

The God Who Gives

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[0 : 0 0] So we're working through a series through the Ten Commandments, actually through a series through the entire book of Exodus, but for the last several weeks we've been in the Ten Commandments, we've been looking at these very famous commandments in their context, and if you think back several weeks now to when we kind of introduced them, these are commandments that God gave to Israel as he was commissioning them to be his people.

Remember, he said, you will be a royal priesthood, meaning that that entire nation would function as a group of people that went between God and between man, and they showed man what God was like.

They were supposed to reflect his image. They were supposed to look like him and point toward him. So these commandments were supposed to help to shape Israel to be that type of people, or we could say to shape God's people, because that also applies to us, not just to the nation of Israel, that these commandments are to shape us to be people who look like God and to point to him.

And this morning we're in the eighth of these Ten Commandments, and we find that in Exodus chapter 20, verse 15, and hopefully you have that open up in your Bible also. Put it on the screen, and we'll read it together.

Okay, so here it is, the eighth commandment. Are you ready? You shall not steal. So this means that you shouldn't steal. All right, Dustin, do we have a closing song?

[1 : 2 9] Not yet, hey? Well, that's fine, I guess, because I think there's some more that we can talk about. But you know, if the Ten Commandments were, as we usually think of them, just arbitrary moral guidelines that God gives us, or even if they're simply unbreakable moral commandments, we really could wrap things up right now.

And some of you would be okay with that. I mean, NFL season started, there's probably a game on or something. I guess we could get into debates like, well, is it ever okay to steal? What if you have to choose between stealing and eating that day?

We could talk about that, or we could talk about what counts as stealing. Like, if I left my phone on the lectern, I won't do that because I won't even take it out of my pocket, but I left it on the lectern and I came back next week and it was gone and Dave had it and he refused to get it back, would it be stealing from me if I went and I snuck it out of his pocket and I stole my phone back?

Would that be stealing? Or would it be stealing if I took his computer also as, like, interest or something? Now, these may be interesting questions, but I think, and they can serve some function, but the problem is that they kind of miss the point of what the Ten Commandments are about.

Because these commandments are much, much more than just external obedience or behavior modification where we just change the way that we act. They're much deeper than that.

[2 : 5 5] They're much more central to who we are as humans. And probably the best place in the Bible that exemplifies this is actually Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. So let me read some of what Jesus says in that Sermon on the Mount in Matthew chapter 5.

He says, You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, you shall not murder, or anyone who murders will be subject to judgment. But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment.

Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, raka, which is an Aramaic insult, is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, you fool, will be in danger of the fire of hell.

Or a little bit later, he says, you have heard it said, you shall not commit adultery. But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. And we've seen and talked about these two commandments, but we see here that Jesus takes them deeper.

And what Jesus is doing is he's showing us that these laws aren't just about external obedience, how we act, how it's something that other people can see about us.

[3 : 58] They're not just moral hoops to jump through. They aren't just behavioral modifications. He's saying that, sure, you may not technically murder someone, or sure, you may not technically commit adultery, or sure, you may not technically steal, but you are still in your heart a murderer or an adulterer or a thief.

You just have the social sense not to put it out there, to show it. You have some degree of self-control in how you act that out, but it's still shaping you because what's in our heart still shapes us.

It's still poisoning us. It's still poisoning our relationship with those around us. It's still poisoning our relationship with God. Now, Jesus doesn't give us the benefit of opening up this particular commandment of not stealing, like he does with the prohibitions against murder and adultery.

But let's try and follow the path that he laid out in applying this commandment a little deeper. So what about, what if stealing is also includes mindlessly borrowing work supplies, or if using sick days when we aren't sick, or taking credit or shirking responsibility when we're leading a team.

So if someone in our team does something good, we take all the credit. And if someone in our team does something bad, we make sure that they take the blame. You know, we take the good and we let the bad flow down. What if stealing is a spending beyond our means?

[5 : 18] There's even that saying, it's not quite the same thing, but robbing Peter to pay Paul, where we rob from tomorrow's me to pay for today's me. Or what about withholding praise from others?

I just started a new job, and one of the things I noticed right away with my boss is that he's constantly affirming everybody on our team. And I looked and I said, I don't do that very well.

I don't look at work that someone else is doing and say, you're doing a great job because I just expect them to do that. And I realized that I'm robbing them of the satisfaction of knowing that they're doing a good job and having that affirmed in them.

And what is it in me that makes it so that I don't freely offer praise to those around me, whether they're my employees or my employers? I actually emailed my boss, who's Kent Anderson, the president of Northwest Baptist Seminary, last night as I was praying through this sermon, thinking I should actually put this into practice of saying, Kent, you're really good at this and not rob him of me recognizing that.

And we could probably apply this in lots of different ways. Maybe something is running through your head of a way that you steal. Although, to be honest, you're probably thinking of the way that someone else that you know steals. But really, what it comes down to is we are stealing.

[6 : 34] Anytime that we look at something, whether it's an actual possession, whether it's money, whether it's someone's approval or someone's praise or someone's respect, or whether it's time or energy or someone else's behavior, we're looking at it and we're saying, that's mine.

Anytime that we say, that's mine, we're stealing. And it doesn't matter whether it's something that we already have or whether it's something that we're reaching out to grab, because there is nothing that we truly own ourselves.

Scripture talks about our money not being ours, that we are stewards. And Scripture talks about our time not even being ours, and that every breath, and we're saying words to that effect, every breath of ours belongs to God.

So when we use it in a way that doesn't honor God, when we use it solely to serve ourselves, we're stealing. Now I hope when you hear me say that, that you're not thinking that I'm saying I'm not, that I don't disobey this commandment.

And I hope you're not thinking that you don't disobey that commandment. I'm hoping that we're seeing that with each of these commandments, that we break them continuously. We don't think about that when we think of them just as external behaviors, but when we apply those attitudes to our hearts, we see how that attitude of being a thief permeates into us.

[8 : 02] So that raises the question, though. Why? What is it that drives us to have a thief's heart? Well, the book of James gives us an idea in James chapter 4, and this is what James, the brother of Jesus, says.

He says, What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You desire, but you do not have, so you kill. You covet, but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight.

You do not have because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures. What's James saying?

James is saying, he's pointing us to twisted desires in our hearts. The C.I. says, They come from your desires that battle within you. You cannot get what you want.

You spend what you get on your pleasures. Stealing, or James applies it also to murder and quarreling and coveting, that we'll look at in a couple weeks. They're symptoms.

[9 : 04] They're not causes. And they're symptoms of misplaced desire. Really, actually, commandments 3 through 10 flow from commandments 1 and 2 about idolatry.

And we steal because we value something more than we value God. That's what idolatry is, that we see something other than God as our ultimate. And we see that idea clearly throughout the whole Bible as well.

Maybe one of the most clear places is in Genesis chapter 3. What happens in Genesis chapter 3? Bible quiz time.

What happens in Genesis chapter 3? We see Adam and Eve sin. If you're not familiar with this story, God has prepared a home for Adam and Eve.

And they have everything they need. They have shelter. They have sustenance. They have company. They even have a purpose. They have work to do to tend and to care for the garden.

[10 : 06] But there's just one command. And what's that command? You shall not eat from the fruit of the tree in the center of the garden. And then what happens? Satan comes to Eve and he tempts her.

He gets her to doubt God's goodness. And he gets her to doubt God's commands. And he says, talking about eating of this fruit, God knows that when you eat of it, your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.

So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food and that it was a delight to the eyes and that the tree was desired to make one wise, she took its fruit and ate. And she also gave some to her husband who was with her and he ate.

Do you see the desire here? Be like God. Good for food. Delight to the eyes. Desire to make one wise. This idea that we're driven by our desires was true in Eve's day.

It was true in James' day. And it's true in our day. But think about it. Satan's false promise to Eve was that she would be like God.

[11 : 10] Well, just a few verses before this is recorded, Genesis says that then God said, let us make man in our own image, after our likeness. So God created man in his own image. In the image of God, he created him.

Male and female, he created them. Eve was already like God. She was made in his image. She reflected who God was. And if you keep reading from there, Genesis talks about all the food that they have to eat and the beauty of their garden.

And so Eve was tempted because the, I almost said apple. We don't know what type of fruit it was. But the fruit was good for food. She already had food. It was a delight to the eyes.

She already had beauty all around her. It was desirable for making her wise. The only thing that helped her with wisdom was knowing good and evil. She already knew good. All she learned about was evil.

And that is sort of the negative side of the equation. But she dropped everything good that she had in order to reach for something that she already had.

[12 : 12] And didn't get it. It's like taking a handful of good produce and dropping it to reach for thin air and smoke. And contrast this with Jesus.

In Philippians chapter 2, Paul, who wrote the letter to the Philippians, quotes a poem. Probably an early creed or maybe an early hymn.

And it says this about Jesus. It says, Do you see this?

What did Jesus have? He was in the form of God. Now that word form, when we translate it in English, it almost sounds like Jesus just sort of appeared to be like God. But that word form in the Greek, it's the word *morphe*.

And it means not just your physical likeness, but an external likeness that lines up with an essence. It's a word we get metamorphose for, for example.

[13 : 27] And when we see a caterpillar turn into a butterfly, we don't just say, Oh, it's in the form of a butterfly, but it's really still a caterpillar. No, it's a butterfly. It's everything about it has changed, including its inner essence.

And so that's what it's talking about, that Jesus really was God. But he didn't count that equality with God as something to be grasped, something to be held on to, something to look at and shout mine to.

It means that even though he was God, he didn't cling to it. It was rightfully his, but he allowed himself to be made weak, to be made a servant, to be made human, to be killed, even death on a cross.

You see, remember the law is supposed to make us like God, to shape us into his image bearers. And we can't be thieves because that is the exact opposite of who Jesus was.

Thieves take what is not rightfully theirs. Jesus gave up what was rightfully his. Okay, we draw in and he gave out.

[14 : 34] And he did it for us. He suffered for our sakes. That's why he didn't claim what was rightfully his. And I want to look at three examples of this in his life.

Places where we can see Jesus overcoming that sin of being a thief. That sin that we see in our lives. Three places. Let's do this like in a court.

Exhibit A. Is that what you say? Evidence A? Exhibit A. Temptation in the wilderness. So right before Jesus' public ministry, God led him, God's spirit led him into the wilderness.

He fasted for 40 days and he was tempted by Satan. Actually, there's a lot of parallel between this temptation and the temptation of Adam and Eve. And at one point during that temptation, Matthew records this in Matthew chapter 4, verses 8 to 10.

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. All this I will give to you, he said, if you bow down and worship me.

[15 : 40] Jesus said to him, away from me, Satan, for it is written, worship the Lord your God and serve him only. What does Satan tempt Jesus with? The glory of the world, all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor.

And just like his promise to Eve, this is something that already rightfully belongs to Jesus. You know, Jesus could have marched down from heaven and taken the whole world back by force.

But he didn't. Instead, he chose a path that he came to lay down his life and to bring the world back to himself through the cross. Really, Satan's offer here is a chance for Jesus to change his mind.

To take back what really was rightfully his, but without having to go through the cross. And what's Jesus' response? He quotes scripture, specifically from Deuteronomy chapter 6, verse 13.

But it really resonates with the first two commandments that we looked at in Exodus 20. Worship the Lord your God and serve him only. So in response to Satan's offer, Satan's offer was, Jesus, you'll get this if you only worship me.

[16 : 53] Jesus instead affirms God's place as the only one deserving of worship. Jesus here is acting like Adam and Eve should have.

He's acting as a foil to them and an example to us. And we can avoid falling into this sin by affirming God's place as our core.

As the only one person, the only one being or object deserving of worship above everything else. And we've talked about worship and idolatry a fair bit in this series.

I talked about it the last two times that I was up. So let's move on to another exhibit. Exhibit B. So fast forward from the very beginning of Jesus' public ministry to the very end.

And Jesus is praying in the Garden of Gethsemane. The night before his betrayal and his arrest and ultimately his crucifixion. Sorry, the night of his betrayal and the night before his crucifixion.

[17 : 58] Now you might be familiar with this prayer. Jesus knows already what's coming. The agony of the cross and the separation that will come between him and his father is already being felt.

It's palpable on Jesus. And so he went and he prayed. I'll read kind of the whole passage from Matthew chapter 26.

Jesus takes his inner three, his closest three disciples, and he takes them to a place called Gethsemane. And he said to his disciples, sit here while I go over there and pray.

And taking with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, my soul is very sorrowful, even to death.

Remain here and watch with me. And going a little further, he fell on his face and prayed, saying, my father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me.

[18 : 53] He's talking about the suffering that's coming. The cup of God's wrath that would fall on Jesus. Nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will. And he came to the disciples and found them sleeping.

He said to Peter, so could you not watch me with me one hour? Watch and pray that you may not enter temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.

Again, for a second time, he went away and prayed. My father, if this cannot pass unless I drink, your will be done. And again, he came and found them sleeping for their eyes were heavy.

So leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words again. Not your will, not my will. Don't get that one backwards.

Not my will, but yours be done. What's Jesus saying? He's asking his father if there's another way to accomplish what he was sent to earth to accomplish.

[19 : 49] But ultimately, he affirms God's plan. Not my will, but yours be done. Did Jesus have to die?

Certainly not. I mean, later in this same chapter, Jesus even says that he could call down an army of angels to defend himself. But then he says, but how then would the scriptures be fulfilled? So no, Jesus didn't have to die unless he wanted God's plan to move forward.

And even faced with that choice between the cross and God's plan, he committed to God's plan. But why?

What motivated him to continue despite the pain that that plan, that path would bring? Let's look at our third exhibit.

Unlike the first two, the third example isn't directly from the life of Jesus. It isn't from the gospels. It isn't directly from the telling of the story from his life.

[20 : 51] But it's an early Christian looking back on Jesus and describing him. And it's in Hebrews chapter 12, verse 2. And the author of Hebrews encourages us to look to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy who was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

What's going on here? How is Jesus continuing to walk towards the cross? It's because he wasn't looking at the cross.

It's because he was looking at the joy set before him. In other words, he bought into God's perspective, an eternal perspective. He didn't look at what was just ahead of him, but he looked beyond that.

He looked at his life as his father looked at his life. We often focus on just what's in front of us. I heard an old joke about this village that had a very unintelligent child in it.

We'll put it that way. And this child was famous for it. And so there was a visitor in the town, and he was at the barbershop getting his, his haircut. And while this visitor is in, the kid walks in, and the barber says, oh, man, you got to, this is what our town is famous for, this kid.

[22 : 11] You got to watch him. Look. And so the barber turns to the kid, and he holds out a quarter and a loonie. And he asks the kid, which one do you want? And the kid takes the quarter.

And he says, oh, what a stupid kid. And the kid runs away. And a little while later, the visitor's walking through the streets, and he sees that kid. And he says, hey, come over here. Why do you take the quarter? And the kid says, well, the first time I take the loonie, the joke ends, and I don't get any more money.

And that's what happens when we look only at the short term, when we see just what's in front of us, and we're not looking at an internal perspective.

Okay, in that case, it's not an internal perspective. That kind of cheapens it a little bit. But the same idea is true that when we're looking just at what's in front of us, we make poor decisions. But Jesus had an eternal perspective.

He had God's perspective. So we see in these pictures evidence of Jesus' character that we talked about in Philippians 2, that it's completely antithetical to stealing, not just in the strict legal sense of what is stealing, of taking something from someone else, but in the much deeper sense of laying claim to something that isn't actually ours.

[23 : 27] Now, I want to cycle back to those three stories. And I want to look at what they tell us about stealing specifically and how we can look at them and how we can reflect Jesus' actions.

So first of all, we said that Jesus affirmed God's place during the temptation. What does this have to do with stealing? Do you remember why James told us that we steal?

That we're intoxicated with our own desire. And I think there's another component to it as well. We think that we deserve it. We take things that we think that we deserve.

I deserve my phone back from Dave, so I take it back. And his computer is interest. But when we have a commitment to God's place, it eliminates the false claims that we have.

We understand the role of God in the universe and how everything belongs to him. And claiming something that isn't ours isn't right. And holding God's place destroys that claim that we have.

[24 : 32] It even allows us not to act on the true claims we have, just like Jesus didn't act on the true claim of him being in the form of God. So it's able to look and say, yes, I do deserve this, but I'm not going to take it.

Because to take it takes away from God's glory. Remember, Jesus had a true claim to the thrones of the earth without having to go through the cross. And yet, he passed that up because he didn't want to take from God's glory.

So how do we hold God in his place? You know, sometimes in the Bible, in order to picture God, it talks about authorities in our life. Well, what kind of person in authority is easy to follow?

For me, there's two things. There's two things that make someone easy to follow. First of all, they have clear authority and competence. I can actually trust them to lead me somewhere because I know that they can get us there.

And the second thing, they have a compassion for those that follow behind them. So I know they're not just, yes, they can get to where they're going, but they can also care for me in the process. Okay, so these two things, these are the type of people that allow me to say, yeah, I'm all in in following you.

[25 : 41] But compassion and clear authority. To put it another way, it's easy to follow someone who has a ton of compassion for you. But if they can't get you anywhere, then you don't want to follow them.

So if I was falsely accused and brought to court, I wouldn't bring my wife in as my lawyer. I know that she cares for me and she wants the best for me. But I haven't seen her in action, but I imagine she's a pretty crummy lawyer because she's never studied law at all.

So I don't want her as my lawyer. I want someone who has competency and a compassion for me. And don't we see this exemplified in God? I mean, if we actually look at who he is, he's very easy to follow because his compassion is clear.

And every time that we question God's compassion, whether he, we question whether he actually loves us, we just need to look to the cross. What he gave to bring us back to him.

And he can't think of the cross without thinking then of the empty tomb. Jesus defeated death and rose again. That's a clear evidence of competency, of power, of authority.

[26 : 47] You know, Christians throughout the centuries have lived under corrupt governments, totalitarian regimes that threatened their very life. And they looked at those leaders and they said, you know, this leader, they have authority over every aspect of my life.

They have authority to end my life. And yet they always looked and said, but their authority ends with my death or their death. And Jesus, his authority extends beyond death because he defeated death.

He didn't just die for us, but he rose again. And so his authority is complete. Do not fear those who can only take your life, but fear the one who has authority over life and death.

So Jesus is easy to follow because he has clear compassion for us, but he also has clear authority. So we can hold him in his place.

How about the second evidence? In Gethsemane, Jesus demonstrated a clear commitment to God's plan. So that idea of holding God in his place leads us to the second concept of saying, not my will, but yours be done, of a commitment to God's plan.

[28 : 07] It doesn't mean too much if God is in authority, but he isn't actually moving something. He doesn't have a plan. And we see over and over again that God does have a plan, that he is bringing his will to pass in the world.

In fact, that's one of the reasons why I love spending time in the Old Testament, reading through the Old Testament narratives like we're doing in this series. Because the Old Testament tells us, like I said, narratives.

They're stories, and they lead us through the plan of God leading to the redemption of the world. And when you read through some of these stories, you're like, what in the world is going on? Like, can you imagine being Joseph in Joseph's story?

Like, it just goes from bad to worse, to worse, to worse. And he's in a well, and then he's a servant, a slave, and then he's in prison, and then he's in a prison where people are getting executed, and it just goes bad and bad and bad.

And then you see God's plan taking shape, because through all of that adventure, if you want to put it loosely, Joseph is shaped, his character has changed, his brothers are brought to repentance, he's put in position to save not only his own family, but also kind of that whole region from starvation after a great famine.

[29 : 11] So we see in these stories God's plan. And you know what? Some of those stories, they don't have a clear beginning and end. They don't have this happen, and then here's the redemption within that story, because they're part of a larger story of God bringing out the nation of Israel, and through Israel, bringing Jesus to be the Savior of the world, and bringing redemption back to earth.

And so we see this plan of God as we look over the entire narrative of Scripture. But the problem is, is we are in the middle of those stories. In our lives, we're in the middle of the story, and we look around, and we're like, I don't see what God is doing.

I don't see his plan. So we desire what we don't have, and we have that thieves' attitude when we think that we need to go and make our own path. When we feel like there isn't a plan, and we're never going to get what we want.

But here's the thing. God is working. God is in control, and we need to trust him. Now, that isn't always easy, and I know that from experience.

And if we look at what Jesus did, Jesus didn't just stand in Gethsemane and say, stoically and stone-faced, God, Father, I trust you, and I'm just going to do what you say.

[30 : 26] He, it's okay to beg and to plead. Jesus sweat drops of blood, anticipating the agony that he would feel. And he called to his Father for another way.

So he struggled, in one sense, with that. He didn't just blindly accept who was coming, but he demonstrated that his trust in his Father was greater than anything that faced him.

So it's okay to beg and to plead for another way, but we ultimately say, not my will, but yours be done. And we can do that because we can have a commitment to God's plan, because we can look at what God has done in history, and we can look at the compassion that he showed us through the cross, and we can trust in him no matter where we see the path leading us.

And that leads us, I guess, to another problem, that we can't see the whole path. There are obstacles in the path of our lives that block our vision, and we can't see where we're heading.

We can't see the finish line. And so we know we need to go this way. We know we need to follow the path, but we don't know where it's going. We see an obstacle.

[31 : 37] We say, are you just leading me into destruction? And that's why, like Jesus, we need to have God's perspective. Remember what it said in Hebrews? For the joy set before him, he endured the cross.

What was that joy? What was the joy that motivated Jesus? It was seeing the fulfillment of his kingdom. See, God shared his, Jesus shared his father's view of history and his greatest desire, and unless we share these, we'll constantly fight against God's plan, and we'll try to take things by force.

We will start to execute our claims on prestige or wealth or materials or things like that, or we'll desire other people's opinion, or we'll desire comfort above following God's plan, and we will work on our timing, not on God's, because we don't see where he's leading us.

But we need to see the whole plan. We need to see the whole path. We can't just look at the first obstacle and say, God's just leading me into destruction. I need to take my own way. When I was growing up, I used to do a lot of distance running.

My dad, who's here this morning, drove me around the entire provinces of Alberta and British Columbia, and one of the races, my favorite race to go to, was called the Grail Quest, and it was called that because it was loosely based on Monty Python's quest for the Holy Grail, and if you have no idea how a race lines up with that type of sketch comedy, I'll talk to you about it later, I guess.

[33 : 02] Anyway, so it was my favorite race, and it was in Fort St. John, B.C. Has anyone been up to Fort St. John? Three of you. Great. So Fort St. John looks a little bit different than Squamish does, even though it's in the same province.

Fort St. John is fairly flat, except that there's kind of a valley, and I can't even remember, I think it's on the southwest side of the city, and so one of the highways into the city, you climb up this huge valley, and that's where the race was.

It was right on top of the plane, and we'd start on the plane, and then it was five kilometers, and you would spend the first four kilometers running down the valley. It's a trail run, so you're just kind of doing switchbacks down into the trees, and then at kilometer four, there's a left turn, and you go straight up, and you make up all of the elevation that you just lost over the last four kilometers, and you go straight up in about 150 meters, and then you have about 800 meters loop in the field.

So I remember the first time I did this race, and I'm running along, and it's downhill, so just flying and going great, and I probably went out a little bit too fast, so at the four kilometer mark, I'm pretty tired, and I come around this left turn, and there's just this hill.

Now, it's not... You guys are, like, in the mountains, so, you know, it's not the same. It's not, like, looking up the chief or anything like that, but you're tired, and you just see these steps carved into this hill, and I'm like, well, there's no way that they mean for me to go down there.

[34 : 27] Like, that's out of the question. So I start to look, and I see this little tiny path. Most of the other paths have tape around them, so, you know, that's not the way to go, but I look, I'm like, no, I'm not supposed to go up the hill, so then I find this little path, and long story short, I got lost, and when I finally found the trail again, I had lost a lot of time.

I was way, way behind, and it didn't go so well. So the next year, I come, and I'm prepared. I knew the path. I was prepared for the hill.

I didn't take the first kilometers, the four kilometers so fast, and when I came around that corner, I drove up because I saved my energy, and I made it through and finished the race.

That story took a little bit longer than I anticipated. What's the point of that story? The point is that often our lives feel like the first time that I ran that race. When you come around, you're running, you're running, you're doing fine in life, and you turn a left corner, and you're like, that's a huge challenge.

That's going to hurt. There is no way that's part of God's plan for me. And so you start to look for your own way. You start to look for another little path that you can take, but the problem is those paths, they never lead us to the finish line.

[35 : 43] They never take us where we want to go. And if we had God's perspective, to stretch the analogy a little bit, to see where the finish line actually was, that it's over that hill, and that we can do the hill, we can climb the hill, and it is going to hurt, and it is painful, but that's the only way to get to the finish line.

That's going to allow us to continue to run the race, which is, I feel justified saying that, because that's an analogy that Paul uses about the Christian life. So we can't stand at the base of the hill and try and lie and cheat and steal our way out so we don't have to climb the valley, because to get to the finish line, we have to.

And that's the perspective that Jesus had. He had an eternal perspective. He looked at the cross, and he looked beyond the cross, to the finish line, to the joy set before him, to the fulfillment of God's kingdom, where we are brought back into relationship with God.

And when we have God's perspective, we know where the finish line is, and we know that we're never going to get there another way. So sure, we can follow one for another way a while, but we'll have to eventually turn around.

A turnaround, that's, by the way, the literal meaning of repentance, and go back and get back on the path that God is calling us to. And you know, sometimes left to ourselves, we even picture the finish line wrong.

[37 : 02] The finish line isn't actually finishing the race, it's just not making our legs hurt. It's just getting to a certain level of status. It's just this, but that will never lead to ultimate fulfillment.

Those are the faulty desires that James is talking about. Sometimes the finish line is just prestige. It's someone else's opinion of us. It's superficial happiness, or comfort, or power, or love.

It isn't the joy that's set before Jesus. I entitled this sermon, The God Who Gives, and I haven't really said much about what God gives, but this is where it comes in, in that the finish line is that God gives us what we need.

God fulfills us completely because he created us, and I didn't mention it too much because we talked about it before, but that's the finish line. What he created us for, relationship with him in every sense.

And when we have his perspective, we run towards that. That's what we're created for. That's what we really crave. That's what it means to have God's perspective. So when we don't honor God's place, when we don't acknowledge his plan, when we don't share his perspective, that eternal perspective, then we act on our own desires.

[38 : 11] We steal to get what we want. Or if we're more sophisticated, we manipulate others. We take, we covet, which we'll talk about in two weeks. We want people's respect. We want people's love. We want comfort.

But Jesus says, seek ye first the kingdom of God, and all these things will be added to you. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray.

Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray.