God’s Heart on Stealing

• If you steal, you break one of God’s commandments.
  “You shall not steal” (Exodus 20:15).

• Stealing is contrary to God’s nature and the order that He created. If you are a Christian, you are not to be a thief because Christ, who lives in you, is not a thief.
  "Just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: ‘Be holy, because I am holy.’” (1 Peter 1:15–16).

• If you steal, you must make restitution beyond the initial value.
  “If the stolen animal is found alive in their possession—whether ox or donkey or sheep—they must pay back double” (Exodus 22:4).

• If you cannot make restitution, you should work for the one you have wronged until the debt is paid.
  “Anyone who steals must certainly make restitution, but if they have nothing, they must be sold to pay for their theft” (Exodus 22:3).

• If something you borrow is damaged, lost, or stolen, you should pay for it.
  “If anyone borrows an animal from their neighbor and it is injured or dies while the owner is not present, they must make restitution” (Exodus 22:14).

• If you find an item and do not try to locate its owner, you are stealing.
  “If you come across your enemy’s ox or donkey wandering off, be sure to return it” (Exodus 23:4).

• If you steal, it breaks God’s heart because it breaks the law of love.
  “The commandments, ‘You shall not commit adultery,’ ‘You shall not murder,’ ‘You shall not steal,’ ‘You shall not covet,’ and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law” (Romans 13:9–10).

Kinds of Thieves

• Taking anything that is not yours, no matter how insignificant
  “Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much” (Luke 16:10).

• Hoarding belongings and supplies
  “If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person?” (1 John 3:17).

• Imposing on another’s generosity
  “The wicked borrow and do not repay, but the righteous give generously” (Psalm 37:21).

• Evading prompt payment of debts
  “Do not say to your neighbor, ‘Come back tomorrow and I’ll give it to you’—when you already have it with you” (Proverbs 3:28).

• Violating a personal “honor system”
  “Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also as a matter of conscience” (Romans 13:5).

• Extortion of others in order to “save a dollar”
  “One who oppresses the poor to increase his wealth and one who gives gifts to the rich—all come to poverty” (Proverbs 22:16).

• Serving the god of materialism
  “No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money” (Matthew 6:24).

  “All a person’s ways seem pure to them, but motives are weighed by the LORD.” (Proverbs 16:2)

Key Verse to Memorize

“Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much.” (Luke 16:10)
Key Passage to Read
Titus 2:6–12

Alibis and Answers

• **Alibi**: “This will never be noticed or missed.”
  **Answer**: Even if you fool people, you can’t fool God. (Proverbs 15:3)

• **Alibi**: “I really don’t want to be involved in stealing, but I don’t want to lose my friend’s approval.”
  **Answer**: I am to live for God’s approval, not for the approval of people. (Galatians 1:10)

• **Alibi**: “This is not really dishonest because they owe it to me.”
  **Answer**: I owe it to others to always do what is most honorable and loving. (Romans 13:10)

• **Alibi**: “This is just the way the system operates.”
  **Answer**: Stealing is not the way God operates. (1 Corinthians 3:18–19)

• **Alibi**: “Once I get to the top, I will change my behavior.”
  **Answer**: I need to change my thinking (values); then my behavior will change. (Romans 12:2)

• **Alibi**: “If I can get ‘extra’ money, I’ll be able to give more to God.”
  **Answer**: God doesn’t want stolen money—He wants a contrite heart. (Micah 6:6–8)

• **Alibi**: “This will get me more cash to give to others.”
  **Answer**: God cares more about my character than my charity. (Proverbs 21:2–3)

How to “Catch the Thief” in Your Heart

• **Denounce wilful ignorance and seek to understand** God’s standards on stealing.
  “Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law” (Romans 13:10).

• **Admit that your heart is deceitful**, and ask God to reveal the ways in which you steal.
  “Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (Psalm 139:23–24).

• **Make a commitment to be totally honest**, no matter the consequence.
  “Ill-gotten treasures have no lasting value, but righteousness delivers from death” (Proverbs 10:2).

• **Know that everything you do is seen** by the eyes of a loving God.
  “For your ways are in full view of the LORD, and he examines all your paths” (Proverbs 5:21).

• **Think and pray before acting** to make sure you are not rationalizing.
  “All a person’s ways seem pure to them, but motives are weighed by the LORD” (Proverbs 16:2).

• **Be sensitive and accountable** to the Spirit of Christ within you.
  “Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit” (Galatians 5:25).

• **Make restitution.**
  “But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, ‘Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount’” (Luke 19:8).

• **Accept the forgiveness of God** and continue to grow in Christlikeness.
  “Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen” (2 Peter 3:18).

To Catch a “Little Thief”

10 Guidelines for Parents

1. Pray for discernment and wisdom when confronting the child.
2. Be sure your information and facts are correct.
3. Meet with the child in privacy.
4. Begin by assuring your love for the child.
5. Offer an opportunity for a confession by the child.
6. If the child doesn’t confess, confront with love and concern.  
   — Encourage the child to tell the reason for taking something that did not belong to him or her.
   — Appeal to the child’s conscience.
   “How would you feel if someone stole from you?”
   “How do you think God feels about stealing?”
7. Have the child return the item and give something extra to the rightful owner.
8. Give an example of an apology. The child can say,  
   “It was wrong of me to take this (name of item) that belongs to you. I want to return it and ask for your forgiveness.”
9. Ask the child, “What will you do the next time you are tempted to steal?”
10. Set boundaries and consequences for possible dishonesty in the future.
  “Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it.” (Proverbs 22:6)
Questions and Answers

“Can I download music off the Internet without paying for it?”

While listening to music or watching video recordings on the Internet is permitted within applicable laws, copying that music or video violates the artist’s ownership rights, deprives the artist of revenue, and undercuts the market value of his work.

Although copying off the Internet is a common crime, it is still illegal.

“Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.”

(Hebrews 4:13)

“Is it plagiarism if I paraphrase someone rather than quote them directly?”

If you use what someone else has written and present it as your own, whether it is an exact quotation or a paraphrase, it is considered plagiarism. This is an infringement of copyright and is stealing.

You are permitted to quote other sources for review, criticism, or to illustrate or support your own points, but care must be taken to quote accurately, in context, and to give credit for sources.

“The way of the guilty is devious, but the conduct of the innocent is upright.”

(Proverbs 21:8)