

# Exploring the 10 Commandments









## The Old Law and the New Law

When Jesus taught people, he gave them a New Law. He said, "Love one another as I have loved you" (John 13:34). But Jesus also expected that people would keep the Old Law, that is, the commandments that God gave us long before Jesus arrived. When someone asked Jesus to say what the most important commandment in the Law was, Jesus answered that it was to love God and to love your neighbor as yourself (see Mark 12:28-34.) In this answer, Jesus was quoting from the Old Law. We call this commandment "the **Great Commandment**."

We can keep this Law of Love only through the new life and grace of the Holy Spirit, which we receive through our faith in Christ. This grace operates through love. Jesus taught this New Law of Love in his Sermon on the Mount (see the Gospel of Matthew, chapters 5, 6, and 7), and we receive the grace we need to live this Law of Love in the Sacraments. This new moral life of love will reach its fullness in the glory of Heaven.



## The Meaning of the Ten Commandments

It is hard to do something when we don't know why we are doing it. In order to keep the Ten Commandments, we need to know what they mean in general and what they mean for us. We need to know why God cares about each commandment, and why we should care about keeping it.

Under each commandment is a short explanation or example of the commandment. Think about each commandment and try to come up with an example of your own. This will help you keep the Ten Commandments in your own life.





# 1

## The First Commandment

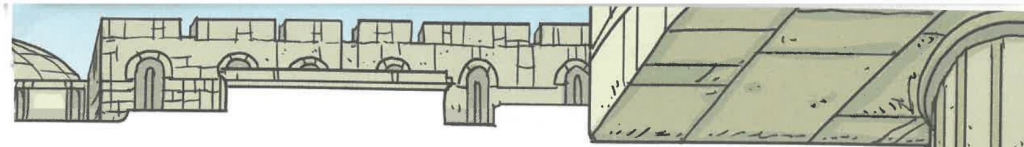
**I am the Lord your God;  
you shall not have other gods before me.**

God commands us to honor God as number one in our lives. Why does God want this? Does God keep chanting, "I'm Number One! I'm Number One!" all the time? No. God wants us to honor him as the one, true God not for his sake, but for our sake.

This First Commandment puts our lives into right order. If we honor God as number one in our lives, then all the other parts of our lives will fall into place. We will then give proper honor to our families and friends, to our country, to creation, to animals and plants. If God is number one, then we will turn to him as our one, true leader, guide and Father. We will believe in God, hope in God, and love God above everything else.

When we obey the First Commandment, we adore God and pray to him. We worship him as he deserves. We keep our promises and vows to him.

This First Commandment also forbids us to worship false gods. We are also forbidden to worship images of God, because God is spirit and cannot be fully expressed in any image. But, we do have images of Christ, Mary, and the saints in our churches and at home. We can honor pictures and statues of Christ because the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, the Word of God, became man and took on a human body. We honor pictures and statues of Mary and the saints because they too had human bodies. But we do not worship the pictures and statues. We worship God alone. We worship the Son of God, Christ, who is pictured. We honor (but do not worship) Mary and the saints who are pictured. Just as we honor our family and friends by displaying pictures of them, so we honor Jesus, Mary, and the saints with pictures and statues of them. This is not against the First Commandment.



F. Jacob loves little things. He is always carrying a small object around in his pocket, just because he likes to hold it. He was in the drugstore and saw a small flashlight on the counter. After Jacob paid for a candy bar, the clerk turned her back to talk to another clerk. Jacob slipped the small flashlight into his pocket.



G. Cynthia is in eighth grade and uses social media as a weapon. She thinks she can say anything she wants because the person she is texting about is not face-to-face with her and is not one of her friends. The other day she texted a friend: "Saw Cecily at the mall. Horrible dress. Too bad for her!"



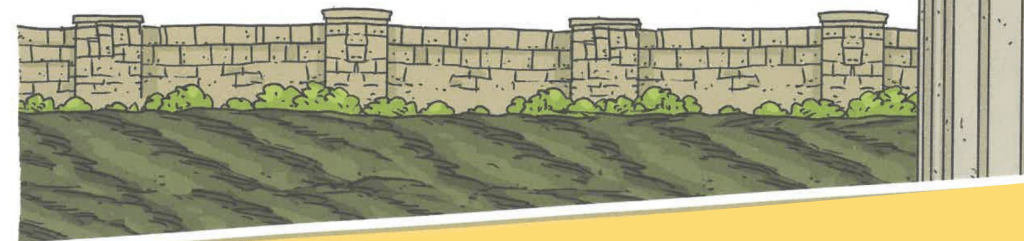
H. Melinda is in high school and has a problem. She cannot put away her phone. She is online every free moment. After she finishes her homework, she goes to her room and plays video games until bedtime. Then, with the lights out, she gets out the phone again, chatting with friends until after midnight. Because of lack of sleep, she cannot stay awake at school. Her grades are suffering. She is often too tired to eat.



I. Trevor does not like to go to Sunday Mass. He argues with his parents every Sunday about going. His mother says, "We owe God thanks for all our blessings, and he gives us the Body and Blood of Jesus in Communion. Mass is only an hour a week." Trevor says, "I don't care. I would rather stay home and play games."



J. Kurt just found out that his friend Devin is going to Ireland with his family for six weeks. Kurt is upset because not only will Devin be gone but his own family has never traveled far from home on vacation. Kurt is so envious that he can hardly speak to Devin, and Devin is really sad about the whole thing.



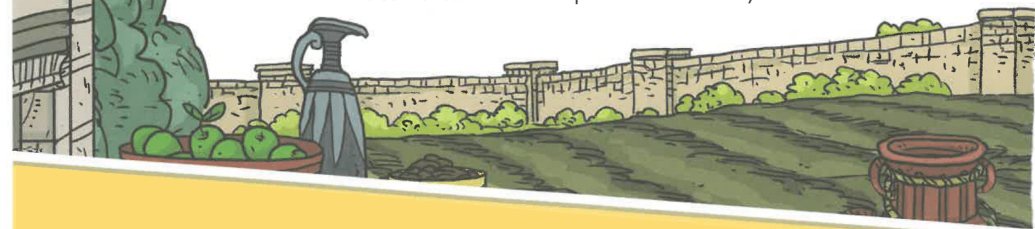




# ACTIVITY

## The Ten Commandments in Real Life

Read each situation below. In the circle before each situation, write the number of the commandment that is being broken. Think about what you would say to the young people in these situations.

- ☐ A. Sally is in middle school, and her favorite exclamation is "Oh, God!" If her mother gets her a new dress, she says, "Oh, God!" If she hears of exciting news in a text from a friend, she texts back, "OMG!" Her dad recently painted her room her favorite color (pink) and when she saw it, she said, "Oh, God!"
  - ☐ B. James loves basketball. He practices every chance he gets. Sometimes he neglects his homework to practice basketball. If you asked him what the most important thing in his life is, he would say, "Basketball. I worship basketball."
  - ☐ C. Cynthia says she loves her parents, but lately she has been doing the opposite of what they ask. When they said, "Come right home from school," she stopped at a friend's house instead. When they said, "No, you may not streak your hair," she did it when they were out of the house. If they say, "Make your bed before leaving in the morning," usually she leaves it a mess. Her attitude is, "Those are silly rules. I'm not doing anything that bad."
  - ☐ D. Tiffany loves clothes and wants to be in fashion design someday. She is constantly battling with her mother over appropriate dress. Her mother says, "I want three-fourths of you covered up!" But Tiffany argues to wear skimpy tops and shorts.
  - ☐ E. Jason likes to tease people and can be a bully. He will tease people until they get really angry about it, and then he says, "You wanna fight?" He makes every conflict worse. His teacher has sent him to the school counselor to help him find better ways to relate to others.
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## 2

### The Second Commandment

**You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.**


The phrase "in vain" means "for no good reason." If something is "vain" it is empty and has no meaning. When we use the name of the Lord, we want it to have meaning. We want to use it with respect and love, because "the name of the Lord is holy"

Our society uses the name of the Lord quite often. When people are excited, they say, "Oh, God!" When people are upset, they say, "Oh, God!" We even use the letters *OMG* to mean "Oh, my God!"

"O God!" can be a prayer addressing God. But if you are saying "O God!" every other minute, just because something is a little bit surprising or out of the ordinary, are you really thinking about what you are saying? Are you really praying? Try to find other words to express your surprise, anger, upset, or excitement. Keep "O God!" for talking to God in prayer. Otherwise, your use of God's name is in vain, empty, and without any meaning at all.

*Blasphemy* is against the Second Commandment. It is the use of the name of God, of Jesus Christ, of the Virgin Mary, and of the saints so wrongly that it is offensive.

*Perjury* is also against the Second Commandment. Perjury is lying under oath. It is taking an oath— making a solemn promise—to tell the truth, calling on God as witness, and then telling a lie instead. God is all truth and always faithful to his promises, and he cannot witness or stand up for a lie.







# 3

## The Third Commandment

Remember to keep holy  
the Lord's Day.

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The Lord's Day is Sunday. Under the Old Law, the Lord's Day was Saturday, and it was called the Sabbath. The Jews kept Saturday as the Lord's Day because it was the last day of Creation. We keep Sunday as the Lord's Day because on that day Jesus Christ rose from the dead and began a new creation—new life now and eternal life with him forever. Sunday is also called the eighth day. We know that there are only seven days in the week. But Sunday, the Lord's Day, is called the eighth day because it is not an ordinary day of the week. As the day of Christ's Resurrection, it is a day "outside of time."

We keep Sunday as a day of rest. Because God rested on the day after he created the world, we rest on the day Jesus began the new creation. On Sunday, we should not be busy working or doing business. Sunday should be a day of joy, worship, and relaxation. In addition, we should not require others to work on Sunday. Sunday is the day for spending time with family and friends, and for participating in cultural and social activities.

Unfortunately, some jobs require work on Sunday. In that case, another day of rest in the week should be given to those workers who are required to work on Sunday.

Above all, Sunday is the Lord's Day because it is the primary day on which we worship God. It is so important that the Church declared Sunday the "foremost holy day of obligation" (*Catechism*), and we are obliged to participate in the Mass on each and every Sunday (unless prevented by a legitimate excuse, like sickness).

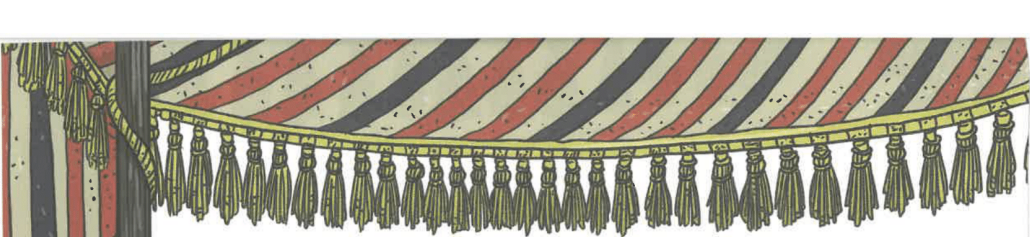
Envy is wanting what others have. If so-and-so has the latest phone, then we want the latest phone. If the family down the block puts in a pool, then we want our family to put in a pool. Envy makes us feel sad and downhearted when we can't always have what others have. Every family has their own financial limits. Envy can lead to disrespecting parents when they say no. It can lead to a broken friendship if the friend has something better than you do, and envy starts to eat you up.

How can we fight envy? First, we can be glad that someone has something nice. Being glad starts in our thoughts, and gradually our feelings will follow. For example, when your friend gets something new, you can think and say, "How cool!" You can be happy for your friend.

Next, we can be grateful for what we have, without complaining about what we don't have. We may not have a new phone or a pool but we have other good and necessary things in our lives. We can thank God for providing for our need for food, clothing, and shelter.

Finally, we can realize that, when we were born, we had nothing. Everything we have was given to us as a gift from God. And, when we leave this world and go back to God, we take nothing with us. We leave everything behind. So, in a way, everything we have and use is "on loan" for a time. We should take care of our possessions and not ruin or waste them, but we should realize that what we have on the inside—love, joy, peace, generosity—is much more important. Those are the riches of the Kingdom of God, and they will last forever.





We must look at people with a pure heart. What does that mean? It means that we look at people with a heart free from lust and a grasping attitude. We give our relationships time to grow with trust and kindness. We hold back rather than putting demands of any kind on someone, especially demands regarding physical expressions of love. True love does not put conditions or pressure on the other person for any reason.

Purity of heart requires modesty. Modesty protects purity of heart. It means that your clothing shows less of you rather than more. Modesty protects your freedom and independence so that you do not become an object of entertainment for others who otherwise do not care about you.

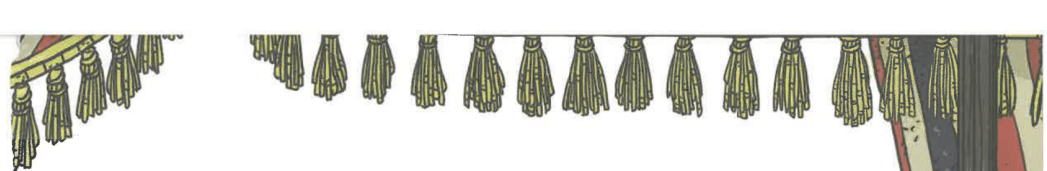

## 10 The Tenth Commandment

**You shall not covet  
your neighbor's possessions.**

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The Tenth Commandment forbids **avarice** and envy. Avarice is an extreme desire for riches and power. Envy is sadness at the sight of others' possessions and the extreme desire to have them for oneself.

People commit the sin of avarice when they want to amass money for themselves for its own sake. It is not wrong to want to provide for a family, to save money for a rainy day, or to collect money for a good cause. God knows that we need a certain amount of money to provide for ourselves and others in this world. But some people want more and more. Their avarice then leads to other sins, like exploiting workers, not giving to the poor, and even neglecting their own home life because they are always out making more money when they already have enough.



Of all the blessings God has given us, of all the hours in the week, God asks us for one hour on Sunday to praise him, to thank him, and to receive his new life in the Sacrament of the Eucharist. When Jesus was suffering in the Garden of Gethsemane, before his Crucifixion, he asked Peter and his disciples, "How is it that you three were not able to keep watch with me for even one hour?" (Matthew 26:40). He asks us the same question every Sunday. What is our answer?

## 4 The Fourth Commandment

**Honor your  
father and your mother.**


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How do you honor your father and your mother? Do you give them cards or gifts on Father's Day or Mother's Day? That is a very good way to honor them! But the best way to honor your father and your mother is by your respect, gratitude, just obedience, and help. ("Just obedience" means that you are to obey your parents in everything, as long as they do not ask you to do anything wrong.) Your father and mother are the leaders of your family, and you can help family harmony by your respect and love for your parents.

Parents also have responsibilities to fulfill. They must educate their children in the faith, prayer, and all the **virtues**—all the good habits that we need to live as Jesus taught. They must provide as well as they can for the needs of their children, both physical and spiritual.

Parents should teach their children that the first calling of every Christian is to follow Jesus. Parents should help their children find and follow the vocation that God seems to be calling them to live—whether that vocation is to married life, religious life, or a life of committed service as a single person.

All authority comes from God, and every authority on Earth (kings, presidents, mayors, police officers, teachers, and even parents) will someday answer to God as to how they used their authority. People are placed in authority over us for our good. So, after God, we must also obey these authorities over us, because they are charged with working toward the common good of all.







## 5

### The Fifth Commandment

You shall not kill.

Every human life is sacred, because every human life was made “in the image and likeness of the living and holy God” (*Catechism*). The taking of a human life in the act of murder is a grave sin. Murder is against the dignity of the human person and the holiness of the Creator, God.

However, in facing an unjust aggressor (someone who wants to harm us), we are allowed to defend ourselves so that they cannot cause harm. And legitimate defense is a serious duty for someone who must defend the lives of others or protect the common good.

The Fifth Commandment also includes the understanding that every child has the right to life, from the moment of conception. The unborn child should be treated as a person from the moment of conception. Like every other human being, the unborn child should be cared for and healed. Direct abortion is a grave sin. Anyone who commits the sin of abortion is forbidden to receive Holy Communion or the other sacraments. This is called *excommunication*. (Sometimes children die before birth for natural reasons, and this, of course, involves no sin on anyone’s part. This is called a miscarriage. When this happens, the mother and the family are very sad and need our care and support.)

Because of the Fifth Commandment, and because the Church believes that every life has value, the Church is also against the death penalty. As followers of Jesus, we do not give up on anyone, no matter what evil they may have done. We know that we need to protect society from those who have done grave harm. We prefer to do this by keeping these persons separated from society and working for their human and spiritual growth, even if they will spend the rest of their lives in prison.

## 9

### The Ninth Commandment

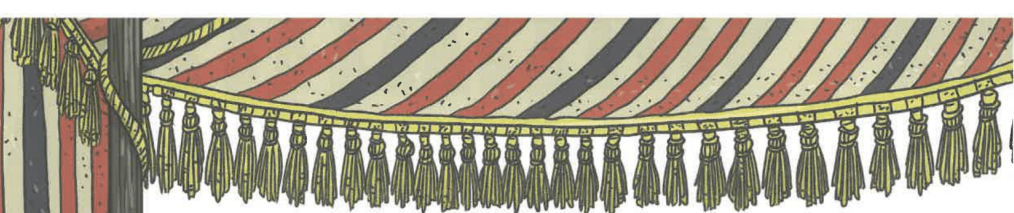
You shall not covet  
your neighbor’s wife.

To covet something is to strongly desire something. Often it means we feel envy for what someone else has and want it for ourselves. Coveting is something that is in our heart, whether we plan to act on it or not. The Ninth Commandment warns us against coveting people—a wife or a husband—who are already committed to someone else. It is closely related to the Sixth Commandment, “You shall not commit adultery.” The Ninth Commandment might say, “Don’t even think about committing adultery or desiring another person who is already committed to someone else.”

But the Ninth Commandment does not apply just to other people’s wives or husbands. In a broad way, it applies to everyone. People are not things to want to have. People are not objects to decorate our lives. People and their bodies are not made for our entertainment. In our society, we continually see pictures and videos of people. Some are our own families and friends. Others are people we don’t know personally but who are famous celebrities. Others are people who wish they were celebrities and think that by sharing their picture on social media, they will become famous.

Some of these pictures deliberately show off a person’s body. God made our bodies to be beautiful, but showing them off leads to problems, including the sin of **lust**. Lust is a very strong and wrongly-directed sexual desire. When we lust after someone, we don’t care about that person as a person. We don’t care about having a true friendship with them. We don’t care about their joys and sorrows. We just want to enjoy looking at that person’s body. This is treating someone as an object and as entertainment.





Social media should be used with moderation and concern for others. This may require self-control on your part. If you are going to be spreading news about people, through social media or in other ways, let it be good news! ("Did you hear that Janie got a scholarship to college?") If people hear about Janie's father's arrest, don't let it come from you.

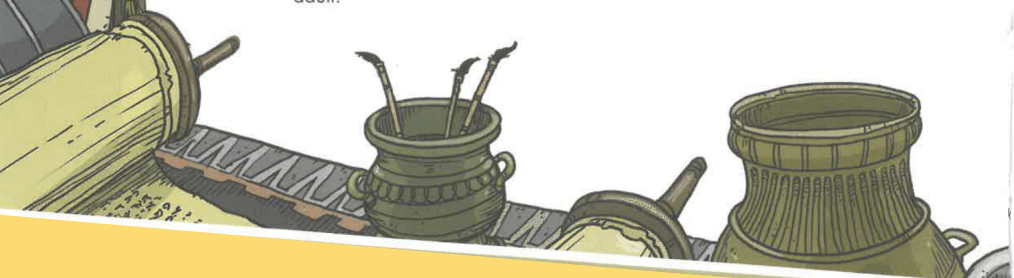
How can the damage from a lie be repaired? The person who lied has a responsibility to tell the truth. The person who lied must admit to the lie and then do what must be done to repair any damage it caused.

The Eighth Commandment also requires that certain types of secrets be kept. These might include small secrets like, "Don't tell mom what I am giving her for her birthday!" or "Don't tell my friend Jody that we are inviting her to come camping with us! It's going to be a surprise!" Or, a friend may tell you something that is "for your ears only" and not for sharing with others. These kinds of secrets are loving family secrets or friendship secrets that spring from compassion and care.

Other secrets that must be kept are professional secrets. People speak to lawyers and doctors in confidence that their conversations will not be told to others. Some businesses rely on secret formulas for their products, and if someone makes those formulas public, the business might suffer greatly or even close.

The biggest secret priests must keep is the "seal of the confessional." This means that the priest must never tell what a person said to him during confession in the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation.

Some secrets among families and friends need to be told, and telling them does not violate the Eighth Commandment. If you or someone you know is in danger, you must tell someone. If someone is in danger from any kind of abuse, using alcohol or drugs, or thinking about suicide, then that situation cannot be kept a secret. It must be told to a trusted adult.



## 6

### The Sixth Commandment

You shall not commit adultery.


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The word *adultery* means having a sexual relationship with someone other than your own wife or husband. The Sixth Commandment is a reminder that marriage is a covenant of love, and married people are obliged to be faithful to each other in an unbreakable relationship. Divorce, polygamy (having more than one wife), and free union (living together without marriage) are "grave offenses against the dignity of marriage" (*Catechism*).

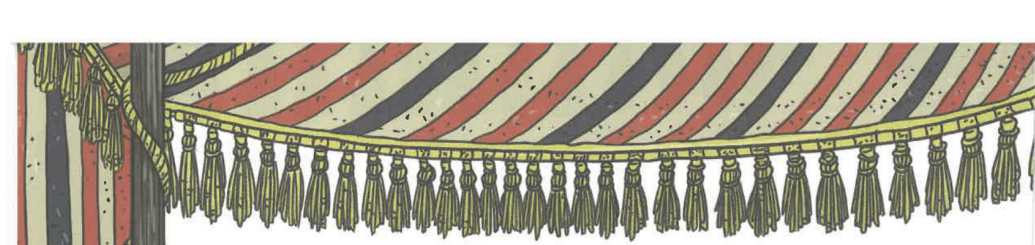
But, you may say, "I am not married! The Sixth Commandment has nothing to do with me!" That is only partly true. The Sixth Commandment also reminds us that each one of us, married or not, has personal dignity as male or female. This is true of boys and girls as well as of men and women. We should not allow ourselves to be put down by anyone because we are a boy or a girl. Even remarks like "Boys are dumb," "Girls are stupid," "Girls are better than boys," or "Boys are better than girls" work against the equal human dignity we all deserve. God made us male and female and he wants all of us to respect his good work!

The Sixth Commandment also reminds us that everyone, married or not, is called to be chaste. Being chaste means having respect for ourselves and others. We are called to be chaste and modest according to our state in life. We look to Jesus as our model of chastity, as he was chaste himself and treated everyone with respect. Married people are chaste by being faithful to a wife or husband. Single people are chaste by waiting for marriage before giving themselves in a sexual relationship. All people, men and women, boys and girls, are chaste by dressing appropriately and not using their bodies as "entertainment" for others. Our bodies are not for everybody and anybody.

Of course, in order to be chaste, we must practice the virtue of self-control. Self-control means that we do what we choose to do for right reasons, and we do not do what our peers or our own emotions may want us to do. Self-control means we choose clothing that shows less of us, rather than more. Self-control means that we show respect for others at all times. Self-control means that we "become friends" with our bodies and take care of them by eating the right foods, getting exercise, and getting enough sleep. Our bodies are gifts from God, and self-control shows that we are grateful.







## 7 The Seventh Commandment

You shall not steal.

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Very clearly, the Seventh Commandment forbids stealing. Stealing is taking or using another's property without permission. Stealing is a sin that requires reparation and restitution. *Reparation* means "repairing a wrong." *Restitution* means "restoring" or "giving back."



Let's look at one example. Billy is in high school and has a bicycle. He uses it to run errands for his neighbors, and they often give him a small tip for this service. He does not make much money, but the tips give him spending money that his parents cannot afford to offer him.

One day, as Billy is delivering groceries, he leaves his bike near the front door of a neighbor's house. When he comes out of the house, his bike is gone. Someone has taken it.

If the thief brings the bike back two days later, that is *restitution*. Billy's bike has been restored to him. But is that enough? Billy could have been making tip money those two days. Without his bicycle, he made nothing. If he normally averages three dollars a day in tips, the person who stole his bike also owes him six dollars. That is *reparation*.

Taking other people's thoughts and ideas is also stealing. Cheating in school is stealing someone else's answers and pretending they are your own. Copying parts of books or written work without giving credit to the author is stealing, and is called *plagiarism*.

But the Seventh Commandment has a wider meaning. Although each human being does have the right to own earthly goods, all the goods of creation are meant for the entire human race. This is called the universal destination of goods. Everything God made is intended for everyone, not for just a few families or a few companies. We all have a stake in what is done with creation—our rivers and lakes, our air, our land, our oceans. Even manufactured goods, such as food, clothing, housing, and medicines, should be made available to everyone, with justice and charity.



## 8 The Eighth Commandment

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

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"Bearing false witness" is telling a lie. A lie is saying something that is not true with the intention of deceiving someone. In other words, you want someone to believe that the lie you told is true.

There are many reasons for telling a lie. We may be tempted to lie if we fear that the truth will bring us punishment. We may be afraid to admit something that we have done. But a lie always makes things worse. When people know we lie, they see us as untrustworthy. Untrustworthy people lose friends. It is hard to stay friends with a person you cannot trust. It is better to be honest with everyone. It is better to tell the truth, take the punishment, and try to do better in the future. God will always forgive us if we are sorry!

Being truthful means that our words and actions match up. We do what we say we will do. We do not pretend to be someone we are not, and we don't say one thing and do something else. That would be hypocrisy.

The Eighth Commandment also forbids **calumny**, which is lying about other people. For example, you might spread this lie: "Sara is really mean to her little sister." You say it because you want people to think badly of Sara, but the statement is not true. You have committed the sin of calumny.

Another way to sin against the Eighth Commandment is to commit the sin of **detraction**. Detraction is saying something bad about someone, even if it is true. For example, you may know that Janie's father was arrested. Should you announce this in school? No, you are not. If you say, "Janie's father was arrested," to everyone you meet, you are committing the sin of detraction. You are detracting, or taking away from, that family's good name and reputation.

You might say, "But it's all over social media. It's in the newspaper and on TV." Newspapers and television report the news of the day, and police reports are part of that news. This is not detraction. People do have a right to information based on truth, freedom, and justice. But gossip, whether in person or on social media, often indulges in both calumny and detraction. Gossip is simply spreading news (usually bad news or even news that is not true) about people.

