

Leaders' Notes

Dear Growth Group Leader:

One of your essential skills as a growth group leader is listening. Unfortunately, the Christian stereotype that we are taught to follow is to be the answer man, not the listening friend. In *Making Small Groups Work*, Cloud and Townsend quote Proverbs 18:13, "He who answers before listening—that is his folly and his shame." How can we be better listeners?

Your first statement after someone has shared his or her heart should be a validation of that statement, not advice or an answer. Sometimes we want to encourage people to think differently so we tell them their feelings are wrong. Here are some examples from the book:

- "Oh, you don't really feel that way."
- "Don't say that, God loves you."
- "That isn't that bad."
- "That's not true. You *are* really cute."

Instead, we should say something like:

- "I can see that you feel awful about this."
- "Sounds like you feel totally forsaken by God."
- "It feels terrible to you."

Surely there are times to build up people in their strength and to question their negative attitudes about themselves. We do need to remind them of God's love and ever-present help. The point is that before we give them answers, we need to let them know that we have heard their needs and that it is okay that they express those feelings in the group.

Try to give plenty of time for discussion. If someone shares a deep need, feel free to go off of the scheduled discussion to deal with this more. Use reflective statements, that is, repeat back what someone has said to you using your own words. That way the speaker knows that you are listening and can correct your perception if you aren't understanding.

Blessings,

Pastor David

Freedom of unselfishness

Exodus 20:15

Examples of stealing

1. Taking property or money by stealth or force.
2. Taking by fraud.
3. Reneging on your word.
4. Allowing a mistake in your favor to stand.
5. Tax evasion.
6. Unfair business practices.
7. Welfare and insurance fraud.
8. Gambling.
9. Robbing God of his property.

Why stealing is a problem

Stealing shows a lack of love.

Ephesians 4:28

Love sacrifices self for others, not others for self.

Philippians 2:3-4

Stealing to gain admiration makes no sense.

Proverbs 19:4

Stealing shows a lack of integrity.

Luke 16:10

Stealing shows a lack of contentment.

1 Timothy 6:6-10, Ecclesiastes 5:10, Hebrews 13:5-6

Stealing shows a lack of faith.

Proverbs 23:4-5, Philippians 4:19, Malachi 3:8-18

Home Bible Study

Freedom of unselfishness

Getting started

1. Did any part of the sermon make you think? Was there anything with which you strongly agreed or disagreed? Was there anything that was new to you?
2. Have you ever had anything stolen from you? What was your reaction? How did it make you feel?

Hopefully this will be a good discussion starter as well as an opportunity to consider the costs of stealing in this sinful world.

3. Why do you think people steal? What justifications have you heard for stealing?

I mentioned some of these in my sermon. It's amazing how inventive we can be when we want to justify our sin.

Going deeper

4. Read 1 Corinthians 6:9-11. What are the consequences of stealing?

The ultimate consequence is that it cuts us off from God. God loves us but he also loves all those that we could steal from. He will not, by his nature cannot, have fellowship with sin.

5. What should we do if we have stolen something?

The law mentions restitution. We should admit our sin of stealing and make it right. Zacchaeus committed to paying back four times the amount of his thefts.

6. Read Ephesians 4:28. How does this passage relate to the eighth commandment?

This passage shows how stealing is the opposite of our responsibility to love others. Instead of stealing what belongs to someone else, we should be gaining dignity by working and also growing generous in our ability and willingness to help others.

7. Read Malachi 3:8-9. Pastor Stone has been fond of saying in this study that we are not under the Law but under grace. Is it still possible for us to rob God? If so, how?

Yes. Even if we are not required to slavishly give a tenth of our income as a tithe, 100% of our income and possessions belong to God. When we use them for our own purposes without giving generously to God's work and to help those in need, then we are robbing God. I think sometimes people are relieved to learn that I don't think a tithe should be the standard giving for Christians; however, they shouldn't be. We should not only feel an obligation but a desire to give at least a tithe. If not, then we really don't have much of a heart for generous giving.

8. How do we know how much to give to the Lord's work? How do we know how much to give to help others?

We are so blessed in our country. We should be giving far more than the average Christian does now. Our giving at First Brethren is above average. That's good because average is terrible. We should even be willing to change our lifestyle in order to give more.