

Stealing

Joe didn't have time to think, it was something he just had to do. He went into the shop trying to look more innocent than he felt. After all it was only pick n' mix, not the crown jewels and it wouldn't exactly make the shop keeper go bust. He sauntered past the magazines and as he went past the pick n' mix, he quickly put a couple of sweets in his pocket. He was amazed, it was so easy! He walked out of the shop to the group waiting outside.

"Did you do it?"

"Yeh, course," he replied, "here."

Joe opened his hand and showed the others what he'd taken. He was amazed at how calm he felt, he had never stolen anything before. Now maybe, these people would stop thinking that he was square and boring. The others however, didn't seem very impressed. He was disappointed, he'd only done the dare because he wanted to be included in their group. They walked along to the park where they usually hung out.

"Hey Joe, we're going to the cinema tonight. Want to come?"

"Oh, yeh thanks" said Joe. Maybe it had worked. He hoped they wouldn't ask him to do it again though.

He went out with the others that night and though he was starting to feel a bit less like the odd one out, he still felt as though some of the group hadn't yet accepted him. On the way home he ended up walking along with Jamie. If he was honest with himself he had to admit that out of all of all the group, Jamie was the one who intimidated him most. Jamie didn't say much, but when he did, everyone shut up and paid attention.

"So, what did you think of your 'shopping' this afternoon?"

"Oh that, it was easy."

"Reckon you could get something bigger next time?"

Joe swore under his breath, this was exactly what he had hoped wouldn't happen, but he couldn't let Jamie see that.

"Yeh, if I wanted to, it was easy."

Joe did not feel as confident as he sounded. The next day he went into the same shop and stole a bar of chocolate. This time the others were a bit more impressed. Joe found that the more he shoplifted the less like the odd one out he felt in the group, so he stole more and more. Eventually, he stopped feeling guilty about it. Shopkeepers made loads of money, what would they care about the little things he took?

After a while Joe stopped feeling like he had to impress his friends and they never dared him to steal anymore, but he'd got into the habit and it was useful at times when he didn't get much pocket money.

One day he was shopping with his mum in a big department store when he saw some hair gel that he really wanted. It was only £4.95, so he asked his mum to get it for him.

"Joe, you know I can't afford to go spending out on stuff like that!" His mum said. "A new school shirt is more important. Look they're over there."

Joe didn't say anything, but inside he was furious. It wasn't fair. He never got half the things his friends did. It wasn't *his* fault that his mum was always broke. He decided that he would have the hair gel, money or not! He'd never taken anything from this particular store and never with his mum around, but he was pretty confident now and very annoyed that he couldn't have what he wanted.

"You go over and look at the shirts mum. I'm just going to have a quick look around here."

"OK" said his mum, slightly irritated, "But hurry up for goodness sake."

Joe's mum went to look at the shirts, frowning because they were more expensive than she'd thought they'd be. After a few minutes she began to get annoyed, where was that son of hers?

She waited and Joe still didn't appear. After a very long 10 minutes, she felt a light tap on the shoulder.

"About time too!" She said turning around. But it wasn't Joe, it was a store security guard.

"Mrs Mardon?" he asked.

“Yes, is everything all right? Is it about my son? Where is he? Is he OK?” replied Joe’s mum sounding worried.

“Your son’s fine Madam, but I must ask you to come this way please.”

The guard led Mrs Mardon through the shop and up to the manager’s office. She was worried sick, imagining that Joe must have been taken ill or something. When she got to the office however, she saw in a glance that Joe was fine, so what was he doing there?

“What’s going on?” she demanded.

“Mrs Mardon, I’m afraid that your son was caught shoplifting” said the manager.

“Shoplifting! My Joe! No you must be mistaken, he’s not a thief!” said Joe’s mum shocked.

She looked across at Joe. One look at his guilty face told her that the manager had not made a mistake.

“Joe! How could you? What on earth were you thinking?”

“Mrs Mardon,” said the store manager quietly, “I’m sorry to have to remind you that this store has a strict policy that all shoplifters are prosecuted.”

“But you can’t! He’s only fifteen, he’ll get a record” gasped Joe’s mum.

“I’m sorry, really I am, but my hands are tied, it’s store policy, I *have* to prosecute. In fact. I’ve already called the police, they’re on their way now.”



Thinking things through

- 1) Was Joe right to steal in order to impress people? What advice would you give Joe to help him resist peer pressure?
- 2) Why do you think that Joe stopped feeling guilty about stealing?
- 3) People sometimes borrow things without asking first and when challenged about it reply 'but I was only borrowing it!' Is there any difference between this and stealing? Explain your answer.
- 4) Joe justified his stealing by saying that shops make a lot of money, so shoplifting is OK. How do you think a shopkeeper might respond to that?
- 5) What effects does shoplifting have on other shoppers?
- 6) Do you have the *right* to have anything you want?
- 7) Imagine you are
 - (a) Joe
 - or (b) his mum.

It is the end of the day when Joe was caught shoplifting. Write an entry in your diary expressing how you feel about the day's events.

A Christian Perspective on Stealing

All the major world religions teach that stealing is wrong.

The Ten Commandments clearly say "Do not steal" Exodus 20:15
The punishment for stealing in Biblical times was that the thief had to pay back double or more than the amount he had stolen. As with any crime, Christians do not simply want to punish the criminal, they also want to get to the bottom of why the person committed the crime in the first place and help to put the damage right.



Things to talk about

1) Working in pairs, consider each of the following situations. You must decide whether or not you think it is stealing and whether or not the action is acceptable.

- a) Pete borrows a jumper from his brother without asking.
- b) Three lad go joyriding in a neighbour's car.
- c) Helen knows that nobody will be in the office when she is due back from her lunch break, so she takes an extra fifteen minutes.
- d) Laura copies her friend's answers in a test.
- e) Will robs a bank so that he will never have to work again.
- f) Steve takes a friend out for a meal and puts it on his business account.
- g) Zoe goes out with her best friend's boyfriend.

- h) Upset at the sight of famine victims on the television, Tom takes money from his dad's wallet in order to send some money to the Famine Appeal.
- i) Jordan finds a wallet on the pavement. It contains some cash and credit cards. He keeps it.
- j) Jack puts foreign coins in a chocolate machine, knowing that they will work in it.
- k) There is no one in the ticket office at the train station and the conductor on the train has not noticed Emma getting on. She doesn't say anything when the conductor asks who needs to buy a ticket.
- l) Mrs Smith keeps herself in writing paper and stamps, by bringing a few home each week from the office.
- m) Bethany remembers her dad's credit card details and uses them on the internet to buy some CDs.
- n) Pete took home around £10 extra every week by giving his customers at his Saturday job too little change.

2) Read through the situations again and then write down what you think stealing means.

3) What do you think a good punishment for stealing is? Why?

4) The Bible clearly states 'Do not steal'. Do you agree that stealing is *always* wrong? Explain your answer.

5) Robin Hood stole from the rich to give to the poor. While many people would probably not judge him too harshly for this, it is probably true to say that a rich person does not like to be robbed any more than a poor person.

Imagine that Robin Hood has been caught and you are a lawyer. It is your job to either defend him, or to try and get him sent to prison. Write a speech to convince the judge and jury that he should *either* (a) be let off or, (b) be sent to prison.

Personal Perspectives on Stealing

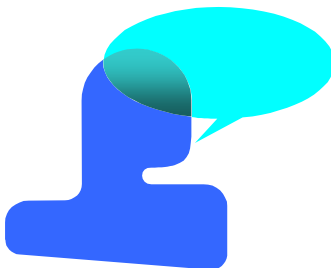
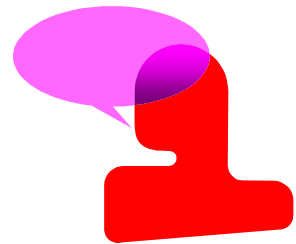


“Stealing is wrong and breaks one of the Ten Commandments. There may be some situations, for example, if you and your family were starving and had no alternative, when it might be morally acceptable to steal enough to keep yourselves alive. But generally speaking, stealing is wrong, as it violates the human rights of those from whom you steal, and is not what God wants for us.”

Paul Cummins, RC priest

“The Christian scriptures teach that stealing is wrong. As Christians we may legitimately obtain things by two routes; by earning them, and by receiving them as gifts.”

Rt Rev Michael Langrish, Bishop of Exeter



“At the end of the day if something isn't yours, it isn't yours and so it's wrong to take it. I think there's a big difference between stealing some food because you're starving and robbing a bank because you're greedy, but they're both stealing.”

Dr Chrissy Vimlanathan GP