

**Aim:** To consider the following: What is stealing? What if you find something? What if you have stolen?

**Have you ever had something of yours stolen or damaged? How did you feel?**

**Why do you think people steal?** (Jealousy, anger, need, they don't anyone will know and/or care)

**Why do people damage other people's property?** (Anger, carelessness, to get attention)

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The Bible clearly says that stealing is wrong – in fact, it's one of the 10 Commandments. Exodus 20:15<sub>NLT</sub> says "You must not steal"

The second half of the Commandments are all about treating people the way we want to be treated; and as we discussed earlier, stealing hurts people.

A couple of weeks ago we learnt how Satan uses ads on TV, shop displays and magazines to make us want more stuff; to get us to break the 10<sup>th</sup> Commandment by coveting things. The 8<sup>th</sup> is another step in the same direction; not only do we covet things, but if we can't buy them for whatever reason, then we are tempted to steal them.

**Do we need to steal?** No. God has promised to provide what we need; if you've prayed about something and God hasn't provided it yet, then either God wants you to wait, or God knows that it's not a good thing for you to have right now.

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**So stealing is wrong, but what if you find something and you don't know who it belongs to?**

- If you can find the owner then you should return it – otherwise you are stealing. I collect books with true stories about children, and I can think of more than one where a young person has seen someone drop a coin and they have picked it up and returned it; something good always happened because of their honesty.
- If you can't find the owner and it is something of value then you should hand it in to the school office, or a church leader, or the police depending on where you are. If the owner is not found after a certain time, then you will probably be given it.

**What if you see something growing through a fence?**

The law says if it's on their side of the fence then it belongs to them so taking it would be stealing; but if it's on your side of the fence, or on the outside of the fence, then taking it isn't stealing. However, most gardeners would prefer that they were asked first, and if they grow lots of whatever it is, then they are usually happy to share, and very happy that someone actually bothered to ask.

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**What should you do if you've taken something that wasn't yours?**

**Read Ephesians 4:28 – this is Paul is talking to Christians.**

Do you remember Zacchaeus? Zacchaeus was a dishonest tax collector, but he changed when he met Jesus.

**Read what Zacchaeus said in Luke 19:8** (*Meanwhile, Zacchaeus stood before the Lord and said, "I will give half my wealth to the poor, Lord, and if I have cheated people on their taxes, I will give them back four times as much!"*<sub>NLT</sub>)

The change in Zacchaeus happened before Paul wrote the of Ephesians – but Zacchaeus was doing just what Paul said to do and even more.

**So what should you do if you've stolen something?**

- Ask God for forgiveness
- Return it
- Apologise to the person/people involved

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**How do you feel when you know you've done something wrong?** (guilty, bad, sick etc.)

I can guarantee, that if you ask God for forgiveness, and make it right with the people who've wronged as well, then you well, then you will feel just the opposite – you will feel relieved and happy, and you will know that you have done the right thing.