

**“Do not Covet”
For Our Good Always
Downtown
Nov 15, 2021**

Morning! We're on our final commandment, pour one out for FOGA. If you have a Bible go to **Deuteronomy 5:21**.

Before we get into the last one this morning, I want to just briefly recap where we've been so far. God's people were under the rule of Pharaoh - and God, out of his power and love towards His people, sent 10 plagues down on Egypt. He then has them cross the Red Sea and for 40 years the Israelites wander the desert in large part because they've failed to realize that God is for their good.

And the book of Deuteronomy, which we've been in for the last 3 months, the Israelites are about to cross into the promised land. A place with so much potential for abundance and life and flourishing. And the book of Deuteronomy sort of serves as Moses' farewell sermon. He stands before the people and reminds them just how gracious God is, and that the laws and the commandments are the means by which they can experience His love.

That's been our heart for this whole series. That we see just how much God loves us. That He's for our good and that these commandments are, when you unpack them, speak to the human condition and our need for God to call the shots.

So with that, let's look at the last one, I'm pulling from the NIV version, I'll explain why in a second:

Deuteronomy 5:21

You shall not covet your neighbor's wife. You shall not set your desire on your neighbor's house or land, his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.”

Now that word “covet” is a word we don't use a lot but think of it as wanting something that's not yours. It's pretty similar to commandment 8, do not steal, but the difference is, coveting is more a matter of the mind and the heart. Stealing sends you to jail, coveting doesn't.

Melissa Kruger

[Covetousness is the] inordinate or culpable desire to possess, often that which belongs to another

And in this commandment, like the others, there's this assumption that as sinful beings we will do this. So check out the things they were tempted to covet back then: your neighbor's wife, their house, their land, their servants, ox or donkey. Now I don't know if y'all have been coveting your neighbor's donkeys lately, maybe you have, but you see the specifics and tbh my eyes glaze over a bit. So to put this into modern-day vocabulary we can get behind, if God wrote the 10

commandments today, commandment 10 might go like this, this is the JSV - Jake standard version:

“You shall not covet what you see on TV or what your friend has on social media. You shall not desire their season of life or their relationship status or how well their kids seem to be doing, nor their new house, nor their latest iPhone, nor your friend’s new job in a new city.”

Now I’m being a bit silly here. But notice back in v.21 the categories here.

- Your neighbors wife - **relationship status**
- Your neighbors house or land - **house, location, city**
- His male or female servants, ox or donkey - **job, wealth, status**
- anything that belongs to your neighbor - **material goods**

When you think about it like that, it covers a lot of ground here. It’s not just “stuff” though that certainly is a big part of it, it’s anything and everything that evokes in you this sinful desire to want what’s not yours to have.

The call as the people of God is to be so caught up and swept in God’s abundant provision for us. To know that God is sovereign and loves us and has us where He has us for our ultimate good and His glory. Whatever season of life you’re in, you’re there for a purpose because God sees you. But the heart of coveting says, **“I want my life to be a little different than what God gave me.”**

And if I could expect some pushback on this, this seems like a commandment where you ask, “Yeah but big deal?” Like, do not muder I get that one. And also the stuff about not lying. Totally. But what’s the big deal if I want something? And who cares if I want something so much I save up my money and get it or work hard to make it happen? It doesn't seem like I’m really hurting anyone here so big whoop.

Commandment 10 gives us the clue: you shall not set your desire. So it’s saying here coveting is ultimately not an issue about the thing itself per se, it’s an issue of desire, so let’s talk about that.

Think of desire as your inner-drive - what moves you and directs you and gets you out of bed in the morning. It’s that humans are desire-driven creatures. We are motivated by what we want. Desire, I would argue, is a good thing when used correctly. A desire to love your spouse and your kids because God calls that over your life, I would argue, is a beautiful thing. A desire to work hard in the workplace because God calls you to, is to be celebrated.

But the problem becomes when your desires go off the rails. Or what theologians call an inordinate desire. This is what happens, according to the verse, when you “set” your desire on something that is out of line with what God has and wants for you. The NIV adds the word “set” and I think it’s helpful in understanding how desires work. It’s this idea of placing too much weight onto something.

I think what's interesting to note is the Scriptures do imply that **we have agency over our desires**. We have a large say in what we actually desire and what we don't. In a world that says your desires are who you are, or your desires can't be controlled and you need to express them - **what we're about to see** is that your desires can and have been manipulated.

And when that happens, when desires sort of devolve into inordinate desire, we set ourselves up for some damage.

And for most of Western civilization, there was an understanding that it's not always a good thing to get what you want. Your desires when you become the authority can actually cause some real harm to you and those around you. And so the good life was found in not getting what you want, but to become a person of character and virtue.

The thing is though, **that narrative has flipped** in the last 80 years or so in America.. Rather than finding the good life through an ethic of cultivating character through denying yourself, the narrative has become "your desires are good, your desires are who you are, and your desires must be expressed and fulfilled." And this everywhere, including within me. This idea that my life is not *exactly* how I want it to be, and I need to actualize my desires and wants. And not only does it lead to damaging yourself in the long run but man, does it lead to some profound, perpetual disappointment and discontentment in your life.

And that didn't happen by accident. I'll show you how that happened in just a second, but I would argue that America, perhaps more than any other society ever, we have a system that is actually designed at its very core to make you discontent.

So a quick history lesson. We mentioned this briefly earlier in the year but at the turn of the 20th century, philosopher Sigmund Freud said we are at our core, our desires. And the reason for all the problems in our culture, whether it be social problems, economic problems, or whatever, is because we've been taught to repress our unconscious desires. And if we as a culture let our desires be free from the shackles of tradition and religion, then humanity can flourish.

Fast forward some 40 some odd years later, Sigmund Freud's nephew Edward Bernays comes to America shortly after World War 2 and has an idea: What if he took his uncle's theory about unconscious desires and apply it to selling products?

And his theory was people would buy whatever product so long as you appeal to their feelings, their emotions, and their unconscious desires. Prior to that, advertising was about giving people the facts and the information, appealing to their intellect.

And rather than selling a product by saying "you need this" Bernays shifted the mentality to become "this would make you feel better if you have this."

To cite a Wall Street executive at the time Paul Mazer, Lehman bros:

We must shift America from a "needs" to a "desires" culture. People must be trained to desire, to want new things, even before the old have been entirely consumed. We must shape a new mentality in America. Man's desires must overshadow his needs."

Historically, America became the first society to shape its whole marketing and capitalistic system into one that appealed to our inordinate desires. By appealing to our desires, that will always outpace what we actually need, it's created systemic unhappiness in our society for the last 80 years or so. It's this idea that in everything, it's this whisper that says, "surely your life is not perfect right? Surely you want it to be a little better right? You could use a vacation, a nicer car, clothes."

And it creates in us discontentment that says, "I'm not happy with what I have or where I am." And this system creates within us a resignation and a disenchantment that says "is this it? Is this all there is? Surely there's something better." We become enslaved and mastered by our desires. **Not just with products but it has seeped into near-every category of life.**

Here's how you see this play out on a **macro-level**

Think about modern advertising and how that appeals to your desires. In nearly every billboard you see there is laden within it some sort of promise that appeals to your unconscious desires. Maybe it's an attractive person on the billboard. Or maybe it's a group of people at a restaurant or city having the time of their lives. Or maybe it's a catchy slogan that promises something their

product is selling. In near every one of those there's an appeal towards some desires within you that is supposed to stoke some level of discontentment. "Your life is fine, but if you buy this your life will be better." Or "Sure where you live is okay, but if you did this or lived here, then you'd really have the life you want and the friends you want." It often stokes within us coveting whether we're aware of it or not because it's far easier to make money off of our unhappiness and than it is to make money off people who are content in life.

ALL THE WHILE - our browsers and platforms and apps are selling our data and history to major corporations so they can tailor advertisements exclusively towards you. ALL THE WHILE tracking on your phones what stores you go to ALL THE WHILE listening to all your phone conversations to give you advertisements specifically tailored to you to inevitably stoke in you some level of discontentment so you can buy their product. [give funny example here]

Or think about social media, and how even if it's not necessarily an advertisement selling a product, what you see generally is a filtered photo of someone whose life seems so put together. You see the mom and dad smiling with their kids and because we've been manipulated to view life in terms of desires, see that photo and implicitly has this message that says "Look how nice this is. Don't you want this" (Meanwhile what you don't tend to see are the 5 dozen other attempts to take that photo and all the bribings with the kids that took place to get them to smile. Hypothetically.) But when all you see is a filtered staged photo, it can appeal to your desires and evokes coveting. And in the process we become enslaved.

Or the post of the single 20 or 30 something, living it up in an exotic location and having the time of their lives. And maybe they're an influencer or maybe they just want to remember the moment, either way, we've been manipulated to have our desires met - **to want what we don't have**. And when that sets in, that becomes coveting. It's the allure of being discipled by Bernays, "Yea but couldn't your life be better? Don't you want to feel special?"

Here's how you see this play out on a **day-to-day level** though.

Think about this, when we were kids, generally speaking what was the highlight of your **birthday or Christmas**? Did I get what I wanted? I don't remember a ton about my childhood, and I'm embarrassed to say this, but I remember clearly as a kid getting the VHS box set of Star Wars on Christmas Day and literally bowing down to it.

Or kid commercials on TV. As I was introducing my kids to Spongebob and in between each episode it feels like 5-10 minutes worth of commercials and toy commercials are basically the same template of when I was growing up. Cool electric guitar music, a kid moving an action figure, slow-mo of the figure's arm moving and explosions happening in the distance And I thought while I was watching it "Hmm that's a little over the top" and I look over at my kids, and they went from having no idea who GI Joe is to suddenly saying "Dad, dad, I need to have that! I want it now!" To which I instinctively went into my teacher-role and said "Now kids you know about desires and how..." but by then they tuned me out.

Now while that's silly **we haven't quite grown out** of that mindset. We don't have a Christmas wishlist but we do have amazon wishlists and an annual holiday each year where America

watches nothing but commercials for 3 hours straight called the Super Bowl. I saw an ad recently on Amazon promoting Amazon Prime that read, “patience is overrated” and I thought “Wowwww, can you believe that?! The unmitigated gall.” And then soon after I saw that, I noticed a book I ordered, because of trade getting backed up, was going to take 5 days to get to my house and not 2 days and I thought, “But I want it now!!!!”

Or how about this. This comes from Theodore Roosevelt who said this:

Comparison is the thief of joy.

There is this subtle sense that when I compare what I have to what others have - with whatever that looks like - it will inevitably distort my thinking to not be happy with what I have. And it's like, I may have very well already been completely content, but then I began to compare and now I suddenly don't like what I have as much.

Like I see this in my life at times talking to friends of mine who are in a different life stage than I am and I think “Oh that sounds nice. I bet you get to do whatever you want, whenever you want. Just on a whim you can go to the beach or the lake or go to the movies whenever.” And it can create in me in those moments this discontentment.

Or I was talking to someone this week about this sermon and they said, “Yea for me it's whenever I see someone with a big house or a nice house. I start comparing what they have to what I have and then I start coveting.

Or this posture of discontentment and disenchantment is what leads to the **mid-life crisis** when you hit your late 30s and 40s, when life begins to slow down and you start to settle in and you look back at your life so far and wonder, “Do I like the life that I've built? Do I like who I am? I got what I wanted out of life, but am I really happy with it? Or maybe I didn't get what I wanted out of life at all.” And there's this sense of longing and questioning. And when this happens it's easy for coveting to set in.

Or something I read this week, there's now emerged what's known as the **quarter-life crisis** which affects nearly half of people in their early to mid-20s. A mindset that says, “Ok now what? I thought life was going to look different and am I really happy with my job? Am I really happy in this city? And what do I do with all this raging discontentment within me?”

Could it be that when it comes to this commandment we're disciplined more in the way of Freud and Bernays than the way of Jesus? Is it any wonder then, how some 80 years removed from this shift that America has become, what feels like, the epicenter of appealing to your desires? We were already a people of desire, but our culture has groomed us to become a people of inordinate desire. People who believe this next thing... this new thing... this upgraded thing... THAT'S what I need. And that line of thinking has not only infected my need to buy things, but it's carried over now into a perpetual discontentment in every near every category

- It was - I don't like this thing. I need the next thing. Or the newest thing. Or a different thing altogether.

- And it's morphed into - I don't like my season of life. I need to move on to the next season of life.
- Or - I don't like my relationship status. I need a new relationship. A different relationship.
- Or - I don't like my job or my city. I need a new job. A new city.

And on and on the hamster wheel of unhappiness goes. And that's not even to say all those desires are necessarily all bad - but what I'm saying is when we live in a society that for nearly a century has tailored near everything to appeal to our inordinate desires - what we're typically doing often without even realizing it is saying to God, "God I don't like where you have me." "God, you dealt me a bad hand."

- "Now, sometimes these realizations are just a process of grieving, and it is necessary to grieve them with and before God. Sometimes your life isn't at all what you hoped, and you feel the loss of this un-lived life, and it is very difficult and worthy to be grieved well with God and others. Necessary, even.
- And sometimes, that grief, when not dealt with in the healthiest of ways, **can** turn into coveting. Where you don't just grieve the desires that weren't fulfilled, but you set your desire on the lives you didn't or haven't gotten to live, and it becomes deep jealousy, bitterness, or covetousness within you

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This is what happens when we appeal primarily to our desires. It creates an inward resignation that says "Is this it?"

And this act of "setting" our desires onto something, is at its heart, an act of faith. When I set my hopes, my wants, my expectations onto something - whether that be a relationship, or a job, or a career, or a thing, or fill in the blank - I am implicitly making a faith statement that says, "If I just have this, *then* my soul will be at rest."

Anything you place your faith in, that you set your desire on outside of what you were made for, that is, God and God alone will ultimately leave you devastated because it will never be enough. You will never be fully content. You will always be left feeling dissatisfied in the long run until you find yourself enslaved by your desires.

And what I need and what you need is our desires to be found in something - or rather Someone - who is big enough to handle what our hearts really desire. And that's what God does for us. And just as we can be manipulated to give in to our desires, so they too can be transformed and realigned back to God.

- A God who is big enough to handle all of our discontentment and reshape our hearts to see that in Him we have everything we need and want
- A God who is gracious enough to handle all our disappointments and remind us of his always-abounding steadfast love to us
- A God who is beautiful enough who no matter what cards have been dealt to us we see that He is in control and He is sovereign and He is good and Him giving us His Son Jesus is the objective truth and proof of that

- That just as death could not hold down the love of Jesus so there is no desire too great, no want too big, that Jesus can't ultimately fulfill through His presence and power in your life

And when you see this and rest in this, it produces in you a radical acceptance. A life of gratitude and joy that says I have Jesus now. The God of the Universe is with me. He loves me. He's given me life to the fullest. He's preparing a home for me. And there's nothing better than that.

And because Jesus promises to us that He never leaves us or forsakes us that means there is space to go to Him with your discontentment. And because Jesus went through every temptation, and made Himself human, that means there is space to go to Him even in your grieving.

- Your life may not be where you want it to be, go to Him with it He loves you
- Your season of life right now may not have been what you signed up for...take that to the Lord, He is there for you and longs to hear you

When we shift our perspective in life to be one not of resignation, but of radical acceptance that sees the beauty and provision and joy found in Jesus alone, we can become like the Psalmist David who, even when he was on the run and it felt like there was no stability or security in his life, he was able to say in Psalm 16:

Psalm 16:11

You make known to me the path of life;
in your presence there is fullness of joy;
at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

Now this is one of those verses that looks great on a coffee mug. Or if you were gonna Instagram your latte and open bible - this would make a great caption. Only by delighting in the presence of God and experiencing His fullness of joy - only that can break apart our inordinate desires. Only He has the power to reshape and realign our hearts back.

But notice what comes before that verse that I hadn't taken too much notice of until a friend of mine pointed this out:

Psalm 16:5-6

The Lord is my chosen portion and my cup;
you hold my lot.
The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places;
indeed, I have a beautiful inheritance.

Notice that connection. If you want to know the fullness of joy found in God alone, and if you want to experience the deep abiding of His presence, it first requires you to shift your heart into a place of radical acceptance and gratitude. To know that God has you where He has you for His greater purposes. And you may not understand it, you may not even necessarily want it, but to shift your gaze upwards and see that God is so utterly gracious. And only when you can say, "The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places" and you then say, "in your presence there is fullness of joy."

A radical acceptance that says this is my lot in life. This is where the lines have fallen for me, and I'm going to do everything I can, because this is where God has me, to do as much as I can to give glory to God. I want to honor Him where I'm at so that it might produce even deeper gratitude in me.

A radical acceptance that says

- This is my job. And it may not be the job I signed up for, but this is what God has for me. So I'm gonna do everything I can to give Him the glory and honor in my workplace
- This is my spouse. This is my family. Or this is my singleness. And these are the cards that God has given me, so I'm going to by the power of the Spirit do everything I can to bless others and give my life away so that I might know the ever-deepening fullness of joy found in God

A radical acceptance that says

- This is my city. And it may not be where I thought I'd be but this is where God has me. Right now. So I want to cultivate contentment here and plant roots and do everything I can to make my city better.
- This is my church and this is my people. And it has its drawbacks, and there's better "fill in the blanks" at other places. But this is where God has me. So I'm gonna hustle and serve and do whatever I can to make my church the healthiest it can possibly be with my God-given strengths and gifts. I'm not gonna complain or covet a better place because God's called me here, and the more I get into that place of gratitude and contentment, the more I can experience the fullness of God forevermore

...because here's the thing. If we don't get to that place of radical acceptance found in God alone, we will always be left in a place of disenchantment and discontentment.

So I don't know how you might need to apply this, fighting off coveting and fostering gratitude, in LifeGroups this week you'll talk about this. But I do wanna offer a few ideas to get the wheels turning...maybe for you, this may look like...

- Getting off certain social media accounts that evoke in you coveting, you know what they are. Maybe it's the super-mom that "seems" to have it all together. Maybe it's the person in the season of life that you want to be in. Maybe it's that person in the same field you're in but who seems way more successful than you are.
- Parents not getting your kids *everything* they want for birthdays or Christmas. I know Christmas is coming up but maybe, just maybe, to foster in your kids that our joy is not found in stuff we accumulate that they not get everything they want even though you could afford it
- Maybe if you're tempted to covet money and stuff, to intentionally live below your means to give your money and stuff away to God's people and mission

...because God is for you. And living a life of radical acceptance is for our good.

Conclusion

This is the refrain for all 10 of the commandments. That underneath every commandment and every rule there was underneath it all a call to embrace this life of love and grace according to how God our Father sees fit. Underneath every law that Moses gave, and every command was this plea to choose this life abundance found in God alone.

And if you jump ahead to the near very end of the book of Deuteronomy, Moses as he wraps up his final sermon says this over the people.

Deuteronomy 30:19-20

I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he is your life and length of days

Moses says, which are you going to choose, the path of life or the path of death? And that same call is over us, some 3,500 years later, who follow King Jesus.

We've been redeemed from a greater exodus, who were rescued from sin and idolatry through the atoning work and resurrection of Jesus...which will you choose today, the path of life or the path of death?

We who have been rescued from a greater Pharaoh, Satan and all his lies and deceit...which will you choose, the way of Jesus and the life He brings or the way of our desires and the death it brings?

We have been adopted into a new people, the family of God, His Church...today, and moment by moment, which will you choose?

May we today by the Spirit choose life and see that God is for our good always.