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We've made it! We've arrived at the final week examining the Ten Commandments. It's been an interesting journey, beginning with four commandments: worshiping one God, not creating idols, using God's name with respect, and honoring the Sabbath with worship and rest. We then examined five commandments on how to get along with others: respect of parents, not killing, not taking another's spouse, not taking possessions belonging to someone else, and being honest by not taking away the truth.

Today, we end with the commandment to not covet another's house, wife, animals, or anything else belonging to your neighbor.

Isn't that a strange word? *Covet*? It's not a word that I use very often, and when doing so it's only when referring to this tenth commandment. The word *covet* seems to come from the Latin word *cupiditas*, which means to desire or lust, from which we also get the name of the Roman god of passionate love, Cupid. In the Bible, covet carries a sense of great desire, wanting more stuff than what one normally has.

At first, I thought it was strange that we would spend a Sunday on just this *one* commandment, but then I read an article that suggested: "The decision to have a single Sunday just for the coveting commandment may seem odd. The reason for this choice is to emphasize that so many of our sins start with our desires."¹

This one gets a bit personal, doesn't it? Even if we worship God regularly and avoid using God's name in vain, and even if we honor our parents, don't murder anyone, avoid affairs, avoid stealing, and strive to tell the truth, most us get into trouble with this covet commandment. Have you ever wanted something more than you needed? Have you ever longed for something because everyone else seems to have it?

It's hard, isn't it, to be happy with what we have when commercials tell us we need to buy more stuff in order to be truly fulfilled? Upon opening the Sunday paper, for example, a multitude of inserts fall to floor, colorful advertisements telling us that we need to go shopping.



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Once we accumulate more than we need, we run out of places to store our stuff, so we buy bigger houses with more closets or bigger garages, or we rent a building whose only purpose is to store unused items.



This frenzy often leads to the depletion of funds, so we take on more jobs to make more money to buy more stuff we don't need. When that still doesn't work, and we find ourselves short of funds, we might do as one woman who went to the bank to open a new account. The banker asked if she would like a joint account, explaining that more than one person could deposit and withdraw funds from it. She thought this sounded like a great idea, so the banker asked if the account would be with her husband. She replied, "Oh no, couldn't I have a joint account with someone who has a lot of money?"²

Hearing the commandment about not desiring stuff that belongs to another may make us squirm a bit, for it's so hard to be happy with what we have. When we encounter those who want someone else's

stuff, we may not even know how to respond, as was the case with



a young preacher who had just begun serving his first congregation. This church was a small one and was composed entirely of the population of a small logging town. Everyone in town worked for the town's lumber mill, which was its only business and was in fierce competition with the mill just upstream.



The preacher wasn't in town long before he had an experience that shook him up a bit. He was taking a walk through the woods and chanced to see the workers at the town mill pulling logs branded for the other mill out of the stream, cutting off the branded ends, and running them through their own mill. Of course, the preacher was very distressed and thus worked the rest of the week on a powerful sermon. That Sunday he got up and preached a sermon entitled "Thou Shalt Not Covet Thy Neighbor's Property."

The sermon seemed to go over pretty well. Everyone told him, as they went out the door,

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just how much they loved his preaching: “You really moved me preacher” and “Best sermon I ever heard” were some of the remarks they made. But that next Monday morning it was business as usual at the mill. They were still stealing logs. So the next Sunday the preacher delivered a real “pulpit pounder” called “Thou Shalt Not Steal.”

“Fantastic!” the people told him. “Wonderful!” they cried. But on Monday morning the other company’s logs were still being swiped by the town mill.

Enough was enough! ... This time he wasn’t going to hold anything back. On Sunday he got up and preached a sermon he called “Thou Shalt Not Cut Off the Branded Ends of Someone Else’s Logs!” They ran him out of town.³

Although some may seek to gain more than they need or try to take what doesn’t belong to them, there are those who desire just the basics of life, and a recent movement has been hearing their voices. Disciples pastor William Barber called our nation this past month to 40 Days of Moral

But I Want It
June 17, 2018

Rev. Dr. Douglas Cripe
Central Christian Church, Elkhart & First Christian Church, Mishawaka

Action to highlight the Poor People’s Campaign. This campaign began when Martin Luther King, Jr. stated in 1967:

I think it is necessary for us to realize that we have moved from the era of civil rights to the era of human rights...[W]hen we see that there must be a radical redistribution of economic and political power, then we see that...we have been in a reform movement...That after Selma and the Voting Rights Bill, we moved into a new era, which must be an era of revolution...In short, we have moved into an era where we are called upon to raise certain basic questions about the whole society.

“Later that year, in December 1967, Rev. Dr. King announced the plan to bring together poor people from across the country for a new march on Washington. This march was to demand better jobs, better homes, better education—better lives than the ones they were living.”⁴

Rev. Barber has updated King’s vision by broadening it for today:

The Poor People’s Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival is uniting tens of thousands of people across the country to challenge the evils of systemic racism, poverty, the war economy, ecological devastation, and the nation’s distorted morality.

Exodus 20:17



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Isn't that a wonderful vision? Something to desire? Something to covet?

There's nothing wrong with desiring an end to racism, looking forward to a time when everyone is welcome regardless of the color of one's skin.

There's nothing wrong with desiring an end to poverty, where everyone can earn a living wage.

There's nothing wrong with desiring an end to war, where nations no longer fight over resources but instead share them.

There's nothing wrong with desiring a time when everyone cares for God's creation by recycling items to use again and ending the pollution that destroys our environment.

There's nothing wrong with desiring better morality, where we treat one another the way Jesus

envisioned when he summed up all the laws by quoting from two books of the Bible, Deuteronomy and Leviticus: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind."³⁸ This is the greatest and first commandment.³⁹ And a second is like it: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."⁴⁰ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."⁵



That's something I want, and I hope you do too: love God, love yourself, and love your neighbor. Those are wonderful things to covet.

⁵ Matthew 22:37-40.

¹ www.workingpreacher.org/?lect_date=06/17/2018&lectionary=nl

² Hodgin, Michael; *1001 Humorous Illustrations for Public Speaking: Fresh, Timely, and Compelling Illustrations for Preachers, Teachers, and Speakers* (Kindle Locations 2784-2786). Zondervan. Kindle Edition, #433 (adapted).

³ Hodgin, Michael. *1002 Humorous Illustrations for Public Speaking: Fresh, Timely, Compelling Illustrations for Preachers, Teachers, and Speakers* (Kindle Locations 4665-4678). Zondervan. Kindle Edition, #772.

⁴ www.poorpeoplescampaign.org/history/