it was very funny. Several years ago, I took my GS home for the holidays. She was very smart, never wandered off or anything. This time, when we let her go, she disappeared. We looked and looked. She came back a couple hours later and she must have worked up an appetite, because she came home with a freshly smoked and properly cooled Christmas Ham. Not knowing which neighbor she had taken it from, we put her in the kennel and shut the gate, telling her to eat fast before someone came looking for her.

But dogs and bankrobbers aren’t the only thieves around here. Don’t believe me, look at the pens in your purse or in your house. How many of them did you take with you from the bank, the grocery store, your employer, or even church?

Well I think we could all say we have been guilty of stealing something in the past, so we can all sit dow

Thieves **please sit dow**n:

Over the last few weeks, we have been talking about what it means to live in community together as the church. This is a community of folks who are living a new life, and like anything new, it takes some time to adjust.

***Ephesians 4:21–24 (NLT) — 21*** *Since you have heard about Jesus and have learned the truth that comes from him,* ***22*** *throw off your old sinful nature and your former way of life, which is corrupted by lust and deception.* ***23*** *Instead, let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes.* ***24*** *Put on your new nature, created to be like God—truly righteous and holy.*

We looked first at not telling lies in order to be loved and accepted, but rather knowing what Jesus had done was proof that we were good enough to have been accepted. Then last week we talked about not allowing our anger cause us to sin, but rather allow this new nature to produce love and forgiveness in our moments of anger – even righteous anger. We talked about how anger comes about when something is taken from us. Which is a perfect connection to how

*If you are a thief, quit stealing. Instead, use your hands for good hard work, and then give generously to others in need. Ephesians 4:28 (NLT)*

So what is stealing…we know what it is.

Taking what doesn’t belong to you

 Pens from the bank,

Withholding what is due to someone else

***Proverbs 3:27 (NLT) — 27*** *Do not withhold good from those who deserve it when it’s in your power to help them.*

***Leviticus 19:13 (NIV) — 13*** *“ ‘Do not defraud or rob your neighbor. “ ‘Do not hold back the wages of a hired worker overnight.*

***1 Corinthians 7:5 (NIV) — 5*** *Do not deprive each other except perhaps by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.*

But there is spiritual stealing as well…Withholding what is due to God

***Malachi 3:8–10 (NLT) — 8*** *“Should people cheat God? Yet you have cheated me! “But you ask, ‘What do you mean? When did we ever cheat you?’ “You have cheated me of the tithes and offerings due to me.* ***9*** *You are under a curse, for your whole nation has been cheating me.* ***10*** *Bring all the tithes into the storehouse so there will be enough food in my Temple. If you do,” says the Lord of Heaven’s Armies, “I will open the windows of heaven for you. I will pour out a blessing so great you won’t have enough room to take it in! Try it! Put me to the test!*

So we know stealing is wrong, For some people, that’s all it takes to stop. What Paul knew we disciples back then and now need to connect our behavior to our faith because theft, just like lying and anger are Great Commandment issues. What do I mean?

THEFT is a **Great Commandment issue.**

***Matthew 28:18–20 (NIV) — 18*** *Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.* ***19*** *Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,* ***20*** *and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”*

Jesus said we were to learn to obey…because of our faith. If we obey because of the law, we are no different than the Pharisees.

How to steal like a Pharisee:

 **Don’t because it’s bad**

Now the Pharisees wouldn’t steal…because it was wrong. They would define what stealing so that it was avoidable, then they would avoid it. But it didn’t change their heart from being affected by greed and covetousness.

Greed- I want it

Covet- I don’t want you to have it

Stealing is a heart issue. So to stop stealing it is a matter of faith. As we believe, God gives us a new life, one that is new and no longer obligated to be consumed

That’s why we need to Raise your White Flag

***Ephesians 2:1–3 (NIV) — 1*** *As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins,* ***2*** *in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.* ***3*** *All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.*

But because

***Ephesians 2:10 (NIV) — 10*** *For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*

So we

 ***Ephesians 4:22 (NLT) — 22*** *throw off your old sinful nature and your former way of life, which is corrupted by lust and deception.*

How do we throw it off and take this new one on? FAITH

Without faith this is impossible…but by faith, all things are possible.

So we raise a white flag on GREED. We raise a white flag on coveting. We surrender our old way of living, a way that was all about getting more and doing as little as possible to get it. WE surrender living to get and as we put on Christ, we begin living to give.

How do we **Live to Give**

**Stop** stealing

Forgiveness is possible. Thieves were welcomed though…because who you were is not who you are.

***Matthew 15:19 (NLT) — 19*** *For from the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, all sexual immorality, theft, lying, and slander.*

We are given a new way to live…a new name…a new identity.

***John 8:32 (NLT) — 32*** *And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”*

If you struggling with greed and coveting, it is possibly because you don’t believe.

***Hebrews 13:5–6 (NLT) — 5*** *Don’t love money; be satisfied with what you have. For God has said, “I will never fail you. I will never abandon you.”* ***6*** *So we can say with confidence, “The Lord is my helper, so I will have no fear. What can mere people do to me?”*

**Work** hard

Again, the vacuum principal comes up. You can’t just stop a behavior, you have to replace it. Replacing taking with earning.

Very American idea.

But this does nothing to reduce our tendency to greed and coveting.

It only goes half way, it addresses they way we get things, but doesn’t help our love for things.

If anything it encourages our greed and covetousness as we now have earned it.

So we need a new understanding of work as well. Because of Jesus at work in us, we can see that we are able to earn because others can’t.

**Give** generously

How do become a part of a community, we share all we have.

We make all we can to give all we can.

By faith we transform from living to get to living to give.

**Live to Give**