

[10 Commandments Episode 11]

[Speakers in the audio file: Jon Collins and Tim Mackie]

Jon: Think of a time that you took something that wasn't yours. Maybe it was small, maybe it was something big, but why did you take it?

Tim: The sole purpose for stealing is, you want to benefit from something that you are not currently benefiting from. So, "I want that; I'm going to take it." You take something of value that you didn't earn or work for.

Jon: Dig even deeper. How did you justify taking it?

Tim: Everything that my neighbor has is God's gift to them. And one way of thinking about stealing, then, actually stems from this, probably unconscious, belief that I think that God should have given that gift to me.

[Laughter]

Tim: That should be mine.

Jon: Today, we're going to talk about the eighth command: "Do not steal," and how, actually, this command is an opportunity for gratitude.

Tim: Deuteronomy 6 says, "He will give to you large and fine cities that you didn't build and houses full of all sorts of things that you didn't fill."

Jon: Everything that we have is a gift to us. And so the eighth command is a call for contentment, which is cool. But as we're going to see in today's episode, the wisdom of the eighth command goes even deeper. Flip over "Do not steal" into the positive, and this command becomes profound. It's a call to not take people's stuff, but to help people steward their stuff.

Tim: You really have to believe that God has given me what I need and more, and that God has given my neighbor what they need and more. And I'm going to help them be good stewards of what God's given to them.

Jon: Today, Tim Mackie and I dig into the eighth commandment: "Do not steal." Thanks for joining us. Here we go.

[Musical break (1:51—1:53)]

Jon: Hey, Tim.

Tim: Hello, Jonathan Collins.

Jon: We're talking about the 10 Commandments.

Tim: Yeah, we are. Yes.

Jon: And we're cruising.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: We're moving.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: We're getting to the final few.

Tim: Yeah. Yeah. We're going to talk about the eighth commandment.

Jon: Yeah. First, we had this conversation about that these are the 10 words.

Tim: Mhm. Mhm.

Jon: And by calling them words, we are allowing ourselves to think of these more as mere instructions. These are instructions. These are commands. But there's something even broader going on, which is that these are, like, a reorientation to a way of relating to God and others.

Tim: Yeah. That's right. Underneath each command is a value—is a, a deeper commitment or view of God and other people, and how I relate to them. And then another big thing has been how the 10 Commandments are the first 10 words of a larger covenant commitment that God invites Israel into on Mount Sinai. That's the story they're found in. And there's 42 more commands given right after the 10. And those 42 actually pick up the language and often the values and ideas underneath the 10, and will fill them out. And we're going to see this with "Do not steal." Actually, the laws themselves within the context flip over the eighth command in a way that's really cool. It forced me to think about a great many things that I'm going to now force you to think about. But—uh—yeah. "Don't steal." First, let's do something real basic. Let's learn the Hebrew word underneath here. The Hebrew word here translated as steal—that's the Hebrew word *ganav* or gimel, nun, bet. It's the letter B, that last 'bet'. The last letter is B. But in Hebrew, if there's a vowel before bet, you soften the B into a V.

Jon: Mhm. So you turn the B into a V.

Tim: Yeah. It's act—yeah. So there's actually lots of words that are spelled with this letter bet, but they're often transliterated in English letters with a V.

Jon: With a V.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: Okay, that makes sense.

Tim: Yeah, so that's what's going on here—*ganav*. These three little commands—six, seven, and eight—are the three commands that are just two words in Hebrew. The word *lo'*—not—and then the verb. So—

Jon: *Lo'* means not?

Tim: *Lo'* means not.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: And then you get the verb. So “You will not kill. You will not commit adultery. You will not steal.” All three of those are two words in Hebrew: *Lo' tirtsakh*. *Lo' tin'aph*. *Lo' tignov*. Those are the only three in all the 10 that are like that, and they've been put next to each other.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: So that's meaningful.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: They're like a little triad.

Jon: It's a little package.

Tim: A little package. And what—we noted this earlier, but these three relate in kind of, like, a descending scale. All three of these are about you and another person in your community.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: You don't have the right to take their life.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: You don't have the right to take their spouse or have sex with their spouse. You don't have a right to their stuff.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So all of them are about things that are valuable or belong to my neighbor. One is their life, one is their spouse, one is their stuff. So it kind of feels like there's a bit of a descending scale.

Jon: Oh, right.

Tim: But what's interesting is if you look at other laws elsewhere in the Torah and you look at the consequences—like, what if you break commands six, seven, and eight? What's, like, what's the result? So we talked about this—murder or killing, especially with intent, is a capital crime.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So in Exodus 21: "Whoever strikes someone so that they die will be put to death." Murder's a capital crime. Adultery is a capital crime in the Torah. A theft? It's not a capital crime.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: So Exodus 22: If a guy, *ganav*-s an ox or a sheep, and then let's say he slaughters it, that is, like, makes it for dinner.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Or maybe he sells it. Then it doesn't say, "He will be put to death." It says, "He will pay five oxen for the ox and four sheep for the sheep."

Jon: That's some weird math.

[Laughter]

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: That's interesting.

Tim: Five—five times the value—

Jon: Five times the value if it's an ox.

Tim: —of an ox. Yeah.

Jon: Four times for a sheep.

Tim: For a sheep. Yeah.

Jon: Yeah. It's not one-to-one. And then, oxen are different than sheep.

Tim: Yeah, I guess, you know, sheep are valuable.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: But yeah, clearly there's—in this cultural context, which is like a—

Jon: Mhm. Farming. Agricultural community.

Tim: Yeah, a hilly region, farming context. So sheep are what you graze with; you have herds. So they're out munching grass, and you get wool and meat. But oxen, yeah, you could maybe slaughter one for a big feast, but mostly they're workhorses.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: You're plowing your farm fields with them. So let's say this: If you take someone's life, you are—hmm. I guess one reason you might is to benefit from it in some way. Like, there's stories about murdering someone because you want their stuff.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Like, there's a story about King Ahab, where he wants this guy, Navot's, nice vineyard. So he arranges false witnesses, and then he takes his stuff. So one reason you might kill somebody is for economic benefit for yourself.

Jon: To take their stuff.

Tim: To take their stuff. But sometimes people murder each other just because they're mad or they lose their temper, or they hate them, or they want to get revenge. There's not, like, economic benefit involved.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: So I guess, maybe, what's different about stealing, the sole purpose for stealing is—we'll get into this a little more, but you want to benefit from something that you are not currently benefiting from. And my neighbor has that benefit. So I want that. I'm going to take it.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: You take something of value that you didn't earn or work for. So it makes sense, then, that the consequence is about restoring value, but like, even more so, to compensate for the wrong.

Jon: Yeah, why are they even more so?

Tim: Yeah, okay. Let's meditate on that. So you are restoring the thing that you took. I stole one ox, I have to pay back one ox, but then I've got to give you four more.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: I guess what you're saying is that the relational damage and the damage to, like, our social fabric also has a value. And that's been ruptured, too, by that act. Yeah, because when you steal something, you are also beginning to shape an environment, aren't you? Because my other neighbors looking on will all of a sudden be like, "What? Oh, what?"

Jon: Not safe.

Tim: “My stuff’s not safe?”

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: And so you’re actually harming your whole community, and you’re compensating for that. Mhm. Let’s keep a pin in that one.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: There is actually one act of stealing, though, that is a capital crime in the laws of the Torah. And that is stealing a person.

Jon: Oh, yeah.

Tim: Yeah. Yeah. There’s no word for kidnapping, as such, in the Hebrew Bible, but the act of kidnapping is referred to in the Hebrew Bible, but it’s called *gonev ish*—stealing a human, stealing a person. So in Exodus 21, there’s a law: “Whoever steals a human and sells him or he’s found in his possession”—capital crime—“he shall be put to death.” So that’s interesting. You steal an ox, you’ve got to pay five back. You steal a human, your life is forfeit.

Jon: It’s intense.

Tim: It’s super intense. Yeah. So the first kidnapping in the Bible is actually among God’s chosen—chosen people.

Jon: His family.

Tim: Yeah. The story of Joseph and his brothers. And, you know, Joseph got that special coat from his dad. He had these dreams about how he was going to become the ruler of the family. And so his brothers already don’t like him.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: And then his brothers— [he] start[s] telling on them, like about, you know, mistakes that they make, and they’re just like, “This punk, he’s got to go.” So in Genesis 37, Joseph is sent by his dad with a bunch of food because his brothers are out shepherding a bunch of sheep in the—the fields, and they want to murder him. That’s what a bunch of brothers say, like, “Let’s kill him.” And then Judah, the fourth-born of Jacob, says, “What profit is there if we kill him?”

Jon: Yeah. There’s no economic gain in killing him?

Tim: No, you’re just—yeah, and just—then he’s gonna be dead.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: "But we've got an opportunity here." He says, "Come, let's sell him. Here's some Ishmaelite traders coming."

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: So kidnapping is, in the framework of the Bible, like, the assumption is the only reason you would steal a person is to sell them.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: And make a lot of money.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: I think that's still today the reason why people kidnap.

Tim: Yes, yeah, I—boy.

Jon: Well, sell or ransom.

Tim: That's right, that's right. Yeah. Yeah, that's right. So, taking someone's stuff, taking someone's person, they're viewed as equal acts, but on a scale of value. Clearly, stealing a person—it's equivalent to murder in terms of the consequence, whereas stealing their ox is not. That itself, I think, maybe that's worth its own—just—moment to pause and reflect on that. That the value of human self-determination, their ability to be an image of God and have freedom and responsibility, to realize their potential and do what God's made them to do, like that.

Jon: Hmm. To take that as, like, taking their life.

Tim: Yeah. Yeah. Murdering them is one way to take away their freedom, but stealing and selling them is an equivalent way. And both of those are put on the same level in the value set of these laws. Let's notice that the ox and the sheep are not just, like, possessions that my neighbor has, like, maybe like a pot or a chair.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Like, those are possessions.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So why didn't it give those examples too?

Jon: Or like his tent?

Tim: Yeah, or his tent. Yeah.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So the ox and the sheep are the means by which my neighbor, like, generates income and value in the community.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So it's interesting.

Jon: It's his work tools.

Tim: Yeah—that those are the things that are focused on. So I suppose for me, this equivalent would be, like, my library or my computer.

[Laughter]

Tim: In the ancient—

Jon: Those are your work tools.

Tim: These are my work tools. The things that I regularly use to generate something of value.

Jon: You know, I have—I think I've stolen a book from you, and that I haven't—

[Laughter]

Jon: I've had it at my house for a while.

[Laughter]

Jon: And—uhm—

Tim: I clearly have forgotten.

Jon: If I—and if I keep forgetting, I will never give it back.

[Laughter]

Jon: So I owe you four or five books. What's—what are we going to settle on here? Is it a sheep or is it an ox?

Tim: I don't know. That's right.

Jon: I think your books are your ox.

Tim: Wow. Okay. Did you—it seems like you stole it without fully knowing it.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Yeah. I don't know. We'll work—well, we'll work that out over lunch.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Yeah, you can buy me lunch or something. I don't know. But the point is, is that—why the ox and the sheep?

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: These are the things that my neighbor uses to, like, sustain the livelihood. To provide for those who are dependent on them. To produce something of value in my community. So it's not just stealing their stuff, but it's about threatening their ability to, like, be an image of God flourishing and adding value to my community. There's, like, an—there's a communal orientation to this.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: It's not just me and my neighbor, because what my neighbor does with their ox and their sheep is actually something that fits into the web of support for the whole community.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Mhm. That seems significant.

Jon: Yeah. Are there other times where other examples are used?

Tim: Mhm. Yeah.

Jon: Other than the work tools or the work animals?

Tim: Yeah. We'll see.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: We'll see. And that leads to an interesting observation. Let's go to an analogy.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: To understand something that I thought was interesting here. So if we're going to, like—two six-year-olds, fraternal twins.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Brother and sister.

Jon: Alright.

Tim: "Hey, Johnny. Don't steal your sister's stuff."

Jon: "Yeah, those are her crayons."

Tim: "Those are her crayons." But are they? Are they actually her crayons?

Jon: Uh-huh. Yeah. Did she buy them?

Tim: Does your sister have a job? Yes, no. She's six. Her parents—

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: That is, your parents gave her those crayons.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: So also, there's this added layer to—this isn't just about inalienable rights of private property.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: I—that's at work, I think, in these laws. When you name ox and sheep, you're naming something that was actually given to them. Like, they didn't make the ox or the sheep. So—

Jon: Wait, say that again?

Tim: Mhm. My neighbor didn't make the ox or the sheep. They acquired it at some point. But it does raise this larger question of, like, "Well, how does my neighbor have any of this stuff in the first place? How do I have any of the stuff that I have?" So it's fundamental to the story of Israel that everything that they have in the land is given to them as a gift of God.

Jon: Okay, so wait, I just want to follow your analogy.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: So you're saying, if you think about how a brother and sister—they can steal from each other, but in some way, it's all the family stuff.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Now you're stepping back from that and saying, if we're all a human family and God owns everything, then what does it mean for you to have stuff and I to have stuff?

Tim: Yeah. I'm trying to—

Jon: If it's all God's stuff.

Tim: I'm trying to identify the deeper value underneath the command. "Don't steal."

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: "Do not steal." Why? Well, on the first level, it doesn't belong to you. It belongs to your neighbor. That's their stuff. That's, like, one level. But now let's go a deeper level under that.

Jon: It's all God's stuff.

Tim: Is it really my neighbor's stuff? Well, that's interesting because—here, let me just sample a couple things that Moses said to us in the book of Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy 6, verse 10[-11]: "And it will happen when Yahweh your Elohim brings you all into the land that he swore to your ancestors, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He will give to you large and fine cities that you didn't build, and houses full of all sorts of things that you didn't fill, and hewn cisterns that you didn't dig out, and vineyards and olive groves that you didn't plant, and you will eat, and you'll be satisfied."

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: Or Deuteronomy 8: "Yahweh your Elohim is bringing you into a good land full of streams of water and springs and even underground water, and a land of wheat and barley and olive trees and honey, a land where nothing will be lacking and you will eat and be satisfied, and you will bless Yahweh your God, because of the good land that he's given to you."

Jon: Okay.

Tim: "Even your herds and flocks and your silver and gold," and so on and so on. So kind of the ground floor underneath Israel being in the land and having any of the stuff that they have—their animals, their crops, their houses, and their families—the baseline is that all of it is a gift of God.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: And when that struck me, that led to a more—almost a more meaningful meditation on why it is that I wouldn't steal from my neighbor, then.

Jon: Yeah. Okay. So what you're saying is a simple logic to "Do not steal" is "You have stuff, I have stuff, we have rights to our own stuff, and let's respect those rights that we have. I own things; you own things."

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: And what you're saying is, you're pressing on it, going, actually, that's not really how the Bible thinks about stuff.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: Like, God owns everything; it's all a gift to us.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: So if that's the case, then what is the logic behind "Do not steal"?

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Because we wouldn't, then, say, "Hey Tim, all your stuff is a gift from God, so I'm just going to borrow your car this weekend."

[Laughter]

Jon: Right, like?

Tim: Yeah. Well, maybe.

[Laughter]

Tim: I—I mean, I could ask you.

Jon: You could ask me, but I couldn't just take it.

Tim: I can't just take it.

Jon: I can't just take it.

Tim: That's—

Jon: So what is the logic behind, then, respecting someone else's possessions if it isn't as simple as "You own stuff; I own stuff."

Tim: Yeah. That's right. Yeah. So everything that my neighbor has is God's gift to them. That's a gift that God gave to them. And one way of thinking about stealing, then, actually stems from this probably unconscious belief that I think that God should have given that gift to me.

[Laughter]

Jon: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Tim: That should be mine.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: That God gave you that gift.

Jon: Maybe God made a mistake.

Tim: Yeah, clearly God made a mistake, because, well, I think that that should be mine.

Jon: Yeah. Okay.

Tim: That should be my gift.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: God hasn't given me that gift, but he ought to have.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: He gave you that gift. It's just an interesting way—

Jon: That is interesting.

Tim: —to think it through. If the baseline of Israel having anything in the land, including their ox and sheep, is that God gave it to them, well, God didn't give me enough ox.

Jon: He didn't give me what I need.

Tim: Mhm. Didn't give me what I need or what I want.

Jon: Or what I want.

Tim: And it's often hard to tell the difference, given—given human psychology.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: So it's a failure to recognize that God gave my neighbor something that—I don't know, they may not deserve, they may deserve it. They may have earned it. Who knows? But the point is that, like, they have it, and God gave it to them.

Jon: Yeah. It changes the focus from my relationship with my neighbor to my relationship with God.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: And that "Do not steal," because, respect the property rights of your neighbor.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: That's going to help my relationship with you—my relationship with my neighbor.

Tim: And that's good, like, that act—that's a good reason.

Jon: What you're drawing attention to, though, is how this affects my relationship with God and my psyche for how I think God is relating to me. Which is—do I believe that God is generous enough?

Tim: Hmm.

Jon: It's interesting, behind this, too, is like—can I trust that when God gives things to people, like, he has a plan for that, he has a purpose for that?

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: Because sometimes it just doesn't feel like that. It doesn't—

Tim: Yeah, sure.

Jon: Right? It feels like people have stuff for all sorts of reasons. And sometimes it's—maybe God is out of the picture completely.

Tim: Yeah, totally. And in one sense, you can observe somebody, and they have more stuff than you think they deserve. But even notice, like, all the mental energy, then, we put into thinking about whether somebody deserves the stuff that they have.

[Laughter]

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: I think it—I think it occupies a lot of our time.

Jon: Instead, you could use that energy to—thinking about, “What has God given me? And what am I supposed to do with what God’s given me?”

Tim: Yeah. Yeah. Now there is another twist here, because all Israelites—speaking of ox and sheep—were to give regularly a 10th, or a tithe, of their crops, of their animals. And then the firstborn of, like—anytime you’re just, you know, breeding from a new animal, the firstborn, like, of a new cow, you dedicate to God by giving it to the temple.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: So that’s also a layer here, where if I take someone’s ox, I’m actually not just taking from what belongs to them. I’m not just taking what God’s given to them as a gift. I’m actually taking from what they have to give thanks back to God as well, which is also another—it’s—so like, I might think my neighbor has, like, too many nice cars, more cars than they need. And it probably wouldn’t ever occur to me to say, “Well, I want to take one of their cars. Well, I probably shouldn’t because I would be taking away their opportunity to give thanks to God for the cars that they have.”

Jon: Uh-huh.

Tim: Like, it’s not something that would occur to me.

[Laughter]

Tim: But I think it pro—was supposed to, to an ancient Israelite.

Jon: Huh. Interesting.

Tim: There’s almost three layers here. I’m taking—it’s what belongs to them, because they’re an image of God, and so it’s about their dignity. It’s what God gave as a gift to them. And so, who am I to say what God should or should not give to them or to me? And then, third, if I’m taking from my neighbors, especially, here, from the ox or their sheep, then I’m actually taking away their ability—part of their ability—to give thanks to God, in this case, by giving it back to God.

[Musical break (24:16—24:18)]

Jon: Well, just to play devil’s advocate, let’s say there’s someone who’s clearly not living a life in gratitude to God.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: They’re clearly just not living that way.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: And they have a lot of stuff.

Tim: Yeah. Yeah.

Jon: And then let's say I can kind of manufacture some sort of almost victimless crime, because their stuff's insured.

Tim: Mhm. Mhm.

[Laughter]

Jon: So if I take it, they're going to get it back.

Tim: Yeah, totally.

Jon: And the insurance company, you know, their business model will work, and you know, maybe some shareholders somewhere are going to lose a fraction of a penny. But I mean ...

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: What big deal is that?

Tim: Is that—is this the Robin Hood type of thing?

[Laughter]

Tim: Are you going to give it to the poor? Take from the rich and give to the poor?

Jon: Well—

Tim: Or is it more—

Jon: I wasn't going to give it to the poor in this situation.

Tim: Okay, so it wasn't—

Jon: That further complicates it, I suppose.

[Laughter]

Tim: Got it.

Jon: Yeah. The redistribution, on your own terms.

Tim: Yeah, okay. Yeah.

Jon: Interesting.

Tim: So maybe, you know, when Jesus talked about wealth, he talked about it as a potential tyrant that can enslave us.

Jon: The mammon.

Tim: Yup. And so, yeah, I suppose you could even distort the narrative even more, and you'd be like, "I'm liberating my neighbor from their enslavement to mammon by"—you know. But then, a—you know, I guess you could also flip it to say, "One of the ways that my neighbor is going on their journey through the test before God—mhm, probably their stuff. And I'm not in the equation between them and God and their stuff. And God has given them what he's given them. And that is a test of their trust. And that's not mine to interfere with. I'm not God." How can I mature and grow an inner reflex for noticing when I'm beginning to make a value judgment about what God has given to my neighbor or what a group of people is doing with their stuff? And yeah, it's interesting the mental gymnastics we can begin to do about whether that should belong to me or some of that should belong to me.

Jon: Yeah. There's something about not being satisfied with what I have and feeling kind of the right to—to take more when I can, even if it wasn't right.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: Maybe there's a noble purpose to take something.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: And so there's all those mental gymnastics—is what you're saying.

Tim: Mhm. Yeah.

Jon: Yeah. And you're saying there's a simplicity and a beauty of just saying, "I have what I have. God has a purpose for that."

Tim: Mhm. Yeah. Just the baseline is that Israel's existence in the land and all of their sheep and all of their oxen, which was, like, one of the primary ways that the Israelites, like, generated their livelihoods. All of that is first and foremost described as a gift of God.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: And so if that's the main framework I have when I think about stuff, the gift of God, maybe I guess it's rooted in a scarcity or a, like, an abundance mindset.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: It takes it back there.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: But that's such an interesting way to think about why you wouldn't steal.

Jon: Mhm. It's different than property rights.

Tim: It's different than property rights, yes. Yeah. Exactly. Yeah. And then, not only that, but then, oxen or sheep are one of the ways that me and my neighbor say "thank you" to God—is to take what God's given to me and to give it back to God, in case of dedicating it to the temple, and that taking my neighbor's oxen and sheep actually affects their ability to thank God. Okay. So, from property rights to the gift of God to my neighbor, to their ability to say "thank you" back to God. That's all, like, one kind of—and it's rooted in, like, an abundance-versus-scarcity mindset.

[Musical break (28:20-28:22)]

Tim: Let's pull our next move, which has typically been to try and invert or reverse the law from a negative into a positive.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: So we—with "Don't murder," we flipped it over, and we were like trying to—what would be the positive statement? It's being your brother's keeper, to put it in the language of Genesis 4.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: Not just "How do I prevent my neighbor from dying?" but "How do I help create conditions for their life to be protected and flourish?" And that opens up, like—whoa. So many different ways to think about ...

Jon: "Don't take their stuff, let them keep it." That's a positive way to say it.

Tim: "Don't take it away, do let them keep it."

Jon: But why let them keep it?

Tim: Hmm. Hmm.

Jon: Because we're going beyond property rights.

Tim: Mhm. Let's ask a question. So, what are the different ways my neighbor can lose their stuff? One way might be because I take it.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: But is that the only way that my neighbor can lose their stuff? If their stuff is God's gift to them and part of the way that they can say "thank you" back to God, I have a responsibility that I not be a person who takes it.

[Laughter]

Tim: But is that the end of the responsibility?

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: Is there something deeper about a responsibility I have towards my neighbor and their stuff?

Jon: Okay. So if you have a perspective that we all have stuff because it's a gift from God, and from our perspective, it might not make any sense.

Tim: Mhm. Totally, yeah. And it might often seem unfair or arbitrary.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: But I can trust that God has a plan. And so when I look at someone and their stuff, I'm not looking at merely their accumulation of wealth or their possessions. What I'm looking at is, they have a story in which God is working something out with them.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: And it's a journey for them.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: And I don't know exactly what it is.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: It could be that God's working on them to detach more from their stuff.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: It could be that God wants them to enjoy the abundance of their stuff in some way at this moment.

Tim: Yeah. Yeah.

Jon: I don't know.

Tim: Yeah. Yeah.

Jon: And so in the same way that I'm supposed to help the thriving of a human life instead of "Do not murder," or the thriving of a family life instead of "Do not commit adultery," there's something about supporting, kind of, just, the thriving of other people and whatever their journey is.

Tim: Yeah. We're seeing their relationship to their stuff as part of my responsibility as a neighbor.

Jon: Say more about that. What do you mean?

Tim: Well, so, and maybe—here, before we get to the result, let me say why this even came to my mind in the first place.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So remember, we have the 10 Commandments, and then we have the 42 that come right after.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: So what's interesting is—in the 42 commands, you only get one more repetition. And that's if a guy steals his neighbor's oxen or sheep, he has to pay back five oxen.

Jon: Oh, that's from the 42?

Tim: Yeah. That's from the 42.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: So you're like, "Okay, all right, that spells it out." But then right after and around that are a whole bunch of other laws that use the word steal, but that, in a—in a really interesting way.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: So—and they're like little case studies, they're almost like little parables.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: This is from Exodus 21 [22] verse 10. So let's say a guy gives his neighbor a donkey, an ox, or a sheep—any animal—for keeping, for guarding.

Jon: Okay. You look after my stuff.

Tim: Yeah. Yup. Yup. And let's say the animal dies, or let's say it gets injured, or let's say it's taken captive. Like here, it's like bandits, but no one saw.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: So it dies, it gets injured, or it's taken captive, but nobody was around. Then they're going to have to make an oath before Yahweh between the two of them, that he—that is, the one entrusted—didn't send out his hand towards his neighbor's property. And so the owner will take back, like, the dead or injured animal, but the guy entrusted with it will not have to restore anything.

Jon: Okay. You lent me something, you lent me your sheep. Sheep got sick and died.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: I am like, "Hey, I didn't do anything."

Tim: Yeah. He was probably sick before—you know?

Jon: He had—he had a runny nose when he got here.

[Laughter]

Tim: Yeah, totally. Yeah. Yeah

Jon: Sorry.

Tim: Sorry. Yeah.

Jon: And then the owner can't demand that he restores the sheep.

Tim: That's right. Yeah. You don't owe me four more sheep back.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Yeah. But let's say that, that sheep was stolen from the guy who it was entrusted to.

Jon: Okay. Didn't get sick and die; it got stolen.

Tim: Mhm. Got stolen. Then you got to restore, pay back the owner.

Jon: Oh.

Tim: According to the measure of four sheep.

Jon: Oh, interesting.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Okay. Huh.

Tim: So what's the difference between it dying, getting injured, or taken captive?

Jon: Yeah, what's "taken captive" mean?

Tim: Like ...

Jon: Kidnapped?

Tim: No, like a bunch of bandits come out of the hills with swords and clubs.

Jon: Well, isn't that stealing?

Tim: Apparently, there's a difference.

[Laughter]

Jon: What's the difference?

Tim: Well, okay, let's think about what is the difference. If a bunch of guys come with swords and clubs, and it says here, no one's around.

Jon: Okay. So I guess that makes it seem like stealing.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: But like, let's say you're having dinner and like, you see some—

Jon: Raiding party.

Tim: You see a raiding—like Vikings.

Jon: Yeah. Okay.

Tim: I'm changing cultural locations here, but like a bunch of—a Viking raiding ship comes up, you know, and they put a sword to your throat, and it's like, you know, take your sheep, but then one of them belongs to your neighbor.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: And it's like, well, what are you—what are you going to do? So there's some difference of responsibility.

Jon: Okay. Hold on.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Before, yes. But what's the difference between, then—so what am I supposed to think of about the story of being stolen?

Tim: I—exactly, yes.

Jon: Like, is that—

Tim: So, apparently, at being stolen, there's a difference of levels of responsibility. I g—the assumption, I think—

Jon: I'm sorry, I'm just getting hung up on how is the Viking thing not “being stolen”? And that's where I'm getting hung up—

Tim: It is being stolen. So there—okay, so there's no difference between it being taken captive and stolen on the level of, like, it's taken.

Jon: Yeah, someone else took it. That didn't belong to them.

Tim: So apparently, there is some difference in levels of responsibility. If my life was at stake—

Jon: Oh, okay. That's the subtext of the raiding party.

Tim: Mhm. Taken captive, like an armed—

Jon: Your life's at stake.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: You're in danger.

Jon: Ah, okay.

Tim: If you had prevented it from being taken, you could have died.

Jon: I see. Okay.

Tim: Versus if it was stolen ...

Jon: That means you were just being negligent.

Tim: I think it's about negligence.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: I think that's what's underneath it here. Now it's very, kind of, dense.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So let's look at the next little variation.

Jon: Okay. Alright.

Tim: Let's say it's torn to pieces.

Jon: You mean, like, by an animal?

Tim: That is, got attacked—yeah. Got attacked by a lion. Bring it as a witness. So bring the mangled body.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Be like, "Look, it didn't—"

Jon: Yeah, obviously a wolf got this.

Tim: Yeah, totally. Then he does not have to restore for what was torn to pieces.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: So if it dies, it's injured, or taken captive, or attacked by a wild animal.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: You don't have to restore.

Jon: You're not on the hook.

Tim: But if it was just nabbed from the sheep pen, you do have to.

Jon: Huh.

Tim: So there's some value underneath this, here, that is relevant to flipping over the do-nots. Because if you steal it, you have to pay back.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: If it was—

Jon: If you let it be stolen.

Tim: Yeah, if it was entrusted to you.

Jon: Yeah. And you let it be stolen.

Tim: And then it gets stolen, you have to pay back.

Jon: There's something different with it being stolen from under your care.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: That's different than, "Well, it was sick and it died", or "it fell, and it got injured", or a raiding party came, or a wolf came.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: In fact, thinking of a wolf and like, a raiding party tog—like, kind of in symmetry is helpful for me.

Tim: Yeah. Exactly. Yes. Mhm.

Jon: Something different than just, "Hey, you were negligent, you didn't watch over your neighbor's property like you would have watched over your property." That's it.

Tim: It's got to—

Jon: You just pointed at me.

[Laughter]

Tim: It's got to—right, that's got to be it.

Jon: Okay, I didn't watch over my neighbor's property like I would have watched over my property.

Tim: Yeah. So—

Jon: Because I wouldn't have done anything with the wolf. I wouldn't have done anything with the raiding party.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: I couldn't have prevented an injury. And I couldn't have prevented, like, a sickness.

Tim: Yeah. So—

Jon: But I could have cared enough to make sure someone wouldn't come and steal it.

Tim: Yeah. Yeah, so I probably do spend a lot of mental energy, if I'm an Israelite shepherd, taking whatever precautions to make sure my sheep don't get stolen.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: So I think the presumption, here, is about a carelessness or negligence, or I didn't treat what belongs to my neighbor like I would treat my own. Because the difference between being stolen and getting taken captive is about being able to prevent it.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: I—that's just an interesting little case study here.

Jon: Yeah. Now, in this case study, it was entrusted to you, so it's like, "Hey, for a while, treat this like it's yours, for me on my behalf."

Tim: Mhm. Yeah.

Jon: And so it kind of sounds like what you're saying is there's wisdom here for ...

Tim: Yes. Yeah.

Jon: ... for maybe that's how we should be thinking about our neighbor's stuff all the time.

Tim: Yeah. Apparently, when my neighbor—we're going to take it one more step, but—when my neighbor gives me something that belongs to them for guarding, I have a responsibility to treat it like I would my own.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Which then makes you think, like, "Well, but it's not my own."

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: But now it is. But it's become my own because they gave it to me.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Okay. Let's look at another case study. This one's from Deuteronomy 22: "You will not watch the ox of your neighbor or his sheep or his goat going astray."

Jon: Yeah, you're watching an ox just, like, wander off into the—

Tim: Your neighbor's.

Jon: Your neighbor's ox—

Tim: You know it's your neighbor's.

Jon: —wander off into the wilderness.

Tim: Yup.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Yeah. "You will certainly return it to your neighbor." Don't ignore it.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Now "let's say your brother"—that is your neighbor— brother and neighbor are interchangeable here.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: "Let's say your brother"—that is your neighbor—"doesn't live near you. Or let's say you don't know who he is." Isn't that a good use of brother?

Jon: Oh, okay.

Tim: You don't know who your brother is, but he's an Israelite.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: That's the point.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So "let's say—"

Jon: You're like, "I don't know whose ox this is."

Tim: Yes.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: So if I know—I recognize, like, “Oh, that’s that red heifer that belongs to my neighbor.”

Jon: Yeah. I’ve seen that one around here.

Tim: “I know that one.”

Jon: Obviously, it belongs to someone.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: “That’s Daisy.”

[Laughter]

Tim: “I know Daisy.”

Jon: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Tim: “She wanders away all the time.” So okay, that’s Bob’s or whatever—that’s Moshe’s—but let’s say, “I don’t know who that belongs to.”

Jon: Yeah, yeah.

Tim: “You should bring it into your house.”

Jon: Oh, okay.

Tim: “And keep it with you until your brother comes looking for it. Then give it back to him. This is also what you should do with his donkey. And this is also what you should do with his garment.”

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: “And this is also what you should do with any of the lost property of your brother that you find.” You are not allowed to withhold your help.

Jon: Hmm.

[Laughter]

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: And then one last flip: “You will not see the donkey of your neighbor or his ox fallen on the road and ignore it. You must help them and get up along with them.”

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: So this kind of takes it even further.

Jon: Yeah. Right. Because in the last example, it was a special scenario where I said, “Hey, would you please take care of my stuff?”

Tim: Mhm. That’s great.

Jon: We have this little agreement: “Yeah, okay, I’ll take your stuff.”

Tim: Yeah, yeah, “I’ll treat it like my own.”

Jon: Yeah. In this situation, it’s just saying, actually, just think that way all the time.

Tim: Yeah, yeah. That’s right.

Jon: If you see your neighbor’s stuff wandering away, treat it like your own. You would go get it.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Go get it.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: Even if you don’t know whose it is.

Tim: Yeah, totally, which is great.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Even if it’s just a garment, and you’re just like, “Well, obviously, they don’t care.”

Tim: Totally, yeah.

Jon: You can tell a story in your mind of like, “Well, they don’t care enough about their stuff.”

Tim: Totally. Oh dude, this happened to me not very long ago on a morning run up at the park. And there's this park bench that I run by every Sunday morning.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: And there was a really nice Patagonia jacket on it.

[Laughter]

Jon: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Tim: And nobody was around.

Jon: Yeah. Right.

Tim: And it was so funny. I did all this, like, mental work.

[Laughter]

Jon: Mhm. Someone's going to take it.

Tim: Totally! I was like, "That's a nice jacket." And you know, of course, we're so subtle in our minds.

[Laughter]

Tim: Because I, like, as I was coming up, I was, like, "Could that fit? Like, does it fit me?" And then I'm like, "What am I thinking? Like, they're going to be right back, or they forgot, or they walked away, and they're going to remember."

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: But I had to, like, tell myself a story about why that's not mine.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: I had to tell myself.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So maybe I'm just revealing that I'm a really screwed-up person.

[Laughter]

Jon: I think that's normal.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: And how wonderful is it when someone returns your stuff?

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: You know?

Tim: Yes.

Jon: It's happened to me a number of times.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: Or actually—yeah, it's ha—one time in particular, I left my backpack at, like, a coffee shop, and some wonderful woman took it. I didn't have a password on it.

[Laughter]

Jon: So she, like, logged in.

Tim: Whoa, really?

Jon: Yeah. And then she figured out who I was.

Tim: Whoa.

Jon: And she emailed me, and she was like, "I have your computer."

Tim: In order to return your—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Whoa.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: That's amazing.

Jon: It is amazing.

Tim: Totally. Yeah, okay, let's think about that. Why do we—

Jon: But it was wonderful.

Tim: Yes. Okay.

Jon: Right?

Tim: Why don't—

Jon: Like, she didn't have to do that.

Tim: Why is that so striking to us? That feels like, "Whoa, somebody went above and beyond." But ba—what that woman was doing was living by the wisdom of Deuteronomy 22.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So let's think back: "Do not steal. Do not take what belongs to your neighbor." Why? Well, they have a right to it.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: It is also God's gift to my neighbor, and it's not mine to interfere with. And God didn't give me that gift, and I might have an issue with that, but that's a part of my journey with God. Why involve my neighbor? Or deprive them of what God has given to them? Also, I'm depriving them of their ability to give thanks to God for that thing that they have that God gave to them.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Also, their responsibility for their stuff is my responsibility. I have a responsibility. That's where we're going with it.

Jon: Yeah. That's the wild leap. So you're saying flip it over.

Tim: Flip it over.

Jon: And there's—instead of asking myself, "Can I be content with what God's given me?" I can actually ask myself, "Can I help be a steward of other people's stuff with them?"

Tim: Yeah. Well, yeah, help them steward their stuff. Yeah. That's right.

Jon: That's, like, the just extra-generous mindset.

Tim: Totally. Yes, you really have to believe that God has given me what I need and more, and that God has given my neighbor what they need and more.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: And I'm going to help them be good stewards of what God's given to them. So much so that even if it falls into my possession accidentally.

Jon: Or I see it in danger.

Tim: I see it in danger.

Jon: And I can tell myself a little story of like, "Well, I guess they were neglectful."

Tim: Yeah. That's right.

Jon: "Guess they don't deserve their stuff."

[Laughter]

Jon: I wouldn't ever say that to myself.

Tim: Yeah. Totally.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: Yeah. Yeah.

Jon: Wow, okay.

Tim: Yeah. That's right.

[Musical break (45:02—45:04)]

Tim: So I think this is a part of the method of meditating on the laws of Torah's wisdom literature. I mean, look where we ended. That's really profound. What is my obligation to my neighbor about their relationship to their stuff?

Jon: Yeah, it's not just about respecting property rights. I mean, it could start there.

Tim: Yeah. It is about that, but it's about more.

Jon: But it's about more.

Tim: Mhm

Jon: It's about, "Do I believe that everything is a gift? Do I believe that I have what God has designed for me? And even more, can I start to view other people's stuff like I view my stuff in terms of how I would treat it, look after it, and care for it? And would I help other people steward their stuff well?" Because everyone's on a journey with how they relate to God and they relate to their stuff.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Jesus had a lot to say about that.

Tim: Yeah, yeah, he did.

Jon: And it's a complicated journey. It's a really complicated journey.

Tim: Mhm. Yeah, and it gets to the core of our values and our desires.

Jon: Gets—yeah.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: And so I can say, "Well, you know, I know how you should deal with your stuff. And I—"

Tim: "Let me—let me have it."

[Laughter]

Jon: "And you obviously don't care about it enough. Maybe I should have it."

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: "Or why do you deserve it?" I—I can make myself God in that situation instead of make myself a true, like, brother and say, "This is cool. God gave you this thing. I want to help you steward what God gave you."

Tim: Mhm. Yeah.

Jon: That's a very—that's a very generous mindset.

Tim: Yeah. Yes, it is. You know, I have one friend, who's been a friend a long time, who I would say, when I think of this value, somebody who helps other people with their stuff, someone comes to my mind.

Jon: Oh, really?

Tim: Yeah. Who's one of the most generous people I've ever met, like, all the way back in college, and—but one of the ways he shows that generosity is he loves to help people do stuff if they own any property or homes.

Jon: Mhm. Like, work projects?

Tim: Yes, with their—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Yeah, he loves it.

Jon: I was thinking about that.

Tim: He loves to, like, rent stuff, or he works in—he works in proximity to a lot of, like, machinery and outdoor machinery.

Jon: Oh, okay.

Tim: And so it's easy for him to get tools and excavators.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: He just loves that. Like, let me come help you cultivate your, like, vegetable garden. Or like, he'll dig out that hillside to make a patio or whatever.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: And he helps other people steward and enjoy—

Jon: That's cool.

Tim: —their property.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: And he just loves that. I just have never met anybody like that.

Jon: Yeah, because it's such a free spirit, because you could instead just be like, "Why do they — they don't deserve that big deck."

[Laughter]

Tim: Yeah, totally.

[Laughter]

Jon: “That nice garden.”

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Like, what?”

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: “I don’t have something like that.” Instead, it’s “God’s working with them, and they have that for a reason. I don’t need to get entwined in, like, do they need to give that away? Do they have too much? Is it taking over their, like, let me just come and just help them steward it.”

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: And then, that’s a really beautiful place to start a relationship with someone.

Tim: Yeah. You have heard that it was said, “Do not steal.”

Jon: Do not steal. And I say to you.

Tim: And I say to you, “Look after your neighbor’s stuff. Go to their house and give them suggestions about how to enjoy their stuff even more. Look after it as if you would your own, and give thanks to God for what he’s given to you,” or something like that.

[Laughter]

Tim: That was a little presumptuous to—or maybe no. I’m imitating. I’m imitating Rabbi Jesus.

Jon: Oh, it’s presumptuous to say what Jesus might have said.

Tim: Yeah, totally. But no, I’m trying to do my own meditation. And I think what was remarkable to me was. by just doing these keyword searches, I found my mind doing that. And I was like, “This surely was how Jesus did it.”

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: Like, how did he get to these—right?—insights?

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: And that he did in the Sermon on the Mount by quoting the 10 Commandments. "You've heard that it was said, 'Don't commit adultery.' And I say to you—" And then he inverts it and deepens it.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So.

Jon: Yeah, maybe you would say, instead of "And I say to you," is "And God says to us."

Tim: Yeah, that's right. And God—

Jon: Because Jesus can pull that "And I say to you."

Tim: That's right.

[Laughter]

Tim: Yeah. That's right.

Jon: That's the presumptuous.

Tim: Yeah. There you go.

Jon: That's cool.

Tim: Okay. Well, there's a lot there to go ponder.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Let's do another one. Number nine, shall we?

Jon: Yeah, the next one.

Tim: Next one.

Jon: Is—

Tim: Uhm—"You will not bear false witness."

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: Alright.

Tim: “Do not lie.” Let’s—

Jon: “Do not lie” is next.

Tim: Yup. All right.

Jon: Next week, we’ll look at the ninth command, which we often say as “Do not lie.” But actually, it is “Do not bear false witness.” Focusing specifically on a communal type of lying in a legal setting.

Tim: If Israel is meant to be the light shining in the darkness, in the city on the hill, God really wants to have even their communal justice systems stand apart from the typical types of corruption and distortion that they’re liable to. That is what’s at stake in the ninth command.

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