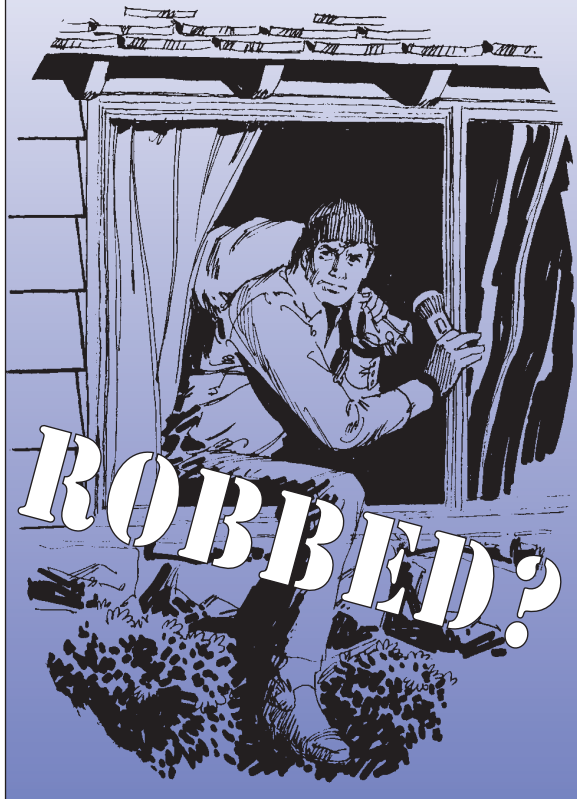


Are you being



ROBBED?

HOW THEY WORK

The thieves we're talking about are really sneaky. They start by stealing just a little at a time. Surprisingly, the victims don't even bother to count their losses or identify the thieves. Why not? Because the losses are hardly noticed for months or even years. Believe it or not, these thieves leave other things in place of what was taken – and the replacements appear to be more appealing than the stolen goods!

Amazingly, the victims often seem almost relieved to be robbed! The stolen articles tended to make their possessors uncomfortable anyway: they pricked their conscience, rebuked their laziness, exposed their selfishness and prodded them to responsible action.

These thieves are just the opposite. They are friendly, inviting their victims to relax. They are entertaining, persuading their victims that the goal of life is entertainment. They offer variety, giving their victims a wide range of replacements for what they steal. They are clever, giving their replacements an air of legitimacy. They are up-to-date, referring to what they steal as irrelevant and out-of-date. They stress popularity, saying that everybody is doing it.

WHO THEY ARE

Some of these thieves have been identified. There is the notorious *Telly Vision*, who continues to attract much interest in spite of constant criticism. There is *Fun N. Games*, who sees life as nothing but watching or playing sports and other activities. Then there is *O. Ver Work* who takes every opportunity to make a little extra money and raise the standard of living. Many more thieves could be listed, but you won't have too much trouble spotting the ones in your life.

WHAT WE LOSE

Of course, they are not always thieves. They can sometimes be opportunities for relaxation and advancement. But they become thieves when they steal the things God wants us to have in our Christian lives. For example:

- When we neglect daily Bible reading, we miss the opportunity for God's guidance: "Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You ... Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (Psalm 119:11,105).

- When our busy schedule crowds out time for communion with God, and we are not even on speaking terms with Him, we miss the opportunity

for intimacy with God: “Draw near to God and He will draw near to you” (James 4:8).

- When we show no concern for others and self becomes our central focus, we miss the joyful opportunity to obey this command of God: “Through love serve one another” (Galatians 5:13).

WHAT TO DO

It’s time to wake up and identify the thieves in our lives and recover our stolen valuables which have eternal value: “Awake, you who sleep ... and Christ will give you light ... walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is” (Ephesians 5:14-17).

— *G. Steidl*

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