

Good morning everyone, my name is Mark and I'm one of the pastors at North Shore Alliance Church. This morning I'm going to give the last message in our preaching series through the Ten Commandments.

When the series began 10 weeks ago, I posed the following question: *what is the purpose of the 10 Words?* It seems a simple enough question. Ten commandments, ten rules—isn't this about regulating behaviour? Well, "no," and "yes." God's purpose in speaking these Ten Words can be seen in His introduction to them; in Exodus 20:2 God said, *"I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery."*

God was not saying, *"I saved you, I own you, and you'd better do what I say;"* instead, God was reminding Israel who He was and who they were. *I am the Lord your God, the One who rescued you from slavery, and you are now a freed people*—the Ten Words need to be understood in light of these truths. God didn't rescue Israel from Pharaoh only to enslave them under an oppressive set of rules—the Ten Words were given to protect Israel's freedom, and ours.

Each of the Ten Words reveal something about who God is, and, who we are. When we ignore the Ten Words, we go against the fundamental nature of reality—we distort *"the way things are,"* as well as *"who we are meant to be."*

This morning we come to the 10th Word, and while it stands on its

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Enns, *NIV Application Commentary: Exodus*, 424.

<sup>2</sup> J.I. Packer, *The Ten Commandments*, 67.

own, we shall see that it also serves as an important bookend to the Ten. At this time I want to encourage you to turn with me in your Bible to Exodus 20:17. I have got the text on the screen behind me and at this time, I want to invite you to read the text with me out loud:

*"You shall not covet your neighbour's house. You shall not covet your neighbour's wife, or his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbour."*

**1. What is coveting?** As we explore the 10th Word, let's begin by addressing the most basic question—*what is coveting?*

Let me give you two definitions by two different authors:

- #1: "Coveting...refers to an inward desire that, if fanned, will lead to action."<sup>1</sup>
- #2: "The word for 'covet' conveys the thought of seeking dishonest and dishonourable gain. Coveting appears here as a first cousin to envy: you see what someone else has, and you want to grab it for yourself."<sup>2</sup>

We covet when we cultivate the desire for something that belongs to another. Over time we become unsatisfied with what we have, which leads to bitterness and resentment, and/or, we act to secure what we want, "need," or think we deserve. The Bible is filled with examples of such action; here are just a few:

- Cain coveted the favour God bestowed upon his righteous brother Abel; he became bitter, angry, and resentful, and ultimately attacked Abel and killed him.
- In coveting Esau's first-born status, Jacob waited until an opportune time, took advantage of Esau, and stole his birthright for himself.
- Jacob's two wives, Leah and Rachel, battled for his affection. Rachel had won Jacob's heart, but she was childless—she coveted Leah's fertility, who bore Jacob child after child.
- Jacob's sons coveted the special attention he gave to their brother Joseph; they ended up throwing Joseph into a well, selling him into slavery, and then telling their father that Joseph had been killed by an animal.

Even King David's sin against Bathsheba and Uriah began with a violation of the 10th Word. One evening, David was up on his palace roof-top when he saw Bathsheba bathing. David already had many wives, but he noticed Bathsheba's beauty and sent men to enquire after her. He discovered that Bathsheba was married to Uriah—one of his soldiers, who was away fighting against Israel's enemies.

David sent men to get Bathsheba, he slept with her, and she later sent word that she was pregnant. David's sin began with a breaking of the 10th Word (*he coveted his neighbour's wife*), he then proceeded to break the 8th and 7th Words (*he took another man's wife and slept with her*) then, in trying to cover Bathsheba's pregnancy, he broke the 9th Word (*you shall not bear false witness*).

David brought Uriah back from the enemy lines—under the guise of hearing a report from the front lines—got him drunk, and then sent him home in the hopes that he would sleep with Bathsheba and make

her pregnancy appear “legitimate.” When his cover-up plan failed, David broke Word #6 (*you shall not murder*)—he sent Uriah back into battle and prearranged for him to be put in a situation where he would be killed by the enemy.

The Bible is filled with examples of coveting; so too are our own lives.

**illus:** I have a long history with the 10th Word; looking back I can see it began in my first years of elementary school.

I was quite satisfied with who I was and how I looked until I was surrounded by a classroom of students. Very quickly I realized that I was short—shorter than all the boys, save one, and shorter than most of the girls. Now clearly height has very little to do with aptitude for learning—I was in school after all, not auditioning for the NBA—but nevertheless, my small stature was of huge concern to me.

Why couldn't I be more like Jason or Dave? Without realizing it, I had begun my journey down the road to coveting; I wanted to be something I was not—tall.

As I got older, I also began to pay more attention to what I had and didn't have. In High School years, my primary sport was tennis; I played tennis for hours a day, I watched every match that was broadcast, and knew the strengths, weakness, and stats of all the top players.

In 1988, Nike came out with a tennis shoe that made my head spin—the Air Tech Challenge. The shoe was white with orange and green highlights; it was a thing of beauty, and it just happened to be the

shoe of my favourite player at the time: Andre Agassi. He had the kind of game, fashion, and hair, that really stood out.

It's funny, the shoes I was wearing at the time were just fine until the moment I saw the Air Tech Challenge. It was love at first sight! I knew intellectually that these shoes wouldn't make me a better player, but that didn't stop me from obsessing about them—I had to have them. I found a picture of them in my tennis magazine, cut it out and tacked it to my wall. I thought about them, dreamed about them, saved for them, and when I finally had enough money I bought my very own pair.

They looked good, felt great, and made me feel happy, but not for long. After all, how could I possibly remain happy with the Air Tech Challenge, after the Air Tech Challenge 2 came out? As Nike continued to crank out new models, I needed the latest in order to rekindle the magic.

Throughout my life I have alternated between wanting things I don't have, and wanting to be someone I'm not. We can covet a person's bank account, their stuff, their personality, their looks, their relationship status, their gifts, abilities, and opportunities. We can covet a person's successes, and even their weaknesses—have you ever wished you had someone else weaknesses or faults instead of the ones you are dealing with?

When I became a pastor, I was very aware that some pastors were better leaders and preachers than I was. Some had gifts I didn't have, influence I didn't have, and opportunities I didn't have but wanted. I was constantly comparing myself to others and frequently feeling like I wasn't nearly as far ahead as others were. In my darker

moments I would dream about what it would be like to be someone else, someone I admired, someone I envied. I became less and less satisfied with where I was, who I was, and what God had given me. My insecurities drove my coveting, and my coveting deepened my insecurities.

Perhaps you can relate this morning. We covet when we cultivate the desire for something that belongs to another. Over time we become unsatisfied with who we are and what we have, which leads to bitterness and resentment, and/or, we begin to act to secure what we want, “need,” or think we deserve.

The question is...

**2. Why do we covet? Where does it come from?** I said earlier that Word #10 is an appropriate bookend to the Ten Words; let's take another look at Word #1.

Word #1 reads, “*You shall have no other gods before me.*” The 1st Word is first not only in terms of order, but also in terms of importance. By keeping this 1st Word, we position ourselves to keep the remaining 9; when we ignore the 1st Word, it's only a matter of time before we stray from the 9. While there is only one God, we make “gods” of many things. Martin Luther once said, “whatever your heart clings to and trusts in, that is properly your God.” Whatever we pursue, love, think about, dream about, worry about, look to, cling to, or trust in, just might be a rival god.

Tim Keller writes, “Anything can serve as a counterfeit god, especially the best things in life... The greater the good, the more likely we are to expect that it can satisfy our deepest needs and

hopes...[A rival god] is anything more important to you than God, anything that absorbs your heart and imagination more than God, anything you seek to give you what only God can give.”<sup>3</sup>

The 1st Word exposes our tendency to look to other “gods” to meet our needs and satisfy our desires. Yahweh does not prohibit other gods because He is insecure, but rather because He knows that false “gods” cannot love, protect, strengthen, save, or satisfy us. God wants us to be satisfied and He knows that **we will not be satisfied until we are satisfied in Him**. We were made *by* God and *for* God.

Darrell Johnson writes, “Break the first commandment and we always and automatically break the tenth. We become souls running on empty, desiring anything and everything that can fill ‘the hole in the soul.’ Is it any wonder that a post-Christian society like ours should increasingly become more and more materialistic, and more and more pleasure-oriented? Once we no longer find our satisfaction in God, we try to find it anywhere and everywhere else.”<sup>4</sup> We become addicted to what we think will satisfy us.

Coveting is a sign of a broken world, and, broken relationship with God. He created the world to be a place where our needs would be perfectly met by Him and one another; in such a world, satisfaction would be the norm, but we don’t live in Eden anymore.

Let me ask you this morning, what do you covet? What consumes your thoughts while awake and crowds your dreams when you sleep?

What are you looking to, clinging to, and trusting in to bring you satisfaction?

In the time remaining I want to address the positive side of the 10th Word. *How do we move from coveting to contentment?*

### 3. Moving From Coveting To Contentment

a. *We begin by trusting in God’s Sovereignty and Providence.* The Book of Exodus, and the rest of the Bible, describes God as One who is in relationship with people, a God who is good, a God who saves, a God who loves. Our situation might be radically different from ancient Israel, but God has not changed—as we turn to Him we find Someone we can trust our lives to.

James 4:2-3 says, “*You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God. 3 When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.*”

There is a certain arrogance in much of our coveting. By and large, we are quite confident that we know what we need, and, what will satisfy our desires. But most of the time, we are flying blind and don’t have a clue. God has a firm grip on this world, and, on our lives. He sees us, He knows what we need, and He is able to supply it. His job is to supply, our job is turn to Him in trust and ask.

<sup>3</sup> Timothy Keller, *Counterfeit Gods*, Introduction, xviii.

<sup>4</sup> Darrell Johnson, *Jealous For Our Freedom*, 78.

Moving from coveting to contentment begins with trust, and continues as...

**b.** We ask God to transform our desires that we might be satisfied in Him.

**illus:** A story is told of a man who was obsessed with collecting clocks. Grandfather clocks, grandmother clocks, cuckoo clocks, alarm clocks, digital clocks, analogue clocks, big, little, and medium size clocks—he was obsessed with collecting as many as possible. By day he thought about clocks, by night he dreamed about clocks. He visited antique dealers to buy old clocks, searched the shelves of department stores to buy the latest clocks, and scoured garage sales to find unwanted clocks.

When his house became too full, he built a warehouse to hold them. When he brought a new clock home, he would go out to the warehouse and undo the heavy duty padlock on the barbed wire fence surrounding it. Then, after ensuring that no one else was around, he would enter his warehouse, lock the door behind him and place the newly acquired clock in a vacant spot.

But every time he visited the warehouse, a voice haunted him. It was as though someone was whispering in his ear, *“Hans of Sweden has more clocks than you...Jillian of London has rarer clocks than you... If only you could get another clock, then you’d be happy.”*

One day the clock collector came to his warehouse with his latest prize. However, on this occasion, he noticed the absence of the tormenting voice; he was enjoying the silence, but his enjoyment

quickly turned to fear when he opened the warehouse door—someone was inside. He saw a tall, wiry fellow, and in his hands he held the most exquisite antique cuckoo clock—he had never seen its equal.

*“Who are you?”* demanded the clock collector. The man replied, *“Why, I’m a thief.”* And with these words the wiry fellow carried the cuckoo clock to a shelf, placed it gently, and gave it a quick dusting. *“Oh, don’t worry,”* the man said, *“I didn’t steal this clock; it’s mine, and it’s my gift to you.”* Though he had never seen him before, the clock collector froze as the wiry fellow spoke. This was the voice that whispered in his ear every time he visited the warehouse.

The clock collector cried out, *“You call yourself a thief, but a thief would steal my clocks, not add to my collection. What sort of thief are you?!”* The wiry fellow replied, *“Oh, I haven’t come to steal your clocks.”* *“You know my voice, don’t you? You’ve heard me many times before...”* With these words, he leaned in close and whispered *“Hans has more clocks, Jillian has rarer clocks, if only you could get another clock, then you would be happy.”* He continued *“I haven’t come to steal your clocks my friend. I’ve come to steal your contentment.”*<sup>5</sup>

We have believed the lie that we need **more** in order to be satisfied; the truth is that when we are satisfied in God, our thirst for “more” begins to fade. When the apostle Paul wrote to the church at Philippi, he was under house arrest. He was chained to a Roman soldier, confined in a small apartment, and utterly dependent on the provision

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<sup>5</sup> Scott Higgins.

of friends for food, clothes, and medicine. It was during this period that the Spirit inspired Paul to pen the following words:

*“I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. **I can do all this through him who gives me strength.**”*

The “him” to which Paul is referring is the Lord Jesus Christ. Contentment is not the by-product of the things we acquire, the things we accomplish, or even the people we become—contentment is the by product of a life lived **in Christ**. Elisabeth Elliot once said, “the secret [to contentment] is Christ in me, not me in a different set of circumstances”.

God spoke the 10th Word because He knows that **we will not be satisfied until we are satisfied in Him**. Psalm 37:4 says, “*Delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart.*” When we make the Lord our delight, He becomes our one great desire—the human heart has been made to be satisfied with nothing less than Himself.

Moving from coveting to contentment begins with trust, it continues as God transforms our desires, and it grows as we...

c. Choose to rejoice when other people experience blessing.

Contentment is something God gives, and, something we must cultivate. Coveting is most often fuelled by things like envy, jealousy, and comparison—they are very real enemies of contentment. But it is very difficult, if not impossible, to be envious while we are rejoicing in God’s provision for others.

Before Jesus began public ministry, the crowds were flocking to John the Baptist, but when Jesus began to teach and preach, the crowds shifted their attention. When John was asked about his shrinking popularity, he responded by saying:

*“A person can receive only what is given them from heaven. You yourselves can testify that I said, ‘I am not the Messiah but am sent ahead of him.’ The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom’s voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete. [Jesus] must become greater; I must become less.”<sup>6</sup>*

John was content with the role God had given him—to prepare the way for Jesus’ coming. When John saw God at work through Jesus, his purpose was realized and his joy was made complete.

If you want to fuel contentment in your life, instead of coveting what God extends to others, choose to rejoice. This act of rejoicing is an intentional spiritual discipline that I have practiced in my own life for years. When I hear that someone has been given a generous gift, or has gone on a lovely vacation, or been honoured in their workplace, or recently achieved a significant success, I pause to thank God—I celebrate His goodness! Choosing to celebrate frees us to enjoy

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<sup>6</sup> John 3:27-30.

God's goodness to others without having to compare and quantify  
God's goodness to us.

**Conclusion:** This morning Paul and the worship team are going to play a song for us entitled "*Crowns*". This song reminds us that in Christ we find life, in Christ we find hope, that Christ alone can satisfy the deepest longings of our hearts. As you listen to the song, respond in your heart to the Lord.

### **Worship**

### **Invitation to Prayer Ministry & Benediction**