

a journey of repentance and redemption

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DEADLY SINS

SEVEN DAYS

My dear friends...

a journey of repentance and redemption

As you and I journey through another Holy Week together, I need to tell you that I have (more than ever) a sense of urgency regarding our shared walk of faith. Yes, we are all gracefully getting a little older, but aging is not at the heart of my urgency and concern. In my process of sorting and seeking, what keeps coming to the surface is that our common biblical world-view, our grid of Christian values, and our faith legacy seems more at risk today than at any other time in my life. Not because we are giving up – but because we are under a full attack from an anti-Christ spirit that you and I have never seen in our own country and culture. Truth is, we have raised two complete generations who do not believe what we believe – period. This is not a blame and shame game, a red flag bugle call, or a frantic plea for us all to get on the ark before the flood. What is in my heart, and on my mind rather, is more along the lines of pulling ourselves together, first as individuals, and then as a community of believers in Christ. Pulling together to live our lives moving forward in redemption, proclamation and subjugation of our Christian faith. Who are we? How are we going to finish what we've started? What will we leave behind of the truth, and of our faith in God? This all starts for you and I, in our love for God, His Word, and how we are living our lives for Him. The Seven Deadly Sins in Seven Days, was the way I believe God spoke to me as a starting place. He was saying, "Steve, clean it up – all of it, and then sit down and write about it – all of it." You and I are witness to the greatest truth ever told. You and I are a living witness to the greatest truth ever known. It is time for all of us to honor that, by how we live our lives.

Pride is the root of each of the seven deadly sins. The reason why pride is not one of the original seven deadly sins, is because pride was the original sin, and then of course what makes each of the other seven sins deadly. The deadliness of pride is that it can manifest itself in many forms and expressions, with many layers and levels of attitudes and behaviors. In this devotional, I have identified the traditional seven deadly sins, so that we can at least identify causes and determine the course of action. When we carefully examine each of these sinful habits, we eventually will uncover some of the same familiar patterns and prideful behaviors; lifelong attempts to provide happiness for ourselves through whatever God-substitutes we choose—pleasure, approval, wealth, power, status. Most of us have not fully allowed God to be in control in every area of our lives, so we refuse to keep these goods in their place, and accept them as gifts from his hand, and not (end-all, be-all) replacement values for our life.

I want us together to aggressively come against these sins (whatever the form or magnitude) in our lives, and begin to put them under our feet, so that we may victoriously live in the truth we have witnessed - as truthful witnesses! Please pray for me, as I pray for you during this important and life-changing time. I love each of you with the love of our dear Savior Jesus Christ – may His peace and redemption fill us as we respond to the conviction and challenge of the Holy Spirit working in us.

pastor steve isaac - reunion community church

SUNDAY - ENVY

a journey of repentance and redemption

Scripture: (Genesis 29-31, Titus 3:3-7, Proverbs 14:30, Colossians 3:1-2)

Take a few moments in quiet meditation of the word the Lord.

Reading: In the classic movie, Amadeus the struggle of envy and jealousy is characterized between Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and Antonio Salieri. As the story goes Salieri (a composer) bargains with God for musical talent. He promises His devotion and service if God will make him a famous composer. Mozart on the other hand is a musical genius unlike any other. The talent of Mozart completely overshadows Salieri's, as if he does not exist. He is enraged and embittered at not only Mozart but more importantly God. Why would God give such gifts and talent to someone so personally undeserving? Salieri is so distraught that he attempts to take his own life, because in his envy he has wished Mozart to die. Envy destroys the life of Salieri, long after Mozart's death. One powerful scene shows Salieri as an old man still longing for greatness even from a wheelchair. Salieri calls in a Priest to make confession. The Priest arrives to his home only to hear Salieri at the piano, who turns and asks the Priest if he has any musical training. The Priest replies that as a boy back in Vienna he received music lessons. Salieri tells the Priest that he is a composer of great reputation, writing many, many, well known tunes in his day. Salieri begins to play some of his music and then asks the Priest if he recognizes any of them. Embarrassingly the Priest does not recognize any of his tunes. Finally, Salieri play one last tune and the Priest immediately begins to hum along! He says, "I know this tune well, I did not know you wrote it!" With hatred and envy in his heart Salieri replies, "I didn't, that was Mozart." He then confesses his life-long envy of Mozart to the Priest, who in final consolation offers to Salieri, "All men are equal in God's eyes." To which Salieri sadly says, "Are they?"

This dramatic image represents the powerful vice of envy and its destructive and immobilizing nature. Too often we are either passively or aggressively envious of either people, possessions, power or position. Envy is beyond being a "bad look" for us as Christians. It is ugly, it is malicious, and capable of destroying all we love - family, friendships, partnerships, marriages, covenants and community. I'm reminded of a well-known poem by Victor Hugo called "Envy and Avarice." In this classic, God grants a wish to both envy and avarice with the condition that the wish of the one who asks first will be doubled for the one who wishes second. With that condition in place "envy" speaks up first and wishes to be blind in one eye - the power of envy.

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*The God Desire stood before their eyes.
Desire, that courteous deity who grants
All wishes, prayers, and wants;
Said he to the two sisters: "Beauteous ladies,
As I'm a gentleman, my task and trade is
To be the slave of your behest—
Choose therefore at your own sweet will and pleasure,
Honors or treasure!
Or in one word, whatever you'd like best.
But, let us understand each other—she
Who speaks the first, her prayer shall certainly
Receive—the other, the same boon redoubled!"
Envy at last the silence broke,
And smiling, with malignant sneer,
Upon her sister dear,
Who stood in expectation by,
Ever implacable and cruel, spoke
"I would be blinded of one eye!"*

Envy is defined as "a feeling of discontent and resentment aroused by another's desirable possessions or qualities, accompanied by a strong desire to have them for one's own self." The envious person resents another person's good gifts because they are superior to their own. It's not just that the other person is better; it is that by comparison their superiority makes you feel your own lack, your own inferiority, more acutely. Envy destroyed Rachael the wife of Jacob. Though Jacob loved Rachael most, she could not enjoy his love or love herself because of her deep envy towards her sister Leah. She wanted what Leah had, and Leah wanted what Rachael had – they were consumed with envy. Because of her envy, Rachael could never see that she was who Jacob loved. She did not live in the love that was always hers to have.

Prayerful Response: Father God, I repent of the deadly sin of envy. I commit my life to being at peace where it is at all possible with all people. I am determined to shut down all unhealthy and contentious rivalries and wrongful comparisons, between myself and those you have called me to love. I pray for the courage to close the evil eye of my heart, and to turn the jealous head of my pride to my temptation to envy. I acknowledge envy as the enemy to the love of God, and I proclaim myself free and victorious over its grip and influence over my life. Amen

MONDAY - VAINGLORY

a journey of repentance and redemption

Scripture: (2 Kings 5:1-14, Galatians 2:20, Philippians 2:1-4)

Take a few moments in quiet meditation of the word the Lord.

Reading: At its most basic and primal level, vainglory is an extreme form of pride. It's the arrogant, conceited, know-it-all form of pride. Vainglory occurs when we, out of desire for notoriety, attention, fame, and recognition put ourselves before everyone and everything else. I call it illusions and delusions of grandeur. The great problem of vainglory (among the many others) is that when we live in complete self-centric thought and self-focused behavior, we displace God – with ourselves. In vainglory, we are placing ourselves at the center of our lives instead of God. We are declaring ourselves, imperfect beings, to be superior to the perfect being, God. That is a problem to which there is only one remedy.

One of my favorite news commentators is Jesse Watters, of Fox News. Jesse does a weekly show for Fox news and has a regular segment on "The Bill O'Reilly Show" called, "Watters World." In Watters World, Jesse will usually end up on an Ivy League campus asking college students and faculty basic questions about significant American ideas, laws, events, and the great American men and women who participated in them. Embarrassingly, these students from our nation's highest learning institutions are incorrect at about a "nine to one ratio." Jesse will usually also frequently ask the students and faculty about celebrities, movies, and pop-culture at which they (not surprisingly) are correct at about a "nine to one" ratio. Evidence enough that the interest, influence, and intrigue of our culture is with self-centric, self-focused, self-indulgent ideology and behavior. As well as those people in our culture who appear to be the very best at it. This is known as vainglory... lol! I laugh because I know that if I used the word vainglory in a public conversation with anyone other than a serious Christian I would be mocked and marginalized as an irrelevant non-intellectual hater. However, this reality remains. Vainglory is still a deadly sin that now more than ever continues to subversively destroy marriages, families, friendships, businesses, governments, and nations – the struggle is real, my brothers and sisters!

The selfish ambition to promote ourselves, in spite of how well it is accepted in our present culture is nevertheless destructive. Vainglory, the pursuit of recognition and self-importance from men, for men, does not build healthy lives or communities - only toxic ones. We can only really grow as we simply decide that others around us are more important than ourselves. This is of course the great irony of the Christian life. As Jesus taught us in Mark 9:35, "If anyone wants to be first, he must be last of all, and servant of all."

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In the Confessions, Augustine tells a famous story about his teenage years. One night he and some friends were hanging out with not enough to do. They decided to steal pears from a neighboring farmer. However, they neither needed nor even wanted the pears—they ended up throwing them to the pigs. They took the pears just for the fun of stealing. In his reflection on his crime, Augustine ponders what fueled his desire to sin. In a crucial part of his confession, he notes that he would not have done it alone. He wanted to impress his friends. “As soon as the words are spoken, ‘Let’s go and do it,’ he confesses, “one is ashamed not to be shameless.” The same desire for notoriety, approval, and his fear of shame drove Augustine to excel in school and become an accomplished rhetorician - vainglory.

Vainglory has similar forms today. For example, it is difficult to find someone who has never exaggerated something she has done or made up something about herself to impress those listening. Or perhaps we might say something bad or false about another person to get our friends to think we are funny or entertaining. Or we do something good with (or perhaps only because of) the expectation that others will notice it. Or again, we do something good that others did not notice, and feel disappointed by that. We may even do something wrong, illegal, or foolish because we want attention from a certain group of people. Many of us lie to seem better than we are, out of an excessive desire for approval. Others of us worry about a performance or task because we are overly concerned about gaining the approval of those judging it. We invest ourselves in building a reputation that is based on shallow, trivial things. Or we do something good, get attention for it, and then take all the credit for our goodness for ourselves, without the slightest nod to the giver of all good and perfect gifts. We may not know these things under the name “vainglory,” but the definition fits them to a T.

There is a wonderful section from the book *The City of God* by Augustine. In this excerpt, there is a contrast surrounding the sin of vainglory in which the destruction of one, and reward of the other is clearly laid before us.

The City of God

“Accordingly, two cities have been formed by two loves: the earthly by the love of self, even to the contempt of God; the heavenly by the love of God, even to the contempt of self. The former, in a word, glories in itself, the latter in the Lord. For the one seeks glory from [human beings]; but the greatest glory of the other is God, the witness of conscience. The one lifts up its head in its own glory; the other says to its God, ‘Thou art my glory, and the lifter up of mine head’ [Psalm 3:3].

Prayerful Response: Father God, I repent of the deadly sin of vainglory. I commit myself to seeking and serving those people and those situations where I can both truly love and serve until Your kingdom comes not only in my life, but in their lives as well. I humbly ask for courage to check my attitude, to check my words, and to check the motives of my heart! I pray for the strength of your Spirit to help me to resist the need and necessity for personal recognition and reward – to You Lord, be the honor and the glory! Amen

TUESDAY - SLOTH

a journey of repentance and redemption

Scripture: (Proverbs 26:13-16, Galatians 2:19-20, 2 Peter 1:3-7)

Take a few moments in quiet meditation of the word the Lord.

Reading: Just to hear someone use the word “sloth” is strange in our present-day lexicons. Is that because it is a strange and obscure word to which most do not know the meaning? Or, is it simply because our culture has truly become so slothful that slothfulness has become the “new normal”, and most certainly not a deadly sin! Lol! As with most sin in our culture, the sin of sloth has undergone progressivism’s process of deconstruction and redefining to wit the American Church (in error) has placed its approval and acceptance. That is pretty intense for a devotional. But, I am believing that like me we all want to witness redemption in our lives from any sin that is sin, even if no one any longer calls it sin.

Most would define sloth as laziness, carelessness, or a lack of sincere effort. And, on the surface (by that definition) sloth does not seem in reality to be relevant or even a problem for most of us. Why? Well, because we already are all so busy, over-committed, and overwhelmed. We are more like workaholics, over-involved, and misplaced-activists. What’s wrong with that you ask? Well, not much other than those are not virtues, and so we are consistently frustrated and angry because we have no time, no emotional resiliency, or emotive capacity. And, as a result we are often resentful and shame driven frequently experiencing “anxiety attacks” from all of the “stressure” (my own word) in our lives. That my friends is the bottomless pit, going nowhere fast.

But, let’s just say just for a moment that we define the deadly sin of sloth biblically and correctly to see if that helps us clarify how sloth can destroy our lives - just as all sin can.

First, it is important to understand that sloth is opposed to the great Christian virtue of diligence. Diligence - that powerful sense of responsibility, faithfulness, dedication, and conscientious completion of one’s commitment to what God determines is most important for our lives. And what is diligence and dedication at its best, but an expression of love and devotion to what God values above what we value? The root meaning of our word diligence is the Latin diligere, which means “to love.” Sloth, in this view, is a comfortable indifference and neglect to the duty of nurturing the spiritual and emotional needs of other human beings (those we say we love). In this sense, the sin of sloth is much deeper than mere physical laziness – it is being spiritually indifferent and disobedient to working faithfully and diligently at what God has asked us to work at. If you just don’t care, you won’t work hard at it – if you won’t work hard at it, you just don’t care.

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Sloth becomes a sin not merely because it makes us lazy, but is a sin because of the lack of love for God and others that lies behind that laziness.

Secondly, to the early Christian Fathers sloth was more accurately considered a spiritual vice, not a carnal or physical one. The physical laziness was merely a symptom of a deeper spiritual problem. The great medieval theologian Thomas Aquinas defined sloth in a way that bridged the ancient ideas of sloth as spiritual indifference to our more modern conceptions of it as laziness. In short, Aquinas explains how and why sloth made the traditional list of seven deadly sins. He also unpacks how sloth reflects a lack of love that can be expressed both as laziness and as restless busyness. His definition is complex, but approachable. He begins with the enigmatic statement that sloth is “aversion to the divine good in us.” What does he mean by that? Well let’s think about how a typical husband and wife in a relationship where both are not only friends, but genuinely love each other. Maybe one evening they argue and spend the rest of the night not speaking and avoiding one another. On many levels, they both find it easier to keep the miserable isolation and distance than to do the work of apologizing, forgiving, and making up one more time. Doing the right thing in a relationship requires the ongoing work of giving up anger, pride, stubbornness, and getting one’s own way. Saying sorry is work, but certainly not the kind of work required to change the behavior and attitudes that made one feel sorry in the first place.

Do they love each other? Yes. Is the relationship important? Yes. But do they want to do what it takes to be in that relationship—do they want to honor its claims on them? Do they want to learn genuine unselfishness in the ordinary day to day of living together? Well, maybe tomorrow. For now, they just each want the night off to wallow in his or her own selfish loneliness. This is true especially when love takes effort, or feels like a formality or an empty ritual. For all of the divine joys and fulfillment that marriage can be there is also the very real aspect of continually working on the hard things that make it more than worth it.

That is what Aquinas meant by “the sin of sloth being aversion to the divine in us.” That is his way of saying the Holy Spirit (God) in us, works against the flesh in us. Love says, “I will change priorities, compromise plans, make some sacrifices, reshape my identity, make mine – ours, make me – us. Sloth says, “Too much work, too much aggravation, so why bother? We will just have to do the same thing all over again tomorrow.” But that is sloth must die, and where the diligence must come to life. Every day, all over again. That reminds me of one of my favorite “feel good” movies – “Groundhog Day.”

In Groundhog Day, weatherman Phil Connors gave an example—at least by analogy—of how sloth resists the daily transformation required by real love. Through a mysterious turn of events, Phil finds himself waking up each morning, day after day, on February 2—Groundhog Day—having to relive the same day over and over again in Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania. A shallow and self-centered Phil first amuses himself with various hedonistic pleasures, since what he does each day apparently has no consequences. “Don’t you worry about cholesterol?” his coworker asks as he scarfs down a table-full of doughnuts. “I don’t worry about anything anymore,” replies Phil smugly.

In his narcissistic mission, Phil decides he wants to sleep with his producer, Rita. He spends every day making a great effort to seduce her. While he finds her attractive, he does not really love her—at least, not yet. Rather than change himself, he painstakingly figures out by trial and error what she likes and finds appealing. Then he puts up a false front designed to get her to fall for him—he memorizes lines of French poetry and pretends to share her interests in world peace and her taste in ice cream. His elaborate scheme is meant to manipulate her into giving him what he wants. Although she is initially taken in, Rita eventually sees through his strategy and rejects his advances. “I can’t believe I fell for this!” she cries at him in anger. “You don’t “love” me! I could never love someone like you, Phil, because you could never love anyone but yourself!” Phil falls into despair. He sits on the couch all day, eating popcorn and drinking whiskey, apathetically watching the same episode of Jeopardy! for the hundredth time. He can’t get what he wants the way he is, but he also refuses to change. And so, he is at a wall.

After he realizes that not even dying will stop his day from repeating itself, Phil finally tries a new tactic. He begins, little by little, to genuinely become the sort of person who could win Rita’s love. Like his earlier seduction project, this takes regular and consistent effort on his part—but requires a different motive. Day after day he studies for a medical degree, he takes piano lessons, he reads French poetry, he extends a helping hand to the young and old. But these efforts, in contrast to his previous stratagems, change his heart. Unlike the old Phil, he is no longer bored and restless, filling time with self-centered diversions and empty pleasures. For he no longer pretends to be, but really becomes—through consistent habit and daily discipline – not just a poet, pianist, and philanthropist, but a person capable of unselfish “love”. Phil is no longer solely motivated by the desire to produce sexual results in his relationship with Rita. Instead, his help for others shows that he has learned to genuinely care about what is right and good—for its own sake. In the end, his changed character attracts the affection not only of all the townspeople, but also the love of Rita herself.

What we need to know about sloth is this. Sloth is a deadly sin because it works every day against the work of love. It is not just love that transforms us – it is the work of love that each day leads us back to being who love calls us to be. Sloth settles for easy – love demands hard. Bono lead singer of the legendary band U2, sang these words... “Love is not an easy thing; the only baggage you can bring . . . is all that you can’t leave behind.”

Prayerful Response: Father, I repent of the deadly sin of sloth. I commit myself to a daily diligence and faithful obedience to do the hard things the right way, and to trust in you for the best outcome. Help me to resist the temptation to hide in the busy-ness of life and the technology needed to live it. I will live in you – free from the bondage of sloth and its power over me. Amen

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WEDNESDAY - AVARICE/GREED

a journey of repentance and redemption

Scripture: (Genesis 13:1-13, Luke 21:1-4, Matthew 27:57-60)

Take a few moments in quiet meditation of the word the Lord.

Reading: Over two thousand years ago, in his works, Republic, Plato felt the strong need to respond to opponents who argued that the self-aggrandizing desire for more and more without limit (pleonexia) was the natural driving force behind humanity. He was right then, and it is still true today. The bible calls this avarice, or greed, and it is a deadly sin.

In order to understand the deeper causes of this deadly sin, let's define avarice/greed itself. In common language, it is true that avarice/greed is identified in many of our common behaviors and motives. But avarice as a sin, goes much deeper. We can list the surface symptoms, but as with any sin it is more important (as Jesus said) to learn what it looks like on the inside – the heart, the soul, and the mind. Avarice/greed, is an unholy habitual desire of the soul – that my friend is deep. From the depth of the soul, avarice/greed moves to becoming the deceitful condition of our heart that gives energy to its sinful outer manifestations. The manifestations of avarice/greed, are typically expressed through unhealthy (by any means) behaviors such as uncontrolled spending, obsessive desire for more power or control, and excessive hoarding of money or possessions. A definition from Thomas Aquinas confirms this: "greed is an excessive love of, or desire for, money or any possession that money can buy."

A greedy person's attachment to wealth, power, and possessions has many faces, but only one driving force... discontentment. "I want it I'm going to get it, whether I need it or not. One of something is never enough, two is always better. One for you and two for me. I don't like what I have – I want what I don't have." This discontentment is from a bad place within us – empty soul, deceived heart, and corrupted thinking.

Wrong thinking, and sinful behavior like this affects people of all ages, all cultures, all colors, and all religions. At its core however, greed is a perverted love – not a righteous love of God, but unrighteous love of wealth, power, and possessions. Its profile has disordered desire written all over it. It is important to understand that avarice/greed is about the spiritually improper balance of the attachment to wealth, power, and possessions. It is not a sin to care about or to be wealthy, or to have power or possessions. It is a deadly sin however, to have an uncontrolled love or appetite for wealth, power, and possessions. It is a sin to love anything or anyone more than we love God. So, we can find revelation to the deadly sin of avarice/greed by learning a biblical understanding of ungodly attachment and godly detachment. What this looks like in a practical sense is this - a daily process of detaching from the attachment we have to anything (wealth, power, possessions) we want or desire more than our Father God. We can overcome our greed with generosity. Ironically, this will take us back to the condition of the heart again – but, it is where we must go.

The measure of generosity is not how much we give away (amount), but rather the way (intent and motive of the heart) we give. We must learn that the intent and motivation of our heart reveals our inner desires and attachments (good and bad). In Luke's Gospel, the widow gives away her last two copper coins out of devotion to the Lord, and Jesus commends her. Her coins couldn't buy a pack of gum today, but even in her poverty, her love and devotion made her willing to give. The gospels also tell the story of the costly gift of a newly cut tomb for Jesus's body, given by a rich man, Joseph of Arimathea. The sign of generosity is not the size of our gift, or our wealth, but our readiness to give what we do have to God. Aquinas quotes the Greek philosopher Aristotle to reinforce this point: "The Philosopher says, "Liberality is proportionate to a person's . . . means, for it consists, not in the quantity given, but in the habit of the giver. It is the heart that makes the gift rich or poor, and gives each gift its value."

In a final look at the deadly sin of avarice/greed, we must revisit the reality that it is our attachment not to the necessities for living life, but rather our unhealthy attachments to the non-necessities for living life. I go back once again to the great biblical thinkers and writers, Thomas Aquinas and Augustine of Hippo. They continually discussed each in their own day, living within the bounds of what is necessary, appropriate, and commonly acceptable for human beings. They did not call anyone into vows of poverty, to live without the common needs of a human being. Though some might be so called, they pointed always to the freedom and liberty of living life without being enslaved to "our stuff." Free from the attachments to anything and anyone without the boundaries and the balance of generosity and godliness. It is true that good intentions can go wrong. That is why it is important that we understand the need to live by the word of truth that calls us to "seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness", and then all of our other needs will not only be added to us, but they will be put in their proper place.

Ocean's Eleven, was a movie from a sequence of films around the art of high stakes set-up, and multi-million dollar high-tech heists. In Ocean's Eleven, Danny Ocean and Terry Benedict both have been greedy for excess and gain. However, in an all revealing scene near the end of the movie, Danny's former wife, Tess, has unresolved feelings for Danny, but no longer trusts him. Tess now with Terry, secretly watches an exchange between the two men on casino security cameras. Danny asks Terry whether he would give Tess up if he could tell him who had just robbed his casino and get his money back. Without thought or hesitation, Terry says "Yes." The difference between the two men suddenly becomes obvious for Tess, for Danny would—just as unhesitatingly – leave all his illicit gains to have Tess back.

Prayerful Response: Father, I repent of the deadly sin of avarice and greed. I commit myself to a daily practice of filling my soul with those things that turn my heart to You - and to emptying myself of the want and desire for those things that turn my heart from You. I seek your kingdom first Lord, and trust that You alone are more than enough to complete and satisfy my life. I stand against the deceptive spirit of excess and attachment to this world and all that is in it, and proclaim freedom from its power over me and over all those I love. In you I live, breathe, and move – you are my treasure and my want. Amen

THURSDAY - ANGER

a journey of repentance and redemption

Scripture: (Proverbs 29:22, Psalm 37, Galatians 5:20, Colossians 3:8, Ephesians 4:26, James 1:19-20)

Take a few moments in quiet meditation of the word the Lord.

Reading: The deadly sin of anger is a complex one. The Bible tells us that even God burns with anger. Jesus was angry as he turned the merchant tables over within the court of the Gentiles. So, let's start with a biblically healthy understanding on what is sinful anger, and what is righteous anger. Just saying that helps, but to clarify and establish truth, here is how we should approach this deadly sin: Anger that is hateful, hostile, and hurtful is a deadly sin, and can destroy the lives of everyone, and everything that it touches. Anger that is justly honest, honorable, and humane is not a sin, and can provoke repentance.

That may be a place for you and I to stop and make sure that the lines do not get blurry, and behaviors remain within righteous boundaries.

Historically, Christianity has always been divided about its thoughts and understanding of anger. Anger, for often quoted Thomas Aquinas, was a natural expression of human passions, one response among many provoked by threats to ourselves, those we love, and those who cannot defend or protect themselves. Anger is not inherently bad, although it becomes so when it attacks the wrong target, or gets out of control. Dr. Rebecca DeYoung says, "But if anger is in for a fight, then to stay clear of being a vice, it must fight the good fight. This means fighting for a good cause and fighting well. Anger must serve the cause, not the other way around."

We are directing ourselves to the deadly sin of anger, so there is not a need to justify or explain one's thoughts or behavior – we need to eliminate sin in all forms from our hearts and minds so that we can live rightly and faithfully before God and our families.

The sin of anger has the ability to control mind and emotion, that makes it twice as difficult to sort through the physical behaviors and motives of the heart. We need to obediently live by the Word of truth regarding anger, or we run the risk of never being free of its poison. Another difficulty is in understanding. Do we simply target getting rid of anger? Or, do we invest ourselves fully in the daily process of creating a right heart, and the discipline of maintaining a right attitude and clear mind? The answer is yes – to both.

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We need to target selfish and over the top (both passive and aggressive) angry responses that lead us to saying, thinking, and doing those things which are not pleasing to God, and so very destructive to everyone and everything around us. And we need to put in place a godly process that is ever-changing the attitude of our heart and mind towards righteous responses and godly behavior. The reason for this should be obvious...

Though we often focus on the physical and emotive force of sinful anger, it also has a shrewd way of deceiving our reasoning powers in order to justify itself. Do not underestimate or overlook this essential truth – it is powerful, and is the critical path to overcoming this deadly sin. Anger is at its core self-promoting—but it dresses-up in self-righteousness. There are plenty of ways to rationalize why we deserve what we want when we want it, why we are always right and others always wrong, and why we deserve what is rightfully ours. But with the constant cloud of self-righteousness over us, anger can storm in and take over by force. Too often, we begin with anger and its force and then as Christians end up having to try and walk back our words and actions trying to undo the consequences of our own doing. Because we know that anger can quickly go wrong in its target and in the manner of its expression, there must be a grid of truth to filter the emotion into a constructive and sinless process. If we find ourselves habitually angry, the first question to ask is what are we really angry about and why. If we are concerned that our anger is misdirected, sometimes the best thing to do is reevaluate our perspective, ask a godly friend their opinion on whether they believe our anger is as righteously justified as it feels, or whether we are rationalizing to cover up something else.

The grid of truth helps to point us to the real object of our anger and can be a healthy beginning to avoiding sinful anger. When anger has the wrong object, what we are angry about is inappropriate. The grid of truth also helps with critical determinations. Perhaps there has been no real injury—only a misunderstanding or an imagined offense, not an actual one. Or the recipient of our anger is the wrong person . . . or the person who happens to be closest, most available, or most readily wounded—the easiest target within range. Sometimes it is true that we are angry at God, and just take it out on other people, in other circumstances.

In order to overcome the deadly sin of anger, we should also look at how we express our anger. We all know that anger can make us feel out of control, enraged, furious. From a godly perspective, we know that even if we have been legitimately wronged, we have better ways to deal with it other than through explosive and destructive ways. Take a minute and you can quickly find in any good bible concordance many, many scriptures giving us godly and positive counsel about sinful anger and its deadly consequences. Interestingly, none of those scriptures will mention anything about the object of our anger. All of the biblical advice given has a summarized bottom line - “Stop it, before you ruin your life, and the life of everyone you love.”

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Finally. Why is sinful anger such a temptation for us? The truth is that sinful anger is deeply connected to our love of ourselves, especially our fear of exposure and our need for security. In the sin culture, we seem to be constantly needing to boost our fragile egos. But as we know, it never works out. We all “get” that when it comes to disrespect and insults to our honor and reputation, anger “takes it personally.” But as followers of Christ, we know there is a better way to respond than from a sinful and deadly anger. Identify the object of the anger. Resist the initial big drama and over emotionalized response... James says, “let every person be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to anger.” This biblical command is not just an outdated, irrelevant religious saying. It is a way out of our sin. It is a better way than we have allowed ourselves to live in. It is better than our distress, disgust, frustration, rage, pride, over-sensitivity and insecurity. We can stop the madness – literally! The reality is, there is always going to be something or someone who will say or do something to offend us, always going to be frustrations and unmet expectations, always some form of disrespect or disregard for how we feel or think, and always people and circumstances beyond our control that will take us places spiritually and emotionally we do not want to go if we let them. So, don’t you let them. Let’s you and I take the time to ask God for the wisdom and courage needed to self-inventory, and begin allowing the truth to reign over our lives.

In the 2003 movie, *Anger Management*, the character Dr. Buddy Rydell (a well-known anger management therapist) is court assigned to help lead character Dave Buznik, overcome his passive-aggressive anger issues. Because of an anger incident, Dave must meet Dr. Rydell’s requirements so that he can save his job, avoid felony prosecution, and keep his fiancée (Linda) from breaking up with him. Publicly, Dave is in denial of his problem, but self-loathes because he has not stood up for anyone or anything in life that he has truly cared about – including himself. In fact, Dave is angry about being ordered to see the doctor. Quickly, the unorthodox and eccentric Dr. Rydell, sees right through Dave’s protests. In their first private meeting, Dr. Rydell says to Dave, “There are two kinds of angry people in the world – explosive and implosive. Explosive is the kind of individual you see screaming at the cashier for not taking their coupons. Implosive is the cashier who remains quiet day after day and finally shoots everyone in the store. You Dave, are the cashier.” Dave quickly replies, “No, no, no. I’m the guy hiding in the frozen food section dialing 911, I swear.” Eventually after several extremely questionable and unorthodox therapeutic scenarios, Dr. Rydell resorts to a highly unprofessional method in order to get Dave a breakthrough. Rydell, stages (with Linda), a secretly pre-arranged breakup of her engagement to Dave. The twist is that the person stealing Linda away appears to be Buddy Rydell! In the final scene in what Dave believes is his desperation last-ditch effort to save his love and relationship with Linda, Dave has his breakthrough when he races onto the field of a packed Yankee Stadium, where he believes he is trying to stop a scoreboard marriage proposal, from Buddy Rydell to Linda. Dave rushes the field, avoiding security and grabs the microphone from the National Anthem soloist. There he publicly admits to his life-long anger, his personal fears, and his undeniable true love for Linda. In standing up to Buddy, Dave stands up against his own anger to reclaim the love of his life, and his opportunity to live free from his destructive and debilitating behavior.

a journey of repentance and redemption

In the real world of our day to day lives we know that it is the time for us to stand up to all of our deadly sin. Not in anger, but in courage, in honesty, in righteousness and truth. Stand up against deadly sinful anger. The word of God has given us the insight and the tools to overcome, and we will, by the blood of the lamb and the word or our testimony.

Prayerful Response: Father, I repent of deadly sinful anger. I commit not to let the sun go down another day on the anger that has hurt my faith, and the people that I love. I no longer desire to live in denial of the truth that my anger, either passive or aggressive is real, and has too often been the cause of hate, hurt, and hostility in my life, and the lives of those I love. Lord Jesus, in Your name I declare a victory over the object of my anger, and the cause of my sin. You are my righteousness against my anger Lord, in you I put my trust! Amen

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FRIDAY - GLUTTONY

a journey of repentance and redemption

Scripture: (Proverbs 23:17-21, 1 Corinthians 6:12-13, Philippians 3:17-21, 1 Timothy 6:8)

Take a few moments in quiet meditation of the word the Lord.

Reading: Gluttony, like many of the other deadly sins we are challenging, has been both the most oversimplified and misunderstood.

As a behavior, gluttony is something habitual – as a sin it is something deadly. It is a routine, a pattern, or a groove that gets worn into our character. Because we can't always see other people's habits, we tend to identify things by their behavioral symptoms. However, gluttony's behavioral signals are more complex than we might think. Most associate gluttony as having something to do with eating or drinking too much. Our certainty towards gluttony however, should not end there. It is important to broaden our scope of understanding not just destructive symptoms of the deadly sin, but even more importantly the subversive and twisted causes of the sin. As Jesus said that it is what proceeds from the heart of a man that defiles him. We are going to articulate gluttony to a broader scope than merely excessive and compulsive eating and drinking. The deadly sin of gluttony is about excessive and compulsive consumption. What then is in the emotions of our hearts and minds that lead us to consume with such excess that we put at risk not only our own lives but also the lives people we love? How has evil been able to twist and subvert how we feel and how we think to the point and process of sin? And how have we allowed the deadly sin of gluttony to go unchecked and uncontested for so long? We need to answer these questions to be free, to have hope, and live healthy and whole again.

The only thing simple about gluttony, is its unhealthy and overpowering connection to personal pleasure. Not just pleasure-pleasure, but excessive, impulsive, immediate and tangible sensory pleasure. What is most deadly about gluttony is that those excessive personal pleasures will eventually dominate everything else that's important to us. This deadly sin systematically degrades us into being mere pleasure seekers (hedonists). This is what gluttony is really all about – this is the cause of the deadly sin. Everything else about the deadly sin of gluttony is massively complex and deeply layered.

Let's start with the idea that gluttony (excessive consumption) expresses and manifests in a myriad of behaviors, attitudes, and forms of acting out, but as we said a moment ago, it's cause is the need for pleasure. Pleasure as feeling good, pleasure as a replacement for pain (emotional and physical), and pleasure as comfort and security.

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Finding the balance between not enough, and too much, is something we are not good at deciding for ourselves. However, God provides both the balance and wisdom for us if we will use them. There are also the issues of understanding and knowing when something (food, drink, work, exercise, etc.) has gained an unhealthy control over us. Or maybe, us knowing where we are and just not being able or willing to do anything about it. Either way, at that point, the deadly sin of gluttony has us in deep trouble. The elemental struggle with the sin of gluttony is that it reduces consumption (of any kind) to an exercise in gratifying our own desires for physical pleasure and emotional security that I previously mentioned. That desire might in some instances be verbalized or rationalized like this... "Eating this, drinking this, doing this, having this, makes me feel good. Eating, drinking, doing and having more of this, will even make me feel better." So, rather than enjoying what we consume, we use what we consume to make us feel the way we think we want to feel. Thomas Aquinas says it well, "Gluttony primarily and intrinsically signifies the excessive desire to consume, not excessive consumption." "It is a case of gluttony," he says, "only when we knowingly exceed the measure in consuming from a desire for the pleasures of the flesh."

Gluttony's excessive pursuit of the pleasures of consuming eventually dulls our appreciation for what we consume, the healthy pleasure we take in consuming, those with whom we consume, and the pleasure and appreciation for the God who created and gave us the ability to consume. As Augustine (who knew quite well the deadly appetite of gluttony) put it, "Virtuous people avail themselves of the things of this life with the moderation of a user, not the attachment of a lover."

There are a few other deadly forms of gluttony that we should also confront. They are familiar... Consuming too fast, consuming too greedily, and consuming too much. We should stop for a minute to process – we all know they are real, and we all know they are really a struggle. Let's ask ourselves some reflective questions.

Why do we have to devour everything we consume as if we are running out of time?

Are we consuming what we really need, or are we just really consuming what we want?

What quality are we truly adding to our life by consuming so much?

What is most sad and tragic about these forms of gluttony is that they reflect who we are as the creation and pleasure of God. Is this what God has made us for? To consume what He has given each one of us, so fast, with such greed, and such excess? We all know that this is not what He has created us for. And, we know that He has created us for so much more than what the deadly sin of gluttony can provide – in any form or expression. For those controlled by the sin of gluttony, you end up finding yourself judging the world from the perspective of satisfying your own desire for pleasure.

But the pleasure you have in mind, is one that you have as a temporal creature – a being with a body. Consequently, the pleasures that you have come to have in life are focused on only material pleasures, pleasures of the body. That is an illusion and a lie from the enemy of darkness. The effect of this focus is, inevitably, dissatisfaction – you will never be satisfied in the deadly sin of gluttony. Why?

One – Bodily cravings never have anything but temporary satisfaction.

Two – As the creation of God, we are made for more than just material pleasure.

The biblical balance of this must be considered so that we do not go too far the other way. God's intent was not that we live life feeling guilty about enjoying life. Desiring and taking pleasure in healthy consumption, like the capacity to feel fear when it is needed, is a natural part of being human. It is the way God created us to be. These reactions are good and useful to us. But, as we know, our desire for consumption and the pleasure we take in consuming can get distorted. These good desires can go bad - destructively out of control, beyond the use for which God designed them. When they do so, we have the deadly sin of gluttony, a habit of excess. We just need to keep pushing ourselves back to the truth – there is a righteous and natural balance God has given. If we condemn righteous and natural feelings as evil, or become unable to enjoy the things God meant us to enjoy, then we become less than what God meant us to be. And too, if we reduce our consuming to an only what is absolutely necessary regimen, and make consuming into something evil merely to be endured, then we will have lost a good gift, and the pleasure of God.

The final point is this. There is no rigid rule to tell us what or how much to consume. In fact, the balance and judgments about what and how much we consume to be healthy point us to being healthy and whole - mind, body and spirit. The deadly sin of gluttony can't get us there. There are some guidelines that reflect the health of mind, body, spirit that we can share together in our shared struggle against sin.

- Consume in a way that contributes to, or maintains your overall health.
- Consume in a way that reflects not only your personal needs, but the needs and well-being of your family and community as well.
- Consume in a way that checks and makes accountable your desires, your motivations for consuming.
- Consume in a way that reaches for the role and spiritual purpose to which God has called you.
- Consume in a way that celebrates and acknowledges the goodness of all that God has given you.

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a journey of repentance and redemption

Prayerful Response: Father, I repent of the deadly sin of gluttony. I commit to living my life free of the bondage that comes from gluttony, and its control over me. You alone are Lord in my life, and I submit and surrender my desires and pleasures to You. I thank you for all that you have given for me to enjoy in this life; food, drink, recreation, exercise, study, work, beauty and entertainment. May I use all that I consume of these gifts in energy and inspiration for service and love of You and Your creation. Amen

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SATURDAY - LUST

a journey of repentance and redemption

Scripture: (Genesis 29-31, Titus 3:3-7, Proverbs 14:30, Colossians 3:1-2)

Take a few moments in quiet meditation of the word the Lord.

Reading: C. S. Lewis said, "What we call 'being in love' is a glorious state, and, in several ways, good for us. It helps to make us generous and courageous, it opens our eyes not only to the beauty of the beloved but to all beauty, and it subordinates... our merely animal sexuality; in that sense, love is the great conqueror of lust."

It would take page upon page for me to unpack that baggage known as our struggle with the deadly sin of lust. Not that we all are burning with evil desire for someone or something that has wrongly caught our eye or filled our heart. But, that our struggle against the deadly sin of lust runs deep for all of us, and that even now in our "open" and soft-porn culture we Christians flounder to maintain a righteous heart, and clear mind before God, our families, and our communities. Let's be clear and honest. In our present day, the sexually open ideology and behavior that we are part of, and party to, crosses every biblical line in the sand that God ever drew. A look back at history, reminds us that great cultures have been here before. But what is lost in social translation, perverted desire, and Godly-wisdom, is the fact that either from without or within, those cultures were destroyed. Historical truth - cultures dominated and powered by the deadly sin of lust do not last. In all reality, that puts our godless culture well down the path to destruction. The "wildcard" of the enemy (Satan), was for our culture the global bombshell of internet technology. This alone has enabled the sin of lust to be taken places not even Sodom and Gomorrah had been. So, hearing this, where then do you and I go from here? Well, to Jesus Christ, of course.

Most of us have a practical and evolving definition for ourselves of what the sin of lust is. But in this instance, we should consider rethinking what we know, to make room for what really is – the deadly sin of lust. Let's define, or in some cases redefine it.

We can start by understanding that lust is not merely attached to ungodly form and expressions of sexuality, but also has a most powerful connection with pride. Lust is the habit of trying to engineer our own happiness for ourselves, on our own terms. In lust, our own pleasure is the goal, and we decide where to get it, and when, and with whom. In the sin of lust, life revolves around only our desires, wants, and "unrighteous needs." We disown our need for God's love or the love of others (big problem). We prefer to find our own delight, meet our own desire for satisfaction, and fill only ourselves. In short, lust is the excessive desire for my own sexual pleasure. And, there it is. There is no other way to say it without not saying truth that needs to be said.

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And yet, we should not forget that lust usually begins as a sin of weakness, not a sin of malice, to put it in Thomas Aquinas's terms. People (we) get carried away by curiosity or strong desires. We weren't planning to be bad or awful, and hurt people in ways that last a lifetime. It's just that we got caught up in the moment, or got caught in a current of habits that soon swept us up and out of control. Sexual desires are a natural, powerful, and beautiful thing, so it's understandable that we underestimate their force and control on us before we're in the moment of no return. So, while lust is a big deal (really), something with the potential for serious damage—those who struggle with it also tend to feel regret and shame, to appreciate offers of help to escape from it, and to respond readily to mercy, rather than condemnation. Of course, anyone can get hard-hearted over time—this is why we should guard against lustful desire as a habit and common behavior. The truth is, for most of us, lust feels like an uninvited demon who has taken over our lives, and once we see if for what it is, we want to escape from it as much as anyone does – and we should, thank God.

The cultural conversation needs to more honestly acknowledge the emotional and physical power of sex. The church's conversation, however, should start with the goodness of sex and virtuous sexual desire—its love- and life-giving power—not just distortions of that power, since sinful habits can only be understood as deviations from the godly habits. As with all of the natural capacities with which God created us, our sexual desires are not meant to be suppressed or demonized, but expressed in a way that respects our full humanness and love for God and His goodness to us. Lust does not need not be consummated in sex to be lust. Lust is a problem with the heart before it is a problem with our behavior.

Good sex has an interpersonal and social dimension, a dimension that brings us into connection and relationship with others. The deadly sin of lust is deformed sexual desire, because it cuts us off from this potential. Sexual desire is meant ultimately to bring us into a union of intimacy with another person. It has the power to bond a man and a woman together in love. This is why it is important to recognize the characteristic of the deadly sin of lust to degrade the fullness of sex into a merely physical act. Sex is easy – love, not so much. Everything that makes the sinful or causal sexual encounter easy simultaneously speeds its collapse into insignificance (means nothing). Perhaps the hardest thing to appreciate about sex until one has experienced it is the way sex is more than a physical act. The emotional bond of intimacy and the union of two loving persons is all part of the biblical "one-flesh-ness".

Lust is a sinful habit, because it does not honor God's plan and principle for the fullness of sex. It will also alienate people from each other just when they are supposed to be experiencing an intimate union. There's a betrayal of the meaning in way that lust uses sex for nothing but self-gratification, and it is difficult to be lustful without feeling that loss at some meaningful level. If one is successful in becoming immune to the good that God intends in sex, one has also been successful in becoming less fully human.

Lust is in the eye—and mind—of the beholder. When the entire advertising industry is built upon the power of images, we ought not to underestimate their effect on our desires and minds. What sorts of images, desires, and expectations fill our minds and feed our hearts every day? Do we get them from reality TV, celebrities, internet porn, soft-porn movies, cable shows, or the music we download? Do these sources speak truth about God's principles for human sexuality and its goodness, or do they feed our lustful fantasies? John Mayer had a hit song a few years ago called "Your Body Is a Wonderland." The lustful view of the body expressed in the title and lyrics does not convey wonder in the sense of awe and love. Its view of the other's body is that it is one's own personal amusement park. It's a place to have fun and explore and get excitement, and then at the end of the day, we are free to leave it behind, as if it never happened. I get it – it's just a song. Is it? Or, has it become along with others like it the standard for how and what we think about sex and fulfillment? Time to find out so that you and I can become free from the deadly sin of lust and its mission to destroy our lives. The short film called Flame compares sex to fire. When we respect the power of fire and keep it in its proper place, we can appreciate its beauty and find comfort in its warmth. At the end of the film, a man douses a pile of timber as tall as a house with gasoline. Then he takes the tiny flame of his lighter and sets it ablaze. The whole night sky is illuminated by the enormous blaze, flames leaping up to the heavens in the middle of a snowy, barren landscape. Don't settle for less than God's good gift of true sexual pleasure, he says. Instead, by respecting and protecting the real power of love, "discover the big flame." Sexual desire that is rightly directed and ruled by righteousness and not by deadly sin gives us eyes to see the beauty and goodness of our sexuality, and to experience the full pleasure of its virtuous expression.

Prayerful Responses: Father, I repent of the deadly sin of lust. I commit to maintain in my right heart with Your Word, so that I might not sin against You. So that I might not sin against others who do not deserve to experience the consequence of my evil and poor judgement. I seek in You a righteousness that leads to courage, and a courage that leads to righteousness in me. I speak the word of authority in You and in Your name, that I live in victory over the deadly sin of lust, and over a culture and society that has already surrendered to it. Liberty, freedom, and holiness are found in You alone, and this is where I place my hope and put my trust. Amen



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