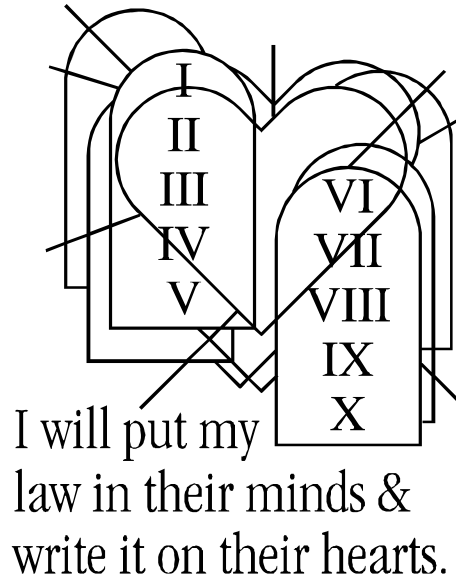


# *The Daily Walk*



Jeremiah 31:33

*... the 6<sup>th</sup> through the 10<sup>th</sup> commandments*

*Trinity Presbyterian Church  
Berwyn, Pennsylvania*

*July 30, 2007 – September 2, 2007*

Summer, 2007

Dear Daily Walkers,

The Ten Commandments . . . what comes to mind? The old movie with Charlton Heston as Moses pops into my mind, especially the scene where the tablets are smashed. For the next ten weeks, we will walk with the “ten commandments” as they come to us in the book of Exodus, and seek to learn and grow in faithfulness.

The “ten words,” as they are called in the Bible, have had an interesting history in Christian worship. They were pretty much absent until the 16<sup>th</sup> century Reformation when Luther and Calvin and others became so concerned about teaching the faith to the church. Luther and Calvin had different interpretations of the role of the “ten words” in the Christian life. For Luther, their primary function was to convict us of our sin, our failure to live as God desired. For Calvin, their primary function was to teach how to live as people forgiven and renewed in Christ. This difference leads to their different places in worship: before the prayer of confession, or after the assurance of God’s grace.

The writers for this and the previous edition of The Daily Walk were given as resources excerpts from J. Ellsworth Kalas’ [The Ten Commandments from the Back Side](#), and from the “Larger Catechism” of the Westminster Confession of faith. I recommend both to all who want to explore the meanings of the “ten words” in our life today. Enjoy the walk.

In Christ,

Jay Wilkins

## LECTIONARY DEVOTIONAL GUIDE

July 30 – August 5, 2007

*“You shall not murder.”*

### MONDAY, July 30

This is the second of the commandments that focuses on our relationship to each other, rather on our relationship to God. According to the Westminster Larger Catechism, “The sum of the six Commandments which contain our duty to man is, to love our neighbor as ourselves, and to do to others what we would have them do to us.” Though these commandments focus on our relationship to our fellow human beings, the overall theme is, “given that God has brought us out of slavery, how do we then live to be within God’s plan?”

Unlike commandments One through Five, this commandment is given without further explanation or discussion. Some of us learned the commandment in the King James Version: Thou shalt not kill. Most Christians hold that sometimes taking the life of another may be necessary, and the Westminster Catechism clarifies: “The sins forbidden in the Sixth Commandment are: all taking away the life of ourselves, or of others, except in case of public justice, lawful war, or necessary defense;.... (7.246) Thus, we might read the commandment: You shall not murder. The consequences of taking the life of another are great: loss of physical life for the victim, loss of a father, mother, child or sibling for the family, loss of a friend, a member of the community, for the friends. And surely even justified killing must make the killer question whether he is right with God.

These days violence and murder are glorified in our society in movies, TV shows, in novels and in video games. In Philadelphia, murder is a daily occurrence. If a person has a gun handy, it seems to take no thought for him to let off steam by killing the guy who “dissed” him or who has something he wants. The killing of civilians in wartime is called “collateral damage.” Abortion is not seen as the last in a string of regrettable mistakes, but as “reproductive rights”. Yet how can any of this be part of God’s plan? Killing may sometimes be the lesser of two evils, but it still must break the heart of God, whose law was captured in the simple statement, “You shall not murder.” How are we separated from God if we participate in these acts?

### TUESDAY, July 31

Jesus taught that, if we nurse anger in our hearts against another, we commit murder (Matthew 5). The Westminster Catechism specifies that these are forbidden by the Sixth Commandment: “sinful anger, hatred, envy, desire of revenge; all excessive passions; distracting cares; immoderate use of meat, drink, labor, and recreation; provoking words; oppression, quarreling, striking, wounding, and whatsoever else tends to the destruction of the life of any.” (7.246) If we tolerate murderous emotions or careless habits in ourselves, these could lead to murder.

We can take this a step further. Just as nursing anger might lead to physical murder, allowing such thoughts often leads to words that kill the spirit of another. One overwrought mom, in anger at her son's spendthrift habits, lashed out, "you're just like your father!" What crushing words for the son, and for the father, to hear. When a family snickers at a daughter's plan to go to college, their thoughtlessness might be killing her dream; it is certainly killing her feeling of closeness to her family.

Let us remember that each person we meet is a child of God, and that in some way that person has been entrusted to us by the One who loves all his children.

### **WEDNESDAY, August 1**

David was a man after God's own heart, but David conspired to have Bathsheba's husband Uriah killed on the battlefield (2 Samuel 11, 12). Afterwards the prophet Nathan confronted David with this act, which was wrong in the eyes of God and would have terrible consequences for generations.

David accepted his guilt, saying, "I have sinned against the Lord." He couldn't undo his deed, but he did avoid compounding the evil. If he had made excuses for his act, numbing his conscience, he would have never put himself in a place of asking God to forgive him. When I harm another with a careless word or thoughtless act, I pray that I will accept my guilt and ask forgiveness, as did David, the man after God's own heart.

### **THURSDAY, August 2**

We often feel justified in holding grudges: Look what he did to me. Or in criticizing: What he does threatens what I hold dear. But when I hold a grudge or criticize, I tear another down. These actions weaken me as well. What can I do instead? "Every time the name of persons against whom you are tempted to hold a resentment is presented to your mind, breathe a prayer for them." (E. Stanley Jones)

More than once I have prayed, teeth gritted, that God would meet the needs of someone who had hurt or angered me; that God would hold that person close. I have also prayed, perhaps with less than my whole heart, that God would let me see my own fault in the situation. Even though I may pray unwillingly at first, I have found that, over time (maybe years), prayer softens my heart and gives me a tiny bit of God's own perspective on the other person, the situation, and on my own part in it.

### **FRIDAY, August 3**

Maybe the active opposite of murder is encouragement: a helping hand or a supportive word to do better or to be what God has created in each of us. The Westminster Confession admonishes us against "the neglecting or withdrawing [of] the lawful or necessary means of preservation of life." (7.246) When I withhold a soft word or an act of

encouragement, I am withholding what may be the bit of warmth that would nurture life in someone else. If I am angry or hurt, maybe I can't make my lips say that kind word. But I hope some day to learn not to lash out with angry words or to take comfort, like picking at a scab, in telling others about my hurt.

E. Stanley Jones puts it this way: "If you find little to love or admire in those persons against whom you hold resentments, then love and admire them for what they may be. You do not have to be dishonest... and like the things a person does. But you are committed as a Christian, and you love people as Christ does. He loves them not for what they have been, or are, but for what they can be. Your love then becomes real and redemptive...." (from *365 Days with E. Stanley Jones*, Mary Ruth Howes, editor.)

#### **SATURDAY, August 4**

Presbyterians are guided by many church documents, including the Westminster Catechism, which we have referred to many times this week. The Catechism poses the question, "What are the duties required in the Sixth Commandment?" Every line of the response is worth reading carefully, and worth pondering, as we finish this week's study on the Sixth Commandment. A slight rewording makes the reading a bit easier:

The duties required in the Sixth Commandment are:

To undertake all careful studies and lawful endeavors in order to preserve the life of ourselves and others, by resisting all thoughts and purposes, subduing all passions, and avoiding all occasions, temptations, and practices, which tend to the unjust taking away the life of any;

To use these studies and endeavors in the just defense against violence;

To bear patiently the hand of God,

To maintain quietness of mind,

cheerfulness of spirit,

a sober use of meat, drink, physic, sleep, labor, and recreation;

To do all this by means of charitable thoughts, love, compassion, meekness, gentleness, kindness, peaceable, mild and courteous speeches and behavior, forbearance, readiness to be reconciled, patient bearing and forgiving of injuries, and requiting good for evil;

To comfort and succor the distressed; to protect and defend the innocent." (7.245)

## LECTIONARY DEVOTIONAL GUIDE

August 6 – August 12, 2007

*“You shall not commit adultery.”*

### MONDAY, August 6

The Seventh Commandment is bested in brevity only by the two commandments that bookend it: “You shall not murder” and “You shall not steal.” The Seventh Commandment is just five words: “You shall not commit adultery.” J. Ellsworth Kalas reminds us that the parson from Geoffrey Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* found significance in this commandment’s placement. “The commandment about adultery comes between those on murder and theft, because adultery is both the greatest theft and the greatest murder: It is a theft of body from the spouse, and a murder of the ‘one flesh’ union of the spouses.” Living as we do in the twenty-first century, with seemingly more relaxed views toward promiscuity and infidelity, does this commandment still carry the same weight? Is it both the greatest theft and greatest murder?

It is important to remember that this commandment is not about finger pointing and living within a spirit of fear. Rather, the Seventh Commandment offers us an opportunity to experience and grow in God’s grace as we seek to faithfully live out this commandment.

*Most gracious God, bless us with a fuller understanding of this commandment. Amen.*

### TUESDAY, August 7

Like many of the other Ten Commandments, the Seventh Commandment is worded in the negative. The Seventh Commandment is stated as a general prohibition, without any definitions or distinctions. The lack of specifics stirs many questions: What do we understand by the word “adultery”? What are the consequences? How, then, are we called to live? The Larger Catechism states the duties of the Seventh Commandment as “chastity in body, mind, affections, words, and behavior, and the preservation of it in ourselves and others; watchfulness over the eyes and all the senses; temperance, keeping of chaste company, modesty in apparel, marriage by those that have not the gift of continency, conjugal love, and cohabitation; diligent labor in our callings; shunning of all occasions of uncleanness, and resisting temptations thereunto.” The Catechism helps us to understand that this commandment has a much broader scope than we might have assumed at first reading. Martin Luther extended its meaning to chastity in thought, word, and deed.

*Lord, help us to identify and remove all forms of unchastity from our lives. Amen.*

### **WEDNESDAY, August 8**

During an interview with a journalist from *Playboy* magazine, former U.S. president Jimmy Carter responded to a question about marital fidelity by admitting that he had lusted in his heart for other women. While we might criticize Carter for his choice of magazine and his naiveté, Carter was sharing his understanding of the Seventh Commandment—committing adultery goes beyond our physical actions. It includes thought, as well. The Larger Catechism explains that to rightly understand the Ten Commandments we must recognize that they are “spiritual, and so reacheth the understanding, will, affections, and all other powers of the soul; as well as words, works, and gestures.” Since we are both spiritual and physical beings, God wants to shape and transform both our inner and outer selves. As Carter recognized, what goes on in our hearts is important to God.

*Loving God, conform our bodies, hearts, and minds to your will for them. Amen.*

### **THURSDAY, August 9**

Kalas titled his chapter on the Seventh Commandment “Redeeming the Sacred.” Do we still consider marriage sacred? Is marriage more than a civil contract between two people? Yes, I believe it is. Ideally, a Christian marriage is an opportunity for two individuals to exchange vows, uniting their lives with one another under the blessing of God. In marriage, a new entity is created. It is more than just two individuals coming together. Marriage is a creative experience—the nucleus of a family is created. For this reason, adultery reaches beyond the confines of the interpersonal relationship between a husband and a wife. The Seventh Commandment seeks to protect the fabric of society, by recognizing that behavior that compromises or destroys the marriage vows ultimately impacts the lives of others: children, friends, grandparents, etc.

*Dear God, protect and strengthen the vows we have taken in our relationships. Amen.*

### **FRIDAY, August 10**

How can we understand this commandment if we are not married? Returning to the Larger Catechism, we are called to “chastity in body, mind, affections, words, and behavior . . . temperance . . . modesty in apparel . . . diligent labor in our callings.” It is important to remember that our bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit. Paul writes, “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.” (NIV, I Cor. 6:19-20) Our bodies are not mere objects to be adorned, primed, and beautified. All too easily we turn one another and ourselves into nothing more than sexual objects. How might our behavior change when we fully embrace the realization that our

bodies are the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit? Remember that we are made in the image of God, and called to faithfully live out that image.

*Help us, Lord, to remember that your Holy Spirit dwells within each of us, and to honor our bodies accordingly. Amen.*

### **SATURDAY, August 11**

Kalas maintains that in our popular culture the wrapping, rather than the gift itself, is given much of the attention. We even tend to desire the wrapping, ignoring the gift inside. Much of the movie industry is based upon, what Kalas calls, “the seductive body, the insistent persuasion, the intrigue of the forbidden.” Kalas goes on to suggest, “Perhaps we shouldn’t be surprised that these are the elements that our culture emphasizes, because it is so much easier to show a well-turned thigh or a rippling pectoral than a lifelong loyalty. It’s hard for a camera to say, ‘For better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health,’ because such words have to be lived out over months and years, and because such a concept is in the realm of the spirit, not in the measure of a photograph.” In the day-to-day stuff of life, it can be difficult at times to remain committed to lifelong loyalty—the “wrappings” of life easily distract us. But we can trust this commandment as good guidance for us, as individuals, couples, and society. We are to honor one another, remaining faithful to healthy marital relationships. There is sacredness in each of us, in our mates, and in our relationships. The Seventh Commandment calls us to honor that sacredness.

*God of wisdom, thank you for revealing the sacredness in the seemingly ordinary things of our lives. Amen.*

## LECTIONARY DEVOTIONAL GUIDE

August 13 – August 19, 2007

” You shall not steal”

*The commandments were not born in a vacuum. As Kalas states in his book, The Ten Commandments from the Back Side, they were a product of a relationship. If a stranger, even a divine one, had given Israel these commandments, they would have been an imposition. “Who are you,” Israel could have said, “to tell us how to live?” But the benefactor had a prior claim. After 400 years as slaves in Egypt, without any action on their part to merit it, the people had experienced a series of miracles that led to their freedom. The One who gave life to Israel also gave them the instructions for preserving that life. God now had a vested interest in this people, and with it a right, an obligation, to see that the interest was not squandered.*

### MONDAY, August 13

You shall not steal. When I discovered that I had this commandment, an image came to my mind of a young man in his 30’s being taken away in handcuffs from a store at Christmastime, over 30 years ago. Something touched me about the scene. I saw the face of a young father wanting to provide something under the tree for his child.

I also recalled an incident on a trip when I had to exchange dollars for euros. It was 1:00 and the center was closing for lunch. Two ladies handled the transaction and I was on my way. Back on the bus, I counted the money and discovered I had been given too much. A fellow traveler suggested that I buy a round for everyone. His wife knew I would give it back. On the return trip through the town, the tour guide had the bus driver stop and I returned the extra money. The same ladies were there and received the money with thanks and amazement.

You can come up with stories of your own to illustrate this commandment –simple, everyday incidents. By working late, are you stealing time from your spouse or children? By degrading others, are you stealing their dignity in the eyes of others?

### TUESDAY, August 14

The eighth commandment was given around 1250 when life was relatively simple in ancient Israel. There weren’t many things to be stolen: livestock, tools, grain, gold and silver. Today there are numerous things to be stolen: household goods, jewelry, high tech tools, cars and personal identity. In ancient Israel, theft was an outright thing. There was no need for such terms as petty larceny, grand larceny, fraud and embezzlement.

Despite the times and the degree, stealing is the same - a double sin:  
 -against God, for it accuses Him of not giving adequately and  
 -against love, for it is a denial of loving one's neighbor as yourself.  
 (from *The Daily Bible Study Series*)

### **WEDNESDAY, August 15**

Kalas writes that today theft is only sometimes the result of need. He asserts that it is driven more often by greed and by the lack of moral or ethical conscience. Examples abound: the treasurer who steals from the Little League organization; persons on Wall St. or in corporations who manipulate finances; the person who fudges on their income tax; or someone who shoplifts an article they can well afford. Most of the stealing, according to Kalas, which goes on in American society, is an illness. Call it sin. Only a small amount is rooted in need. The larger portion has deeper roots in the state of our soul and character.

### **THURSDAY, August 16**

Stealing can be a passive act as well as an active one. The sin of commission is to **take** money that belongs to another. The sin of omission is to **keep** money that I ought to give to another. Centuries ago, Basil stated, "When someone steals a man's clothes, we call him a thief; shouldn't we give the same name to one who could clothe the naked and doesn't?"

If I have enough, don't I have an obligation to those who do not? When someone helped to support my children with their taxes, don't I have an obligation to do the same for others by supporting school taxes (unless they are unwise)? I think my mother wrote that line as I have heard that more than once when she heard me complain. How can I ignore an appeal from a college when I remember that someone helped supplement my tuition, as one knows that tuition paid by the student, be it ever so high, does not begin to cover the total cost. I recall how my father repaid the money that I had received from a small academic scholarship in order to allow another student to be helped. Members and friends of Trinity are only too aware that it is only by voluntary giving that our doors can remain open and the ministry continue.

Wealth, money is a crucial responsibility. If we do not use it generously, we rob God and we rob life.

### **FRIDAY, August 17**

The commandment against stealing obviously protects the structures of our social order. It also protects the essence of who we are. Matthew Henry, an 18<sup>th</sup> century preacher-scholar, was once robbed while traveling through a dangerous area. As he looked back on the experience, he wrote a series of reasons for giving thanks. One related to this commandment

when he gave thanks that he was the victim and not the perpetrator. The one who is robbed loses only earthly goods. The thief loses so much more.

When we steal, we lose a piece of our character and a measure of our self-respect. An even greater loss is our right relationship with God; we build a barrier between ourselves and God. Losing character, a clear conscience, self-respect and a right relationship with God makes stealing a pretty bad bargain.

### **SATURDAY, August 18**

The apostle Paul offered a better way with the idea expressed by the Greek word, *chrestotes*. Kindness has been used as a synonym. William Barclay, a popular British Bible teacher and author, described its meaning as a desire for others to have what one desires most for oneself. This is the opposite of stealing, for when we steal we want what the other person has, rather than wanting them to have what we would want.

A *Guidepost* story some of you may have read in the September, 1996 issue told about Oseola McCarty, the Mississippi washerwoman who had to drop out of school in the sixth grade. She celebrated her long life of faith, work and stewardship by giving \$150,000 to the University of Southern Mississippi for scholarships. Hers is the spirit of *chrestos* – wanting others to have what one wants most for oneself. She never got such an education, but she wanted others to have it. When asked why she didn't spend it on herself, she answered with a smile, "Thanks to the good Lord, I *am* spending it on myself."

That is the point of the eighth commandment. The person who chooses not to steal, using the broadest and most demanding definition, may suffer some temporary loss, but he or she becomes rich. When we take from others, we make ourselves smaller; we diminish ourselves. When we turn life into a giving enterprise, we grow larger.

You shall not steal. In other words, you shall become a larger person.

*Dear Lord, thank you for what you have given me. Help me to be content with what I have and to respect and protect the property of others. Amen.*

## LECTIONARY DEVOTIONAL GUIDE

August 20 – 26, 2007

***“You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.”***

*We have been given the power of communication. Effective communication allows us to share ideas, hopes, and feelings. One of the key phrases of our times is an explanation for all that goes wrong: “a breakdown in communication.” Most clichés become absurd with continued use, but this one has survived because it is obviously true. The ninth commandment protects the integrity and the power of communication. Communication is used for both good and for harm. Why should we trust anything anyone says to us?*

### **MONDAY, August 20**

This commandment applies to the whole realm of human relationships, covering all forms of slander, defamation, and misrepresentation. Further, it applied to groups, races, and faiths, as well as to individuals. The Contemporary English Version puts it simply: You shall not tell lies about others. This translation makes sense, because all the world is a courtroom. Everywhere and always, reputations are on trial. Decisions are constantly being made at business luncheons, during telephone gossip, at parties, during coffee breaks, in letters, and in E-mail.

If truth is important in courts of law—so important that it is spoken under oath—it is even more important in the courtroom of daily life. When people stand before a judge, they realize the seriousness of what they say. In social occasions there is not only no oath, there also is an informality that can encourage easy, thoughtless speech. In the courtroom, the person on trial has a chance to hear the charges that are made against him or her. But in daily life, we rarely know what stories are being told and rarely do we have a chance to set the record straight. All the world is indeed a courtroom.

### **TUESDAY, August 21**

The only protection for reputation and personal security is in the integrity which the ninth commandment calls forth: You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. No sin is as the sin of false witness, the sin of slander, the defaming of other persons. This is partly because all of us have the weapon, and because the weapon is so immediately available. We may not have a knife with which to cut someone, but the tongue can be used at any time. Many of us would never think of striking another person physically, but we often have no problem repeating an unverified story. Some who would faint at the sight of blood are not at all disturbed by the sight of a battered reputation.

I am embarrassed to realize how often I have welcomed a destructive word about someone else. I haven't always pressed the messenger to confirm the truth of what was being said. Sometimes I have enjoyed hearing the destructive word.

### **WEDNESDAY, August 22**

The different versions of the ten commandments suggest that "false witness" comes in many forms since different Hebrew words are used in Exodus and Deuteronomy. Exodus uses a word which means "lying" or "untrue." In Deuteronomy, the Hebrew word means "insincere," "empty, or "frivolous." The two words cover a multitude of sins. Sometimes our false witness is not an outright lie; it is simply a frivolous, thoughtless word. We've heard a story about someone. We aren't sure of the facts, and we don't mean any real malice. Nevertheless, we can do great harm.

One writer warns of "the libel of labels." Label someone and you may have done a libelous act. Call someone a radical or a right-winger, an extremist, a liberal, or a fundamentalist, and their ideas are discounted and their insights dismissed because they have been labeled. We are the sound-bite generation, and are open to such quick and easy judgments.

### **THURSDAY, August 23**

One of the most subtle forms of false witness is inappropriate silence. The Bible condemns the person who gives false evidence as well as the one who, having evidence to the contrary, refuses to give it. If we remain silent while a reputation is discredited, when we know the truth or have good reason to question what is being said, we participate in slander and in the destruction of that person. Silence is not always golden; sometimes it is sinful.

Almost as bad as silence is "simply asking a question." Someone says of a person, "She's a kind, loving human being," and the questioner answers, "Could be. But I'd know the truth if I lived with her for a week." Nothing was said, but a question was raised that leads to doubts about a person's character. This practice comes right out of the encounter between Eve and the serpent. The serpent did not lie about God; he simply raised a question: "Did God tell you not to eat fruit from any tree in the garden?" (Genesis 3:1). So the seed of doubt was planted. We've been doing it ever since.

### **FRIDAY, August 24**

Slander is never worse than when we set out purposely to hurt or destroy another person. Sometimes it's a matter of revenge; someone has hurt us, and we intend to pay them back. More often slander is a product of jealousy; we resent another person's success, and we want to cut them down to size. Sometimes we say things about other people simply because we are unhappy with ourselves? All of us have known someone who is an equal-opportunity

insulter; they really don't care who their target is, as long as they can diminish someone else. If there's any malice involved, it isn't really personal; it's simply malice against the human race. More particularly, it is the disguised cry of someone who is very unhappy with self. Who ever comes their way pays a price for their unhappiness.

### **SATURDAY, August 25**

Slander is one of the most tragic of our human practices, because its influence is so far-reaching. Human relationships depend on trust. When people choose to deceive, all other social rules become ineffective. Peace between nations can be shattered by false witness as surely as can the relationship between husband and wife, parent and child, friend and neighbor.

Have you sometimes wondered when a friend has spoken to you destructively of a mutual friend, if perhaps the friend treats you the same way in your absence? We want so much to have someone we can trust. Whether in business or in friendship, we want to feel we can count on the next person. The sting of loneliness is the feeling that there is no one we can count on. Diogenes traveled across ancient Athens with his lantern to find an honest man. Was Diogenes concerned solely for the public welfare, or was his search perhaps more personal? Was he hoping to find someone he could count on, someone who deserved the title of friend?

The ninth commandment is not a restriction on life; rather, it gives a foundation for all that is best in human communication. Our civilization stands or falls on the issue of truth. Public figures destroy the political structure by casual lies, and gossip destroys individuals by private lies. Those who love the truth bring a kind of transparent goodness to human relationships. Political discourse gains a quality of integrity, business negotiations enter a new realm of trust, and loneliness is driven into retreat, because we find those of whom we can say, "I can count on them."

**LECTIONARY DEVOTIONAL GUIDE****August 27 – September 2, 2007**

*“You shall not covet your neighbor’s house;  
you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or male or female slave,  
or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.”*

**MONDAY, August 27**

And, finally, last – but not least? Whenever we see the Ten Commandments listed, it is always in column, vertical form that we read top to bottom. Such a format suggests that we move in order usually from most important down to least. I have often thought that the Ten Commandments would be better displayed in a circular form so that one could enter the reading at any point and see it is connected to all the others. That is the way. This tenth commandment links us back to the first – “You shall have no other gods before me.” Coveting is failing to hold God first.

**TUESDAY, August 28**

To understand this commandment, the basic interpretive issue is in determining what “*hamad*” (covet) entails. The dictionary defines “covet” as “to desire inordinately or without due regard for the rights of others.” Covetousness causes discontent and forms the interior ground for the violation of the other commandments. Without covetousness, disobedience of them would probably not occur. To desire is an essential part of life. How then do we protect ourselves from that level of desire called covetousness, the desire that destroys? “No one can serve two masters,” Jesus teaches, “for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.” (Matt. 6:24)

**WEDNESDAY, August 29**

Covetousness is especially disastrous in what it does to our own person. Covetousness prevents our seeing what we have, or at least, of recognizing its value. Russell Conwell made famous the story of a wealthy Persian who heard that somewhere in the world there was a vast store of diamonds. He went to bed that night a poor man – poor, Conwell said, because he was discontented. He sold his farm and began a worldwide search for the acres of diamonds, until he had spent his entire fortune in the quest. After his death, they found in his old farm the acres of diamonds he had so feverishly sought, the famed diamond mine of Golconda. Conwell reminded his many audiences that each of us has “acres of diamonds” in his or her own backyard. He proved it in his own life by building the struggling Temple Baptist Church in Philadelphia into one of the great churches of its day, and with it, founding Temple

University and the Temple Hospital. Coveting sees life's acres of diamonds somewhere else – and we lose sight of what we have and have been given.

### **THURSDAY, August 30**

We live in a society in which we are awash in commercials whose purpose is to entice us to covet whatever they are selling. The force of this tenth commandment for an affluent society like ours has been stated this way – “Ours is an age in which the appetite for more and more seems almost impossible to assuage. We find it increasingly difficult to maintain any sense of balance regarding our use of food; gadgets for home, office, or auto; clothing; entertainment done in our behalf as we look on; or recreational goods and equipment.” We must learn how to make distinctions between desiring that which is wholesome and beneficial for both people and nature and that which only feeds a hunger for more than we need.

### **FRIDAY, August 31**

Coveting distorts our whole sense of values. The Christian does not despise the things of this world; to the contrary, he/she considers them God's gifts, intended for our pleasure and benefit. But we have to keep them in their place – and that's second place. When we covet, we think some object or person or position will bring us happiness, contentment, or peace. That is far too great a burden to put on any person, position or thing. Only God can fill the God-shaped void. God must be kept at the center. To covet is to be discontent. To be content is to be in right relationship with God, with life, with one's own soul, and with one's neighbor. “But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” (Matt. 6:33)

### **SATURDAY, September 1**

Tauler of Strasbourg is remembered as a great fourteenth century saint and mystic. One day he learned a lesson from an anonymous beggar. “God give you a good day, my friend,” Tauler said to the man. “I thank God I never had a bad day,” the beggar quickly answered. Tauler was silent for a moment, then said, “God give you a happy life, my friend.” And the beggar answered, “I thank God I am never unhappy.” Now Tauler was nonplussed. “Never unhappy,” he said, “What do you mean?” “Well,” the beggar replied, “when it is fine, I thank God; when it remains, I thank God; when I have plenty, I thank God; when I am hungry, I thank God; and since God's will is my will, and whatever pleases Him pleases me, why should I say that I am unhappy when I am not?” Tauler was now in awe of his new friend. “Who are you?” he asked. “I am a king,” said the beggar. “A king!” said Tauler, half ready to believe it. “Where is your kingdom?” The man in rags spoke calmly, strongly. “In my heart,” he whispered. “In my heart.” The tenth commandment leads the way to such a kingdom.