

UNEDITED DRAFT

Dear friends in Christ,

We are continuing our 10 Commandments sermon series. Today we are discussing the 7th Commandment: “You shall not steal.” If you’ve been coming to sermons in this series, you know that for many of these Commandments, I’ve taken a shotgun approach. There is a lot to be said on every Commandment, so I’ve often tried to

I want to introduce you to a word today. Some of you already know it, and some may not. That’s because some suffer from this in your vision. But the reason I want all of you to know this word is because we all suffer from this spiritually. The word is “myopia.” How many of you know what the word means? How many of you know what it means suffer from it? I most certainly do. Myopia is simply the scientific term for nearsightedness. Myopia is when you can only see things that are near. Things far away appear blurry. I have severe myopia. My eyes need lenses that are a -10... which doesn’t mean anything to you if you have good eyes, but that means something to some of you... namely I am nearly blind without contacts or glasses. I am so nearsighted that without corrective lenses, I can’t read something on my cell phone unless it is within 8 inches of my nose. Any further out, and it’s too blurry to see. I regularly thank God for giving man the wisdom to invent contacts, because with them my vision is nearly 20/20.

Myopia is a common vision condition which affects 30% of the U.S. population. Research indicates it is probably hereditary. Both I and my wife have myopia, and as I research my own family, I’d say it is definitely hereditary. It affects far more than 30% of my family. 5 of our 6 kids are nearsighted (myopic). None of them are as bad as me, thank God. Our youngest, Micah, who is four years old, is the only one that does not yet need corrective lenses. If our past track record is any indicator, he’ll need glasses around 2nd or 3rd grade.

Although myopia only affects 30% of the population, there is another condition that affects 100% of the population. I’m going to call this condition: “MY-opia.” This is a condition in which the afflicted believes that all that they have belongs to them! “That’s MY car. My house. My bank account. MY motorcycle. My clothing. MY big screen TV. MY cell phone / computer / gaming system.” Clearly the person who talks like this has severe MY-opia. It’s a spiritual nearsightedness where we struggle to see beyond our stuff and we struggle to see the Owner who is lending it to us for a time. We all struggle with MY-opia.

We’re born with this disease. With each of our six kids, I was always fascinated when they started to learn to speak. I don’t know how many hours we spent trying to teach them “Momma” or “Daddy”. But it always seemed that among the first couple dozen words they learned was one we never spent time teaching them. “MINE.” Our kids were born into this world with MY-opia, and they inherited from their sinful Mom and Dad. That’s where you go it too. So did your kids.

What are the symptoms of this disease? If you are in a time of want - resources are tight and you’re barely making ends meet – then MY-opia shows itself with grumbling, complaining and a lack of contentment. It starts there, anyway. It often goes beyond that.

- Greed
- Lack of compassion for those in need.
- Fraud.
- Sometimes declaring bankruptcy.
- Theft.
- Stealing from employer.
- Employer not paying fair wages.
- Deceiving to buy or sell something at a better price.
- Not putting in an honest day's work, but sloughing off. (And you know the excuses. They don't pay me enough to work the whole time. I have seniority, so I've earned the right to slack off a bit.
- Stinginess with offerings.

Or maybe you are in a time of relative plenty. I'm pretty confident if I asked for a show of hands as to who was in a time of plenty, we would have very few hands go up. But the truth is, in a sense nearly all if not all of us are in a sense in a time of plenty. Most, if not all, of us know we will have food on the table today... and the rest of the week too. We don't worry about not having clothes to wear. We're not worried about an enemy army marching through our backyards tomorrow and plundering our houses. Modern day United States is a country where the vast majority of its citizens live in plenty.

The danger when living in times of plenty is that we tend to be proud, independent and self-sufficient. We don't feel in particular need, so we don't spend much time with the one who gives help. You would think that if you were in plenty, it would get rid of a bunch of the sins we mentioned earlier, like greed, stealing, cheating employer or employee, stinginess with offerings. But the truth is, these sins still tag along in times of plenty.

Finally, the problem is never having too much. Nor is it not having enough. The problem is MY-opia. Having the mistaken notion that everything is ours, and that we have full jurisdiction over our earthly possessions. All of this is because of our "MY-opia." We believe that things are mine, and I need and deserve more. But the truth is what we heard in the first verse of today's Psalm (24:1): "The earth is the Lord's and everything in it."

To help us with this disease, we are going to turn to Deuteronomy 8. We're plowing through more verses than usual, but the point God makes here is one we desperately need.

Let me set this up for you. A few weeks ago we learned the context of the 10 Commandments. God freed his people from slavery in Egypt with 10 miraculous plagues. God led them through the Red Sea by parting the waters so they could walk through on dry ground. God led them to Mt. Sinai where he appeared to the people and spoke to Moses and gave the people his law, including the 10 Commandments on two stone tablets.

God led the people up to the Promised Land. They sent 12 spies in to check out the country. All 12 said, "Awesome country! We would be so prosperous there!" 10 of the spies also said, "But we could never take it. They are too powerful, and we are too weak. 2 spies said, "We're not too weak with God on our side!" Those two were Joshua and Caleb. But they were overruled. God was angry at his people for their lack of trust. He sentenced them to 40 years of wandering in the wilderness, where all from that generation except Joshua and Caleb would eventually die.

The 40 years passed. They came to the Promised Land again. Moses won't be leading them in. He's 120 years old, and God said his life was rapidly drawing to a close. And so Moses addresses the people to prepare them for what was about to happen. They are at a crossroads. And what do you do at a crossroads? You look behind and you look ahead. Moses helps them do both, and in the process, tries to cure them of their "My-opia."

Remember where you have been. "My-opia" makes God appear distant in his past provision. First of all he reminds them of where they have been. Because here's the first thing we notice. My-opia makes God more distant than as we look at our past. We see what happened, but God looks far away. We see ourselves. We see our successes, but we don't see God behind them. We see our failures, but we don't see God supporting us. We see our enemies, and challenges and setbacks... but God appears more distant. This was Israel's problem too, so listen to what Moses says:

Deuteronomy 8 Be careful to follow every command I am giving you today, so that you may live and increase and may enter and possess the land that the Lord promised on oath to your forefathers. 2 Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. 3 He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. 4 Your clothes did not wear out and your feet did not swell during these forty years. 5 Know then in your heart that as a man disciplines his son, so the Lord your God disciplines you.

As you look back, recognize that "my-opia" will make God blurry and distant. See God in your past. See his guidance. See his provision. See his blessing.

Don't forget to look to the even more distant past to God's work for mankind. His guidance of history. Especially his work of salvation for us by sending Jesus to be our Savior.

Look! Jesus is there! He's clear! He's large!

It's important to look back once in a while and see God acting on your behalf in love. Because when you see him clearly in the past, you'll see him more clearly in you present, and you'll walk with him into the future.

Now Moses gives a warning about the future:

6 Observe the commands of the Lord your God, walking in his ways and revering him. 7 For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land—a land with streams and pools of water, with springs flowing in the valleys and hills; 8 a land with wheat and barley, vines and fig trees, pomegranates, olive oil and honey; 9 a land where bread will not be scarce and you will lack nothing; a land where the rocks are iron and you can dig copper out of the hills. [Things are going to be good, Moses says. And that scares him! Because he knows that when things are good, our my-opia grows worse and we have a hard time seeing God.]

10 When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the Lord your God for the good land he has given you. 11 Be careful that you do not forget the Lord your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day. 12 Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, 13

and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, 14 then your heart will become proud and you will forget the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. [See how he's now directing the gaze to the past once again? For confidence in the present, we must constantly look to what God has done for us in the past, so we have hope for the future.

15 He led you through the vast and dreadful desert, that thirsty and waterless land, with its venomous snakes and scorpions. He brought you water out of hard rock. 16 He gave you manna to eat in the desert, something your fathers had never known, to humble and to test you so that in the end it might go well with you. [Now he again switches to the warning about prosperity.]

17 You may say to yourself, "My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me." 18 But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your forefathers, as it is today. Remember where you have been. "My-opia" makes God appear distant in his past provision, and it also keeps us from seeing God in our current prosperity. When things are going bad, God is to blame. When things are going well, I must receive credit. False! Whatever successes or prosperity you enjoy are an undeserved gift from God. He created you. He gave you your abilities. He put you in this time and in this place. He gave the opportunities that have come up in your life. You owe everything you have and all that you are to God!

Then the warning: **19 If you ever forget the Lord your God and follow other gods and worship and bow down to them, I testify against you today that you will surely be destroyed. 20 Like the nations the Lord destroyed before you, so you will be destroyed for not obeying the Lord your God.**

Don't forget God where you are going. My-opia makes God appear distant in present and future prosperity.

You would think that the more the Lord blesses us, the more we would thank and praise him. But this is the foolishness of the sinful mind. The more we are blessed the more we tend to forget God. The more we have, the more we tend to think we are independent and that we are the source of our own good fortune.

It all boils down to this disease we all share. My-opia. We are nearsighted. We see our possession, but fail to see God who gave it. We think we are the owner, but fail to see God is the owner who entrusted things to us. We see earthly wealth, but we fail to see the eternal wealth God has promised to all who believe which makes earthly wealth look like Monopoly money. We see what we have and we think, "All mine!" We have my-opia. It's the root cause of every violation of the 7th Commandment... you shall not steal.

Confess your my-opia to the Lord. Turn to him for perfect vision. As he helps you to see clearly, your own sinfulness, helplessness, powerlessness comes into focus. Repent and turn to Jesus. For in Jesus we have a perfect substitute. Even when tempted to turn stones into bread, Jesus knew there was something more important: feasting on the Word of God. He lived in poverty. He could easily have used his influence and power to amass huge wealth. Yet he lived in poverty. Jesus came for a much bigger reason. He came to take from us the one thing that truly is ours: our sin. He took our sin and made it his own. He took it to the cross where he bled and

died for you, for me, for the sins of the world. He rose on the third day so we know it is true.

With clear vision, cured of our my-opia, let's look our earthly possessions in a completely different way now. In times of plenty and in times when things are tight, our help, our hope is still our God. He has never let us down in the past, and he'll be with us forever. Our earthly stuff is not ours. It's been given to us for a short time to use and to manage for the Owner. Let's take this week to reevaluate. How do we view our stuff? How are we using it? How are we managing it? God help us live for him who is our true treasure, and look forward to heaven which is our real home! Amen.