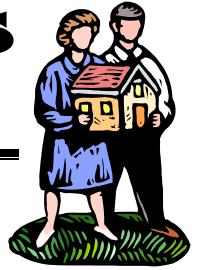


10 HABITS of Highly Healthy Homes



Habit 8: Maintain Your Integrity

Sunday, July 16, 2000

Exodus 20:15 (NLT) Do not steal.

- When Pastor Joe Wright was asked to open the new session of the Kansas Senate, everyone was expecting the usual politically correct generalities. But on January 23, 1996, what they heard instead was a stirring prayer, passionately calling the United States to repentance and righteousness. The response was immediate, with a number of legislators walking out during the prayer.
- Representative Delbert Gross, described the prayer as "divisive, sanctimonious, self-serving, and overbearing." Representative David Haley railed, "I take personal umbrage to the prayer we had to suffer through this morning. We've got to respect one another. His prejudice and his perversion can be practiced in his own church, maybe where they are worshipping snakes." **Clearly, these representatives felt uncomfortable in the presence of "absolute" truth.**
- In six short weeks, Central Christian Church logged more than 5,000 phone calls, with only 47 negative responses. Radio Commentator Paul Harvey aired the prayer on his program and received his largest-ever audience response. **Just what was in Pastor Wright's prayer that so polarized people in Kansas? Simply a passionate call for a return to the Biblical values that we have been teaching from the Ten Commandments!** Here is the prayer that he prayed:
- Heavenly Father, we come before You today to ask Your forgiveness and seek Your direction and guidance. We know Your Word says, "Woe to those who call evil good," but that's exactly what we have done. (*) We have lost our spiritual equilibrium and inverted our values. We confess that ... We have ridiculed the absolute truth of Your Word and called it pluralism; We have worshipped other gods and called it multi-culturalism; (*) We have endorsed perversion and called it an alternative lifestyle; We have exploited the poor and called it the lottery; We have neglected the needy and called it self-preservation; We have rewarded laziness and called it welfare; (*) We have killed our unborn and called it choice; We have shot abortionists and called it justifiable; We have neglected to discipline our children and called it building self-esteem; We have abused power and called it political savvy; (*) We have coveted our neighbor's possessions and called it ambition; We have polluted the air with profanity and pornography and called it freedom of expression; We have ridiculed the time-honored values of our forefathers and called it enlightenment. (*) Search us, oh God, and know our hearts today; try us and see if there be some wicked way in us; cleanse us from every sin and set us free. Guide and bless these men and women who have been sent here by the people of Kansas (*) and who have been ordained by You to govern this great state. Grant them Your wisdom to rule, and may their decisions direct us to the center of Your will. I ask it in the Name of Your Son, the Living Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

*You are cordially invited to join us for **The Re-Wedding** on Sunday Evening, July 30 at 6:30, as dozens of couples renew their marriage vows in the biggest wedding in the history of Saint John.*

Ten Habits of Highly Healthy Homes

**Examine Your
Priorities**

**Avoid The
Counterfeits**

Take God Seriously

**Renew Your
Relationships**

**Respect Your
Heritage**

**Value The
Individual**

**Protect Your
Marriage**

**Maintain Your
Integrity**

Speak The Truth

**Discover Real
Contentment**

- The Ten Commandments are offensive to our “tolerant” society simply because they are so “absolute” (that is the nature of a command!) They get down to “where the rubber meets the road” and cut to the heart of the matter – TO PUT IT PLAINLY, THEY CONVICT US!
- The eighth commandment tells each of us “MAINTAIN YOUR INTEGRITY” – even though society often tells us exactly the opposite!
- Stealing is epidemic in modern life! And just as we discovered that there is more than one way to murder a man, there is also more than one way to steal from a man! Roget’s Thesaurus records more than 125 synonyms for the word “stealing,” and the criminal code contains a multiplicity of terms that attempt to define the many shades of theft: burglary, robbery, larceny, hijacking, shoplifting, pickpocketing, purse-snatching, embezzlement, extortion, racketeering, and a host of others.
- Most of the justification for stealing comes from the egotistical notion that other people exist only to serve “my wants” or as an opportunity for “my gain.” That is why many people find it easy to rationalize the wrong that they are doing ...
 - Is it really stealing if it’s from a company or the government instead of people?
 - Is it really stealing if they wouldn’t really notice it’s gone, because they have so much?
 - Is it really stealing if it’s just not fair that I don’t have what so many other people have?
 - Is it really stealing if I mean to give it back eventually, before they notice or need it?
- The Eighth Commandment says, “YES, IT’S STEALING!”
- The Hebrew phrase “lo t’gahnaf” in the eighth commandment means that we are not to take by stealth or to carry away secretly. In other words, it refers to an action that is kept hidden from the owner of whatever is being taken – because they would not permit it if they knew about it!

ACQUIRING “BY THE BOOK”

- While the Bible forbids stealing, which is the ILLEGITIMATE acquisition of possessions, it allows and even encourages us to acquire possessions in LEGITIMATE ways:

1. DILIGENT LABOR

- ***Ephesians 4:28 (CEV)*** *If you are a thief, quit stealing. Be honest and work hard, so you will have something to give to people in need.*

2. WISE INVESTING OR BARGAINING (i.e. Parable of the Talents)

- ***Matthew 25:29 (NLT)*** *To those who use well what they are given, even more will be given, and they will have an abundance. But from those who are unfaithful, even what little they have will be taken away.*

3. FAITHFUL PRAYER

- When people have no opportunity to work or barter, and every avenue of provision seems closed, that’s when prayer comes in! GOD WILL NOT MEET NEEDS THAT WE SHOULD BE MEETING!
- ***Matthew 6:32-33 (NLT)*** ³² *Why be like the pagans who are so deeply concerned about these things? Your heavenly Father already knows all your needs, ³³ and he will give you all you need from day to day if you live for him and make the Kingdom of God your primary concern.*
- **There are three things we need to remember when praying that God will give something to us:**
 - A. There is more to life than possessions.
 - ***Matthew 16:26 (NLT)*** *And how do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul in the process? Is anything worth more than your soul?*
 - B. We must pray with the right motives.
 - ***James 4:3 (NLT)*** *And even when you do ask, you don’t get it because your whole motive is wrong — you want only what will give you pleasure.*
 - C. We must store up treasures in Heaven as well as on earth.
 - ***Matthew 6:19-21 (NLT)*** ¹⁹ *Don’t store up treasures here on earth, where they can be eaten by moths and get rusty, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰ Store your treasures in heaven, where they will never become moth-eaten or rusty and where they will be safe from thieves. ²¹ Wherever your treasure is, there your heart and thoughts will also be.*
 - ***Luke 12:21 (NLT)*** *Yes, a person is a fool to store up earthly wealth but not have a rich relationship with God.*
- We store up treasures in Heaven each time we use the resources God has given us to accomplish His will on the earth.

- **So, labor and bargaining – and even prayer – are “legitimate” ways to acquire possessions. But before we look at the “illegitimate” acquisition of possessions (stealing), let’s discover the Biblical penalty for such activity:**

THE BIBLICAL PUNISHMENT FOR STEALING

- **Exodus 22:3b-4 (LB)** ^{3b} *If a thief is captured, he must make full restitution; if he can't, then he must be sold as a slave for his debt.* ⁴ *If he is caught in the act of stealing a live ox or donkey or sheep or whatever it is, he shall pay double value as his fine.*
- What a fitting punishment the Bible demands! Justice in its purest sense. If you steal twenty dollars from me, you must pay me back the twenty, plus another twenty. That which you wished to take from me is taken from you! The Bible compensates the VICTIM for the emotional violation that took place, and makes the THIEF feel the exact loss he wanted to perpetrate. Could you imagine the drop in our crime rate if every thief was required to give double restitution to their victims? (i.e. steal a car, give back their car plus your car!) Unfortunately, our “justice” system generally punishes the perpetrator only for their actions against society, while not demanding restitution to the individual.
- What if you steal something and then turn yourself in? In this case, the Bible demands a diminished penalty for “owning up to it,” thus providing incentive and opportunity for the thief to change his life. It is hoped that the admission of guilt may be the first step of genuine repentance! Thus, if a thief turns himself in, he is only fined a 20% penalty in addition to the return of the item, instead of a 100% penalty.
- **Numbers 5:6b-7 (CEV)** ^{6b} *If any of you commit a crime against someone, you have sinned against me.* ⁷ *You must confess your guilt and pay the victim in full for whatever damage has been done, plus a fine of twenty percent.*

EIGHT WAYS THAT WE STEAL

1. Deceiving Customers

- **Amos 8:5b (GN)** *You overcharge, use false measures, and fix the scales to cheat the customers.*
- This 3000-year-old problem sounds pretty current! When a mechanic or a repairman makes unnecessary repairs, when a salesman skips over the fine print, or when you sell a car or a house without disclosing its problems, the Bible calls that stealing!

- One of the most “creative” ways to deceive customers is found every week in the real estate section of the newspaper ...

GUIDE TO FAMILIAR REAL ESTATE AD PHRASES	
WHAT IT SAYS	WHAT IT REALLY MEANS
Starter Home	One bedroom, no bathroom
A Real Challenge	It was hit once by an A-Bomb
A Fixer-Upper	A heap of junk
Charming	Tiny – Snow White might fit, but the dwarfs would have to find their own place
Much Potential	Pretty grim, steer clear unless you have a lot of money and like the smell of mildew
Unique City Home	Used to be a warehouse
Daring Design	Still is a warehouse
Hi-Tech Contemporary	Lots of steel shelving with little holes, like your dad used to store tools on in the garage
Completely Updated	Avocado dishwasher, harvest gold shag carpeting and paneling in every room
Sophisticated	Black walls and no windows
One Of A Kind	Ugly as sin
Brilliant Concept	Has a two-story oak tree in a 30-foot sky dome – right in the middle of the kitchen
You'll Love It	No, you won't
Must See To Believe	This is an absolutely accurate statement

2. Defrauding Employers

- **Colossians 3:23 (NLT)** *Work hard and cheerfully at whatever you do, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people.*
- According to the employee screening company Guardsmark, employee theft costs North American employers about \$120 billion each year. Roughly one-third of employees admit to having stolen from their companies; two-thirds say they benefit by abusing sick leave, falsifying time cards, cheating on an expense account, or taking other unethical actions. Over one-third of college students say they will steal from an employer if given the opportunity when they are employed.
- **And what about wasting time on the job?** When an employer is paying you for your time and you come in late, leave early, take several coffee breaks and a long lunch, you’re stealing from them! When you work below your capacity, indulge in daydreaming, kill time, or take care of personal business at work, you’re a thief!

- **Illustration:** “The former treasurer of the Episcopal Church blamed job stress and gender bias yesterday in her misuse of \$2.3 million of church funds between 1990 and 1995. Ellen F. Cooke said that a psychiatrist who evaluated her attributed her behavior to ‘enormous pressures and stress.’” The **Harrisburg Patriot News** reported on May 2, 1995 that the money was used for personal expenses, a house, a farm, school tuition, jewelry, and travel. **It is offensive to us that sinful behavior is being passed off as a bad mood!** People – even those with mental conditions – generally know right from wrong. Most stressed-out people take warm baths or cold showers, they meditate or pray; they don’t steal by misusing their access to other people’s property.

3. Delaying Payments

- **Leviticus 19:13 (NLT)** *Do not cheat or rob anyone. Always pay your hired workers promptly.*
- If you have employees or suppliers or friends and you owe them some money, don’t say “the cheque is in the mail” – **pay them now**, or be honest about why you can’t and when you will!

4. Defaulting On Loans

- **Psalms 37:21 (NLT)** *The wicked borrow and never repay, but the godly are generous givers.*
- Many people borrow things with no intention of paying them back. **The worst loans are made to friends, relatives and fellow church members.** What is in your garage that you need to return to somebody? That’s not long-term borrowing – God’s Word says that it’s stealing!
- **The church is neither a loan agency nor a welfare society!** To paraphrase John F. Kennedy – “Ask not what your church can do for you, ask what you can do for your church!”

5. Deceiving The Government

- **Romans 13:6-7 (CEV)** ⁶ *You must also pay your taxes. The authorities are God’s servants, and it is their duty to take care of these matters.* ⁷ *Pay all that you owe, whether it is taxes and fees or respect and honor.*
- **TAX AVOIDANCE** is good stewardship – there’s no reason you should overpay on taxes or not try to maximize your deductions. But **TAX EVASION** is illegal – and God says that it is stealing!
- **Cheating or lying to get government benefits is also theft!**

- Being poorer than others is not an excuse for stealing from others!
- **Marvin Olasky (The Tragedy of American Compassion):** “The problems of the underclass are not caused by poverty. Some of them are exacerbated by poverty, but we know that they need not be caused by poverty, for poverty has been the condition of the vast majority of human communities since the dawn of history, and they have for the most part been communities of stable families, nurtured children, and low crime.”

6. Depending On Chance

- **Isaiah 65:11b-12a (CEV)** ^{11b} *What will happen to you for offering food and wine to the gods you call “Good Luck” and “Fate”?* ^{12a} *Your luck will end!*
- North Americans now spend more money on games of chance than they do on food or clothing! (Jim Nesbitt, “The Social Costs of Gambling”) Focus On The Family reports that nearly seven million North Americans are addicted to gambling, which can lead to crime, bankruptcy, divorce, and even suicide. A Harvard University study says that two millions teenagers in North America are struggling with gambling addiction – per capita, twice the rate of adults! 25% of these gambling addicts will wind up divorced or separated, and 22% of them will attempt suicide. Another study by the U.S. government found that domestic violence and child abuse skyrocket when gambling machines arrive in a community!
- **Issues and Answers (Southern Baptist Convention):** While the Bible contains no “thou shalt not” in regard to gambling, it does contain many insights and principles which indicate that gambling is wrong. The Bible emphasizes the sovereignty of God in the direction of human events (Matthew 10:29-30), gambling looks to chance and good luck. The Bible indicates that man is to work creatively and use his possessions for the good of others (Ephesians 4:28), gambling fosters a something-for-nothing attitude. The Bible calls for careful stewardship, gambling calls for reckless abandon. The Bible condemns covetousness and materialism (Matthew 6:24-34), gambling has both at its heart. The moral thrust of the Bible is love for God and neighbor (Matthew 22:37-40), gambling seeks personal gain and pleasure at another person’s loss and pain.
- Gaming, gambling, lotteries, slot machines, and other games of chance are precisely the kind of “slight of hand” banned by the eighth commandment. There are an enormous number of losers just so there can be one winner. **In the game of stealing, the score is always 1-0.** Especially when you talk about gambling!

7. Deserting Responsibilities

- **2 Thessalonians 3:10-12 (NLT)** ¹⁰ *Even while we were with you, we gave you this rule: "Whoever does not work should not eat."* ¹¹ *Yet we hear that some of you are living idle lives, refusing to work and wasting time meddling in other people's business.* ¹² *In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we appeal to such people — no, we command them: Settle down and get to work. Earn your own living.*
- Not working when you are able to work is STEALING. You are stealing from your family, from society, from the church – and from your own self! Your laziness and lack of initiative offends God!
- **Michael Korda (Editor-In-Chief of Simon & Schuster):** "Success on any major scale requires you to accept responsibility ... In the final analysis, the one quality that all successful people have is the ability to take on responsibility."
- **People seldom realize how weak their excuses are until they hear some from others.** One inmate at Butte County Jail in California explained his absence from jail to sheriff's deputies this way: "I was playing pole vault and I got too close to the wall and I fell over the wall. When I regained my senses, I ran around to try and find a way back in, but being unfamiliar with the area, got lost. Next thing I knew I was in Chico."

8. Defrauding The Lord

- **Malachi 3:8 (CEV)** *You people are robbing me, your God. And, here you are, asking, "How are we robbing you?" You are robbing me of the offerings and of the ten percent that belongs to me.*
- The first ten percent of all I make goes back to God in **gratitude** – because I really owe Him one hundred percent!
- If I am paying my bills before I pay the Lord back out of gratitude for what He's done, that's **robbing God** according to the Bible!
- **Illustration:** One pastor was preaching through the Ten Commandments, and every week a man came up to him after service and said, "You're really preaching the Word in this series. It's great!" That is, until the pastor preached "Thou shalt not steal." That Sunday, the man came up to him after service and said, "Now you've quite preaching and started meddling!" We love to hear preaching when it talks about other people's sins, but we don't like to hear how **WE** are breaking the Ten Commandments!
- Here are some powerful reasons to keep the Eighth Commandment ...

FOUR REASONS WHY I SHOULD BE HONEST

1. I am being watched by God

- People steal because they think they can get away with it. If you knew when you stole something that everybody was going to know about it, would you steal? Not likely! But Satan comes along and says, "Nobody's going to know." Wrong! The most important person knows – God. He's the one you're going to have to give an account to, not anybody else.
- **Job 34:21-22 (NLT)** ²¹ *For God carefully watches the way people live; he sees everything they do.* ²² *No darkness is thick enough to hide the wicked from his eyes.*
- Nothing escapes God's view. I may fool other people, but I'm not fooling God! He's the One I've got to report to – one day I will stand before Him and give an account.
- **If you're a parent, you're not only being watched by God, you're being watched by your kids. VALUES ARE CAUGHT, NOT TAUGHT!** What is my lifestyle communicating to my kids? Is there anything in my life I'd be ashamed of if they knew. One of the greatest gifts you can give your children is integrity.
- **Proverbs 20:7 (LB)** *It is a wonderful heritage to have an honest father.*
- I'm also being watched by unbelievers. There are people you work with who may not like your personality and they may disagree with your faith, but they better respect your INTEGRITY. Every time you live with integrity, you're giving a witness to the world.
- **Matthew 5:16** *Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.*

2. I will reap whatever I sow

- **Galatians 6:7 (NLT)** *Don't be misled. Remember that you can't ignore God and get away with it. You will always reap what you sow!*
- I will **ALWAYS** reap what I sow – it is an unbreakable law of the universe. If I take advantage of other people, I will be taken advantage of. On the other hand, this will work for me if I use it the right way. If I maintain integrity in all my decisions, God will make sure I'm blessed. Whatever I sow I'm going to reap.
- **Proverbs 15:27 (GN)** *Try to make a profit dishonestly and you'll get your family in trouble.*

- ***Proverbs 21:6 (LB)*** Dishonest gain will never last, so why take the risk?

3. Dishonesty damages my character

- ***Proverbs 10:2 (GN)*** Wealth you get by dishonesty will do you no good, but honesty can save your life.
- Every time I make a decision to steal – no matter how small or insignificant – I am choosing to side with the devil rather than with God. He is a thief, who comes to kill and destroy.
- Some people say, “I just can't make it in the market place if I don't cheat.” You're dead wrong! The fact is that in business, integrity pays. Customers want to return to where they trust the company. One study of the 50 most profitable corporations in America found that one thing they all had in common was a moral code of ethics.
When you have a reputation, you have respect!
- ***Proverbs 19:1 (NLT)*** It is better to be poor and honest than to be a fool and dishonest.

4. God will reward my honesty

- ***Proverbs 28:20 (GN)*** Honest people will lead a full, happy life but if you are in a hurry to get rich you are going to be punished.
- Honesty brings a reward in this life – because you don't have any skeletons in the closet!
- God has one word to say about get-rich-quick schemes. **Don't!** Don't be foolish! You get wealthy by proper investments, wise savings, honest work, good stewardship and investing in things that count. Don't worry about schemes and dreams. The quicker you make it, the quicker you can lose it!
- YOUR GREATEST REWARD FOR HONESTY WILL BE IN ETERNITY!
- ***Matthew 25:21 (NLT)*** The master was full of praise. 'Well done, my good and faithful servant. You have been faithful in handling this small amount, so now I will give you many more responsibilities. Let's celebrate together!'

LIVING A LIFE OF INTEGRITY

1. Make a living honestly

- Starting today, begin to act as though God were your boss and you were working to please Him!

- ***Ephesians 4:28 (NLT)*** If you are a thief, stop stealing. Begin using your hands for honest work, and then give generously to others in need.

2. Give God my full tithe

- If I'm not tithing, then I'm paying my bills with money stolen from God! If you're ever going to **STOP STEALING**, you need to do it today! If you're ever going to **START TITHING** (the same thing!), you need to do it today!
- ***Malachi 3:10 (CEV)*** I am the LORD All-Powerful, and I challenge you to put me to the test. Bring the entire ten percent into the storehouse, so there will be food in my house. Then I will open the windows of heaven and flood you with blessing after blessing.

3. Make restitution when possible

- WHEN WE ACTUALLY MAKE RESTITUTION FOR OUR WRONGS, IT BECOMES NOT JUST A MATTER OF BELIEF, BUT A MATTER OF BEHAVIOR! Maybe you need to make a list, write an anonymous cheque, send a letter, return an item, etc. Make it a witnessing opportunity: “I am making restitution for _____ because I am a follower of Jesus Christ and I want to do what is right.”
- Don't be like the guy who ripped off Revenue Canada. He got under conviction and sent \$500 in back taxes, along with a letter that said: “I'm sorry for cheating on my taxes, here's \$500.00. If I still feel guilty, I'll send in the rest later!”
- RESTITUTION! You can't buy that kind of feeling – the freedom and joy that come from a clear conscience! It's a wonderful feeling to be able to go anywhere and face anyone and say, “I have no skeletons in my closet! I have nothing to hide, nothing I have not dealt with!” That is real CONFIDENCE!
- Zacchaeus, the dishonest Tax Collector, went above and beyond the duty of the law, which said that he had to pay back DOUBLE ...
- ***Luke 19:8-10 (NLT)*** ⁸ Meanwhile, Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, “I will give half my wealth to the poor, Lord, and if I have overcharged people on their taxes, **I will give them back four times as much!**” ⁹ Jesus responded, “**Salvation has come to this home today**, for this man has shown himself to be a son of Abraham. ¹⁰ And I, the Son of Man, have come to seek and **save those like him** who are lost.”
- **MAINTAIN YOUR INTEGRITY! By doing so, you maintain your earthly life ... and your eternal soul!**