

Do Not Covet

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Sermon Series:
Deuteronomy

Deuteronomy 5:21

***Coveting
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more. But
more is never
enough!***

The enormously popular *Veggie Tales* is a children's video series featuring computer-animated garden vegetables that teach Biblical lessons. The *Veggie Tales*' story of *King George and the Duck* is an adaptation of the Biblical story of David and Bathsheba. You may recall the David and Bathsheba story. David spots Bathsheba sunbathing from his balcony and likes what he sees, so he puts her husband on the front lines of battle to eliminate him and marry Bathsheba.

How do you tell this sordid tale to children?

In the *Veggie Tales*' account, Larry the Cucumber plays the role of King George, while Bob the Tomato stars as his faithful servant Lewis. The privileges of royalty—kingdom expansion, castles, power and treasure—don't appeal to King George. What King George loves to do is bathe with his rubber duck. He sings "I love my duck" whenever he takes a bath with his rubber duck.

One day, while standing on his royal balcony in his purple robe and golden crown, King George peers through his binoculars and his eyes grow wide with desire. The king spots a rubber duck that looks exactly like his duck. The king covets this duck, exclaiming, "I want it!" His servant Lewis

tells the king the duck belongs to Billy, who happens to be bathing with his rubber duck on his balcony. "Are you saying I shouldn't have whatever I want," asks the king.

Lewis opens a large wardrobe overflowing with hundreds of identical rubber ducks, saying, "If I could just jog your memory, your honor, you already have quite a few ducks." King George shoots a condescending look at his unlearned servant and replies, "Those are yesterday's ducks."

King George and The Duck is a parable about coveting. Today, we're focusing on the command, "Do not covet." This tenth command makes clear, "Do not covet...anything that belongs to your neighbor" (Deuteronomy 5:21).

Covet is just a fancy word for the Biblical sin of envy. Coveting always wants more. But herein lies the problem: more is never enough!

Someone asked John D. Rockefeller, once the richest man in America, "How much money is enough?" He answered with a sneer, "Just a little bit more."

Not all desire is detrimental to us. Indeed desire, all by itself, can be a good thing. Desire motivates us to achieve and excel. The desire to learn propels people to seek after knowledge. The desire to succeed inspires people to work hard.

Just when I think I have sorted out my needs from wants, commercials assault my sensibilities.

Excessive desire becomes poisonous and toxic. Unbridled, unfettered desire kills the soul.

When Frederick the Great was preparing to declare war on a much smaller state, he instructed his secretary to prepare a document to announce his intention to go to war. The secretary returned with a draft copy of the war document, which began with the words, “When in the Providence of God it becomes necessary for one nation...” The king suddenly interrupted the secretary. “Stop the lying,” Frederick thundered. Simply say, “Frederick the Great wants more land.”

“Do not covet...anything that belongs to your neighbor.” Do not covet your neighbor’s house or spouse, land or servants.

The sin of coveting is not limited to people’s material possessions. We can covet anything that belongs to our neighbor, including a person’s popularity or reputation. We can covet a person’s musical or speaking ability.

Deuteronomy indicates these ten commandments are copied on two stone tablets (4:13). Most likely, the first five are etched on the first tablet while the second five are unscribed on the second tablet. All the commandments on this second tablet, save the tenth command, have to do with concrete action. The sixth command warns against murder, the seventh command prohibits adultery, the eighth command condemns stealing and the ninth command guards against lying. This tenth command

is distinct from all the others, because it addresses desire rather than concrete action.

Perhaps coveting culminates the list of commandments because it is the root of every other sin. Desire provokes coveting and coveting leads to murder, adultery, stealing and lying.

All the other sins on this second tablet are observable. But coveting acts in secret, hidden from public view. The secret sin of coveting produces observable sins: murder, adultery, lying and stealing.

When it comes to this command, I’m fine so long as I confine myself to looking strictly at my own life. I have everything I need. I have clothes to wear and food enough to eat. I have a roof over my head.

The problem arises whenever I do comparison shopping, when I compare myself to other people. Why can’t my house look like her house? Why can’t my car look like his car? Why can’t my kids act like her kids? Why can’t I receive a promotion like he obtains a promotion?

The wicked queen in the children’s classic, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, is content only when the magic mirror on the wall tells her she is the fairest of them all. She flies into a rage the day her mirror announces she is the second fairest of them all. The queen’s envy of Snow White consumes her. Eventually, it kills her.

More is never enough. More always wants a little bit more!

Advertisers pander to my covetous desires. Just when I think I have sorted out my needs from

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wants, commercials assault my sensibilities. All of a sudden, the things I want in life become the things I desperately need.

Have you ever noticed how people in commercials look so serenely happy? New software or new cars can't possibly deliver that much happiness.

Take mattress commercials. I've been noticing mattress commercials lately, now that Chris and I need to purchase a new mattress. Is it just my imagination or do the people in commercials look positively joyful as they shop for mattresses? Now, I understand sleeping on a new mattress can be a pleasurable experience, but the enthusiastic way people in commercials sit down and stretch out on showroom mattresses leads me to believe that everybody who shops for mattresses looks serenely happy. Somehow, I don't picture our mattress-shopping experience to be quite that euphoric.

The Biblical antidote for covet is contentment. Contentment is coming to the place in our lives when we realize that what we have is enough. Paul writes in his letter to the Philippians, "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 things through Christ who gives me strength" (Philippians 4:11-13).

Coveting, like a worm, cuts a hole into our hearts, draining away our contentment.

Coveting is almost always nearsighted. It blinds us to our own affluence and happiness. Isn't it possible that the same people we envy may be looking at our lives and coveting what we have?

Covetousness is craving more of what we have enough of already!

If Danny Sampson had known more about guns, he might not have needed to rob a bank. But in 1990, in Ottawa, Canada, 24-year-old Danny went to jail and his gun went to a museum. He was arrested for robbing a bank of \$6000 and then sent to jail for six years. He had used a .45 caliber Colt semi-automatic pistol, which turned out to be an antique made by the Ross Rifle Company of Quebec City back in 1918. The pistol is worth up to \$100,000—far more than Danny Sampson had stolen. If he had just known what he carried in his hand, he wouldn't have needed to rob the bank. In other words, Danny already had what he needed.

We already have everything we need. Let's not confuse needs with wants. We may not have everything we want, but what we have is enough!

One evening, an old Indian man told his grandson about a battle that goes on inside of people. He said, "My son, the battle is between two wolves. One wolf is called envy, the other wolf is called contentment.

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The grandson thought about it for a moment and then asked his grandfather, “Which wolf wins?”

The old Indian replied, “The one you feed.”

I was treated this weekend for an infected thumb. I am fascinated how this small appendage can inflict considerable torment on my entire body. My whole body was in agony from the pain emanating from my miniscule thumb. A simple toothache has the same deleterious affect. The small sin of coveting can inflict considerable damage.

The Biblical antidote for covet is contentment. What we have is enough.

Where, O Lord, am I most susceptible to the secret sin of coveting?

Where, O Lord, do I covet what belongs to my neighbor: her house...his car...her kids...his job...her popularity...his ability?

Where, O Lord, have I confused my wants with my needs?

Where, O Lord, am I guilty of wanting more? Teach me to be content with what I have. Show me that what I have is enough.