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# Deadly Sins and Saving Virtues

2018 Lenten Study  
following Pastor Alf's Sermon Series

Beginning the week of February 18  
Concluding the week of March 25

**MDPC**  
Memorial Drive  
Presbyterian Church

# 2018 Lenten Study: Deadly Sins and Saving Virtues

Thank you for participating in our six-week 2018 Lenten study! These six sessions, following the sermons preached during Lent on the theme “Deadly Sins and Saving Virtues,” can be part of your Lenten spiritual formation. Before you begin, please take a moment to read these guidelines and explanations that may help you along the way.

## About the Sermon and Study Topics

This study flows with Pastor Alf’s Lenten sermon series. Each Sunday, we will hear a sermon about the theme and its Scripture passages; then we will meet as groups (or study as individuals) to learn more about the theme from a Biblical perspective. In other words, the studies come after the sermon is preached.

The reason for this is two-fold. First, it connects us with the sermons, providing a synergy between our study and our proclaiming God’s Word. Second, it allows us to wrestle with others with the thoughts and implications the sermons will undoubtedly provoke in a helpful way.

SERMON DATE		WHEN GROUPS MEET
February 14:	<i>From Pride to Humility and</i>	Week of February 18-24
February 18:	<i>From Envy to Concern</i>	
February 25:	<i>From Sloth to Caring</i>	Week of February 25-March 3
March 4:	<i>From Anger to Faith</i>	Week of March 4-10
March 11:	<i>From Greed to Contentment</i>	Week of March 11-17
March 18:	<i>From Lust to Love</i>	Week of March 18-24
March 25:	<i>From Gluttony to Balance</i>	Week of March 25-31

## About the Discussion Questions

When we study Scripture, we do not immediately jump to “what this verse means to me.” Instead, responsible and helpful Bible study moves with an intentional flow guiding it that ensures we consider the context, setting, and meaning of the Bible passages before we start thinking about how the Scriptures impact our lives.

The Discussion Questions are written with this flow in mind. The flow can be summarized with an acrostic: “IDEA.”

**I = Introducing: Getting Ready to Discuss the Passages.** Every study is introduced with at least one opening question or icebreaker, just to “prime the pump” for your thought and discussion.

**D = Discovering: What the Passages Say.** Here we talk about the basic stuff of the passages. Often we are answering the “Who? What? When? Where? How?” questions so we understand what the passages are saying and, sometimes, what they are *not* saying.

**E = Exploring: What the Passages Mean.** Now we move to the work of interpretation. We begin to go beyond the surface level to the meaning and significance of the Biblical texts. We look at bigger questions, at contexts, and at other issues.

**A = Applying: Wrestling with the Passages’ Implications for Our Lives.** Once we know what the passages are saying and meaning, we move to the “So what?” questions. *Now that we know this, what do we do? What are the logical and necessary implications for our lives if the Biblical passages are true?*

You will find this flow helpful as it moves you through the process whether as a small group, as a Sunday morning class, with a friend over coffee, or in your individual devotions.

## About the Two Bible Translations

Two different translations of each Scriptural passage are provided.

The **English Standard Version**, on one hand, is an “essentially literal” translation, seeking as much as possible to render the original Greek in a word-for-word fashion that still is understandable in English.

The **New Living Translation**, on the other hand, is a “dynamic equivalence” translation, seeking to find equivalent words, phrases, and expressions that connect with today’s English speakers, but may not be literal renderings of the original manuscripts.

Comparing two diverse translations can be very helpful as we study, discuss, and reflect on Scripture.

## About the Priority of God’s Grace

As we start our review of deadly sins and saving virtues, we first remind ourselves of an essential truth: We do not begin and maintain a relationship with God by our obedience to God’s commandments or by our general goodness. Instead, we begin and maintain a relationship with God solely by God’s initiative, by “grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone,” as the Protestant Reformers tell us. Therefore, when we talk about deadly sins and saving virtues, we are emphatically NOT stating we must work our way into God’s good favor by acquiring certain virtues, attributes, or characteristics.

At the same time, though, “grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone” naturally leads to lives lived in gratitude and obedience to God’s will. In our journeys of faith, we will acknowledge, confess, and strive against the particular sins that pervade our hearts and reveal themselves through actions, thoughts, and affections. Also, we will seek to develop virtues that counter these sins and give glory to God.

## A Final Word

Much appreciation is due to Jeanmarie Tade and Martha Moore for their contributions to this study with lessons and feedback, as well as to MDPC Communications for its helpful and beautiful work in preparing this guide.

I believe God will richly bless your life during this Lenten season as you study, discuss, and reflect upon the theme of “Deadly Sins and Saving Virtues.” Grace and peace to you as you do so.

The Rev. Dr. Clay J. Brown

Associate Pastor, Equipping Ministries

# Week 1: *From Pride to Humility* *From Envy to Concern*



## Setting the Stage

As stated in the introduction, we do not begin and maintain a relationship with God by our obedience to God's commandments or by our general goodness. Instead, we begin and maintain a relationship with God solely by God's initiative, by "grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone" in the words of the Protestant Reformation. So we are emphatically NOT stating we must earn our way into God's favor.

At the same time, though, "grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone" naturally leads to lives lived in thankfulness and commitment to God's will. In our journeys of faith, we will acknowledge, confess, and strive against sins we all struggle against as part of the human condition. Also, we will seek to develop virtues that give glory to God.

To launch the Lenten study, we will first explore and discuss what Scripture indicates may be the core sin of human beings: the sin of pride. It makes sense, then, that we will follow up with one of pride's primary expressions in our lives: the sin of envy.

What can we do about pride and envy? We will discuss what overcomes pride: the virtue of humility. What is the opposite to envy that keeps it from establishing a foothold in our lives? The virtue of a God-oriented concern for others and their welfare.



## Scripture Passages

### 1 Peter 5:5-6

English Standard Version

<sup>5</sup> ...Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."<sup>6</sup> Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time He may exalt you.

New Living Translation

<sup>5</sup> ...And all of you, dress yourselves in humility as you relate to one another, for "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."<sup>6</sup> So humble yourselves under the mighty power of God, and at the right time He will lift you up in honor.

### Luke 22:24

English Standard Version

A dispute also arose among them, as to which one of them was to be regarded as the greatest.

New Living Translation

Then they began to argue among themselves about who would be the greatest among them.

### Proverbs 14:30

English Standard Version

A tranquil mind gives life to the flesh, but envy makes the bones rot.

New Living Translation

A peaceful heart leads to a healthy body; jealousy is like cancer in the bones.

### Proverbs 27:4

English Standard Version

Wrath is cruel, anger is overwhelming, but who can stand before jealousy?

New Living Translation

Anger is cruel, and wrath is like a flood, but jealousy is even more dangerous.



## Discussion Questions

### Introducing: Getting Ready to Discuss the Passage

- (If you are in a new group) What is your name? Tell us one factoid about your life that will help us remember you vividly!
- How do advertisers appeal to pride and envy in their advertisements? Please share a few examples. How successful are these appeals?

### Discovering: What the Passages Say

- Compare the two translations above for each Scripture passage (1 Peter 5b-6, Luke 22:24, Proverbs 14:30, and Proverbs 27:4). What jumps out at you? Similarities? Differences? Overlaps? Things to pursue?
- According to Peter, what does God strongly oppose? Why might Peter mention this, particularly in light of the fact that he is writing a letter intended to be circulated to several congregations?
- What metaphor regarding clothing does Peter use in 1 Peter 5:5 to describe our efforts toward becoming humble? What will be the result in verse 6 if we follow Peter's guidance?
- In Luke 22:24, a most unflattering snapshot of the disciples is shown. Why would Luke include this in his Gospel? How might what is happening in chapters 22 and 23 of Luke shed light on this inclusion?
- Define "a tranquil mind" and "a peaceful heart," as stated in the two translations of Proverbs 14:30. How do they change a person's life according to this verse?

- In Proverbs 14:30, one translation uses “envy” and the other translation “jealousy.” How are envy and jealousy synonyms? How do they differ?
- How does Proverbs 27:4 describe the connections between “wrath,” “anger,” and “jealousy”? What might you add to this description of the connections?

### Exploring: What the Passages Mean

- C. S. Lewis in *Mere Christianity* states: “According to Christian teachers, the essential vice, the utmost evil, is Pride. Unchastity, anger, greed, drunkenness, and all that, are mere fleabites in comparison: it was through Pride that the devil became the devil: Pride leads to every other vice: it is the complete anti-God state of mind.”  
Is Lewis on the right track, based on the Scriptures above? If so, why? If not, why not?
- The term “pride” can die the death of a thousand definitions. What are other more helpful, even necessary, connotations we give to this term? How do these differ from the pride C. S. Lewis decries?
- How is humility a choice we make? How is humility a gift we are given?
- One thing distinguishing humility from other Christian virtues is the reality that as soon as we recognize we are humble, we stop being humble. How do human beings get around this Catch-22?
- As the disciples are arguing about which one of them is the “greatest,” what do they mean by “greatest”? In our day, what are ways we define “greatest”? By comparison, how does Jesus define “greatest”? How do we measure up?
- Using Proverbs 14:30 and Proverbs 27:4, please elaborate upon the devastating effects of envy or jealousy in someone’s life. When have we observed this devastation?
- If we know envy harms lives so noticeably, then why is it so commonplace? What about us as people makes envy so appealing?

### Applying: Wrestling with the Implications of the Passages for Our Lives

- One implication of this study is we all have a huge problem with pride. How does the gospel speak to this problem? What about God’s grace through Jesus addresses your pride?
- Another implication is we are able to choose, at least in part, to be humble. What changes do you need to make to reflect the humility Jesus wants? As you reflect on this, please consider the following areas:
  - My behavior and/or attitude with family members, work colleagues, and others with whom I spend a great deal of time
  - My response when someone wrongs me
  - My schedule
  - My personal priorities and goals
  - Other areas not listed.

- Still another implication is envy is quite dangerous and destructive. What leads you to be envious? What patterns or habits can you establish to resist these temptations?
- One more implication of this study suggests we need to think of ourselves less in response to our problem with envy. Tim Keller writes in his little book *The Freedom of Self-Forgetfulness*, “The essence of gospel-humility is not thinking more of myself or thinking less of myself, but thinking of myself less.” What is the difference between thinking less of yourself and thinking of yourself less? What are ways in which you might think of yourself less and think of others more? How might this shift in thinking help you address your envy?



## Week 2: From Sloth to Caring

### Setting the Stage

As we continue our review of deadly sins and saving virtues, we must emphasize again we are not saying human beings must work their way toward God's grace by particular deeds, habits, or characteristics. Instead, we remember that "grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone" ordinarily leads to lives lived in gratitude to God. In our Christian discipleship, we will acknowledge, confess, and strive against the sins that pervade our hearts and reveal themselves, and we will seek to develop virtues that honor God.

This week we look at what the early church fathers and mothers considered the most dangerous of all the deadly sins: the sin of sloth. Although today sloth has the connotation of laziness, in the 4th-6th centuries when the deadly sins were being compiled, sloth was listed as *acedia*. *Acedia* derives from both Latin and Greek: *a* - "lack of" or "without" and *kēdos* "care, concern, grief," or literally without care, lacking care, or not caring, which is why the antidote to sloth is caring rather than the more common solution of diligence and activity.

Dorothy Sayers writes in *Creed or Chaos?*, "The Church named the sixth Deadly Sin as Sloth. It is the sin which believes nothing, seeks to know nothing, interferes with nothing, enjoys nothing, loves nothing, hates nothing, finds purpose in nothing, and only remains alive because there is nothing it would die for."

When being interviewed about her book, *Acedia and Me*, Kathleen Norris shared, "I think of *acedia* as the spiritual aspect of sloth. The word literally means not-caring, or being unable to care, and ultimately, being unable to care that you can't care. *Acedia* is spiritual morphine, but it does more than mask pain. It causes us to lose faith in ourselves and in our relationships with others."

So, let's get to work! What does the Bible say about sloth?

### Scripture Passages

#### Proverbs 6:6-11

English Standard Version

<sup>6</sup> *Go to the ant, O sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise.*

<sup>7</sup> *Without having any chief, officer, or ruler,*

<sup>8</sup> *she prepares her bread in summer and gathers her food in harvest.*

<sup>9</sup> *How long will you lie there, O sluggard? When will you arise from your sleep?*

<sup>10</sup> *A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest, and poverty will come upon you like a robber, and want like an armed man.*

#### New Living Translation

<sup>6</sup> *Take a lesson from the ants, you lazybones.*

*Learn from their ways and become wise!*

<sup>7</sup> *Though they have no prince or governor or ruler to make them work,*

<sup>8</sup> *they labor hard all summer, gathering food for the winter.*

<sup>9</sup> *But you, lazybones, how long will you sleep? When will you wake up?*

<sup>10</sup> *A little extra sleep, a little more slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest—*

<sup>11</sup> *then poverty will pounce on you like a bandit; scarcity will attack you like an armed robber.*

#### Philippians 2:12-13

##### English Standard Version

<sup>12</sup> *Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, <sup>13</sup> for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.*

##### New Living Translation

<sup>12</sup> *Dear friends, you always followed my instructions when I was with you. And now that I am away, it is even more important. Work hard to show the results of your salvation, obeying God with deep reverence and fear. <sup>13</sup> For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases Him.*

### Discussion Questions

#### Introducing: Getting Ready to Discuss the Passage

- You have a free afternoon with no appointments or tasks to do. How will you spend your time?
- What is your favorite, most creative way to procrastinate?

#### Discovering: What the Passages Say (10)

- Compare the two translations above for each Scripture passage (Proverbs 6:6-11, Philippians 2:12-13). What jumps out at you? Similarities? Differences? Overlaps? Things to pursue?
- Solomon counsels us in the Proverbs passage to consider the ant in order to gain wisdom. What do we notice about the ant's actions? What other facts do

we know about ants?

- Solomon then contrasts the actions of the ant with those of the sluggard. What are the similarities and the differences between the ant and the sluggard?
- Paul, in his letter to the Philippians, also sets up some comparisons and contrasts. What does Paul tell us we are to be doing with fear and trembling?
- Meanwhile, what is God doing? What is the goal or outcome of all this work?
- What does it mean to work out our salvation?
- What truly pleases God? What Bible verses support your answer?

### Exploring: What the Passages Mean

- The early church fathers and mothers counseled their followers not to succumb to the “noonday demon” of *acedia*. How does the Proverbs passage illustrate this advice?
- Kathleen Norris shares, “One reason I wrote [*Acedia and Me*] was to explore my suspicion that much of the restless boredom, frantic escapism, commitment phobia, and enervating despair that plague us today are the ancient demon of *acedia* in modern dress. When we look at *acedia*’s root meaning, as not caring, we can see it as a social problem, and perceive that the sloth it engenders is anything but an insignificant physical laziness. It may even manifest as hyper-activity, but it is more like the activity of a hamster on a treadmill than action that will enhance the common good.”

How does Norris’ illustration of a hamster on a wheel contrast with Solomon’s work of the ant? When we consider the way we live out our days, which do we more resemble, the ant or the hamster? Take a prayerful, thoughtful look at how you spend the hours of your day. How does what we are doing each day further God’s kingdom in our corner of the world?

- What does the phrase “fear and trembling” mean to you? How does it relate to *acedia*? How does this support the early church fathers and mothers’ thought that *acedia* was the most dangerous of all the deadly sins?
- How have we noticed God working in us, giving us the desire and the power to do what pleases Him? How do we respond?

### Applying: Wrestling with the Implications of the Passages for Our Lives

- One implication of these passages is we all have issues with sloth rightly understood. How does the gospel speak to your problem with sloth? What about God’s grace through Jesus Christ addresses your slothfulness?
- Another implication is that, at least in part, we are able to choose to care, to choose to work out our salvation. After reading Romans 12:9-21, please consider the following areas we can avoid being slothful in zeal (v. 11):
  - My behavior and/or attitude with family members, work colleagues, and others with whom I spend a great deal of time

- My response when someone wrongs me
- My schedule
- My personal priorities and goals
- Other areas not listed.

- Am I willing to report back to the group next time we meet how this played out for me this week?
- Still another implication is that in the Proverbs passage, the ant shows us that there are seasons of summer and winter not just to your physical world but also in your faith. The church fathers advised their followers to push through *acedia* to experience a deeper joy in their relationship with God and avoid the dangerous pitfall of falling away from the faith. We gather in the summer season of our faith when there is abundance and plenty so that when life becomes cold and dark we can draw from that harvest. How does *acedia* in your personal faith journey keep you from experiencing God as a deeper level?
- One more implication is you can become sluggish, lazy, and complacent about your faith not because you don’t care but because you become hopeless, overwhelmed, and crushed by the enormity and expanse of the cares of this world. You need only to read the newspaper, follow your Twitter feed, or watch the news to see tragedy, injustice, and crisis are rampant. Where have you felt God’s invitation to join Him in bringing the kingdom of heaven to earth? Will you share it with the group, and covenant with one another to hold each other accountable to what God is working in us?

## Week 3: From Anger to Faith



### Setting the Stage

As we talk about deadly sins and saving virtues, please remember we do not create a relationship with God by our obedience to God's law or through our inherent goodness. Instead, we experience a relationship with God solely by God's initiative, by "grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone" in the terminology of the Protestant Reformation.

This week, as we turn to the deadly sin of anger and the virtue of faith, it is important to remember that we are not working our way into God's favor, but we are being realistic about our sinful nature and asking the Holy Spirit to help us grow more like Jesus, naturally exhibiting more of the virtues than the sins.



### Scripture Passages

#### Proverbs 29:11

English Standard Version

*A fool gives full vent to his spirit,  
but a wise man quietly holds it back.*

New Living Translation

*Fools vent their anger,  
but the wise quietly hold it back.*

#### Ephesians 4:25-27

English Standard Version

<sup>25</sup> *Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another.* <sup>26</sup> *Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger,* <sup>27</sup> *and give no opportunity to the devil.*

New Living Translation

<sup>25</sup> *So stop telling lies. Let us tell our neighbors the truth, for we are all parts of the same body.* <sup>26</sup> *And "don't sin by letting anger control you." Don't let the sun go down while you are still angry,* <sup>27</sup> *for anger gives a foothold to the devil.*

#### Mark 3:1-6

English Standard Version

<sup>1</sup> *Again He entered the synagogue, and a man was there with a withered hand.* <sup>2</sup> *And they watched Jesus, to see whether He would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse Him.* <sup>3</sup> *And He said to the man with the withered hand, "Come here."* <sup>4</sup> *And He said to them, "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?" But they were silent.* <sup>5</sup> *And He looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, and said to the man, "Stretch out your*

*hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was restored.* <sup>6</sup> *The Pharisees went out and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against Him, how to destroy Him.*

New Living Translation (NLT)

<sup>1</sup> *Jesus went into the synagogue again and noticed a man with a deformed hand.* <sup>2</sup> *Since it was the Sabbath, Jesus' enemies watched Him closely. If He healed the man's hand, they planned to accuse Him of working on the Sabbath.* <sup>3</sup> *Jesus said to the man with the deformed hand, "Come and stand in front of everyone."* <sup>4</sup> *Then He turned to His critics and asked, "Does the law permit good deeds on the Sabbath, or is it a day for doing evil? Is this a day to save life or to destroy it?" But they wouldn't answer Him.* <sup>5</sup> *He looked around at them angrily and was deeply saddened by their hard hearts. Then He said to the man, "Hold out your hand."* *So the man held out his hand, and it was restored!* <sup>6</sup> *At once the Pharisees went away and met with the supporters of Herod to plot how to kill Jesus.*



### Discussion Questions

#### Introducing: Getting Ready to Discuss the Passage

- For the benefit of new members to the group, introduce each other again (like you did last week). Share briefly something that happened last week that made you angry – such as Houston traffic, a misunderstanding with a spouse or friend, unfair treatment at work, life's irritations, etc.
- Do you view anger as a catalyst to positive action or do you view anger as always destructive? Is it a "both/and" or an "either/or"? Why?

#### Discovering: What the Passages Say

- In Galatians, Paul tells us that a fruit of the Holy Spirit is self-control (Galatians 2:22). In Proverbs 29:11, who shows more self-control: the fool or the wise person? Which one is more likely to exact collateral damage with their behavior? Share briefly your experience with venting.
- In both versions of Proverbs 29:11, what is it that the wise person holds back? It does not say that the wise person gets rid of their anger. Do you think this distinction is important? Discuss.
- In the translations of Ephesians 4:25-27, it appears that verse 25 is unrelated to verses 26 and 27, however, when you look at the original language (Greek) you see that they are related. How are lying and anger connected?
- Compare the two translations for Ephesians 4:25-27, especially the first part of verse 26. Does the dynamic equivalence translation (New Living Translation) help you to understand the essentially literal (English Standard Version) translation? Discuss briefly when anger has controlled you or when you have seen someone controlled by anger. What was the outcome?



- What miracle does Jesus perform in Mark 3:1-6? When does He perform it? What opportunity does this miracle provide for Jesus' enemies?
- In Mark 3:5, Jesus is angry. Who or what is the object of His anger? How does He challenge them (it)? What other emotion does He experience besides anger?

### Exploring: What the Passages Mean

- Donald Capps in *Deadly Sins & Saving Virtues* (p. 30) says that anger is “emotional agitation aroused by great displeasure.” We cannot control being angry, but we can control how we react to it and how we feed it. For example, Capps defines rage as “a violent outburst of anger in which self-control is lost, and fury is an overwhelming rage of such frenzy that it borders on madness.” How do we avoid letting anger become rage or fury? How do we practice the advice of “holding back” anger in Proverbs 29:11?
- In Ephesians 4:27, Paul gives us practical instructions not to let the sun go down on our anger. What does this mean? How do we do this? What are the consequences of not doing this? How does avoiding this advice give the devil a “foothold” or “opportunity” in our lives?
- In the Mark passage, the Pharisees demonstrate their stern code for the Sabbath, and Jesus interjects a criterion of compassion for practicing the Sabbath. What are your Sabbath practices? How important are they to you and why?
- How do we manage anger in the face of the day-to-day irritations of life? For example, would people guess by your driving in Houston traffic that you are a Christian? If not, what are practical ways of exercising self-control in this context?
- How does faith intersect with anger? Discuss.

### Applying: Wrestling with the Implications of the Passages for Our Lives

- One implication of this study is we all have the possibility of anger controlling our lives. How does the Bible speak to this problem? How does faith in God's grace through Jesus help?
- Another implication is we may choose, at least in part, to control our anger. What changes do you need to make to control anger in your life? As you reflect on this, consider the following areas:
  - My behavior and/or attitude with family members, work colleagues, good friends, neighbors, and others with whom I spend time
  - My response when someone wrongs me
  - My schedule
  - My personal priorities and goals
  - Other areas not listed.

- Still another implication is anger can be dangerous and destructive. What causes you to be angry? What patterns or habits can you establish to resolve anger before the sun goes down?
- Yet one more implication of this study is our responsibility to self-manage. There is a story from the mission field of a tribe that would visualize in their minds a black dog and a white dog fighting, one representing evil and one representing good. When a missionary asked a tribesman which dog wins, the answer was, “the one who gets fed.” What emotions are you feeding? Where do these emotions lead you in word and deed?

## Week 4: From Greed to Contentment



### Setting the Stage

As we continue our study, we must repeat again and again that people cannot work their way into God's grace. Instead, we, with the Protestant Reformers, proclaim that "grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone" will naturally lead to lives lived in grateful love and service. In our Christian walk, therefore, we will both acknowledge, confess, and strive against the sins that pervade our hearts and reveal themselves, and attempt to develop virtues that honor God.

In the famous 1980s movie *Wall Street*, the character Gordon Gekko states without reservation that "greed is good." But is Gordon correct? Is greed really good? If so, in what sense? Furthermore, good for whom? For me? For my family? For my company or employer? For the United States of America? For the world?

Continued financial and material gain has its strong points. The homes in which we live, the meals we enjoy, and the luxuries we expect every time we flip on a light switch, board an airplane, or keystroke our password enrich our lives. No doubt indoor plumbing and central air conditioning are marvelous gifts in a city like Houston!

Yet money and possessions fail to give a person's life any true, lasting meaning. How do we discover true, lasting contentment regardless of circumstances? Our Scriptures provide some insight on this quite important question.



### Scripture Passages

#### Exodus 20:17

English Standard Version

*"You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's."*

New Living Translation

*"You must not covet your neighbor's house. You must not covet your neighbor's wife, male or female servant, ox or donkey, or anything else that belongs to your neighbor."*

#### Luke 12:15-21

English Standard Version

<sup>15</sup> *And He said to them, "Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."* <sup>16</sup> *And He told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man produced plentifully, <sup>17</sup> and he thought to himself, 'What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?'" <sup>18</sup> And he said, 'I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there*

*I will store all my grain and my goods. <sup>19</sup> And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry." <sup>20</sup> But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' <sup>21</sup> So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God."*

New Living Translation

<sup>15</sup> *Then He said, "Beware! Guard against every kind of greed. Life is not measured by how much you own." <sup>16</sup> Then He told them a story: "A rich man had a fertile farm that produced fine crops. <sup>17</sup> He said to himself, 'What should I do? I don't have room for all my crops.' <sup>18</sup> Then he said, 'I know! I'll tear down my barns and build bigger ones. Then I'll have room enough to store all my wheat and other goods. <sup>19</sup> And I'll sit back and say to myself, "My friend, you have enough stored away for years to come. Now take it easy! Eat, drink, and be merry!"' <sup>20</sup> "But God said to him, 'You fool! You will die this very night. Then who will get everything you worked for?' <sup>21</sup> "Yes, a person is a fool to store up earthly wealth but not have a rich relationship with God."*



### Discussion Questions

#### Introducing: Getting Ready to Discuss the Passage

- Share a time in your adolescence when you just had to have "the thing" that all your friends had because it was simply the coolest thing to have. How did you attempt to get it? What did you say to your parents or other significant adults? To your peers? Describe the success or failure of your attempt, and what life was like afterwards.

#### Discovering: What the Passages Say

- Compare the two translations above for each Scripture passage (Exodus 20:17 and Luke 12:15-21). What jumps out at you? Similarities? Differences? Overlaps? Things to pursue?
- What does it mean "to covet" something, as mentioned in Exodus 20:17? How are coveting and greed connected?
- Please consider the items listed in Exodus 20:17 that should not be coveted. Why might these specific items be singled out in ancient Israel? What additional items might we add today?
- In Luke 12:15, how does Jesus introduce the parable He is about to share? What warning does Jesus sound? On what basis is the warning given?
- Describe the state of affairs of the rich man in the parable. How are things going for him?
- The rich man's response to his perceived state is to do what, according to Luke 12:18-19? What does the rich man believe will be the logical and natural consequence of his response?

- God interrupts the rich man's scenario of how things will go in his life, according to Luke 12:20-21. What negative term does Jesus use to describe the rich man in Luke 12:20? Why do you think Jesus uses such a strong term? Who else fits the negative term mentioned above, according to Luke 12:21? Why?

### Exploring: What the Passages Mean

- Based on both Exodus 20:17 and Luke 12:15-21, what damage does greed create in a person's life? In a community's life? In a church's life?
- Jesus says in Luke 12:15 that "life is not measured by how much you own" (NLT). If how much we own does not provide the best measurement of our lives, then what does? Please provide some examples. How is this measurement expressed both in terms of its quality and its quantity in a person's life?
- Please elaborate upon any possible connections between greed and idolatry, as alluded to in Luke 12:21. What other Biblical references might be found?
- H. L. Mencken is famous for stating that Puritan Christianity (a strong influence upon the Presbyterian and Reformed tradition) should be defined as "the haunting fear that someone, somewhere, may be happy." Is God, as shown in Exodus 20:17 and Luke 12:15-21, a Puritan deity in Mencken's sense of the word? Is He against all desires for happier, better, and more abundant living? If He is not, then what desires for "more" and "better" are God-oriented desires? What distinguishes these desires from greedy and covetous desires, and why?
- Some Christians equate our personal wealth and material possessions with God's blessing, and the absence of wealth and possessions as a self-evident sign of our lack of faith. Based on what we have read in Exodus 20:17 and Luke 12:15-21, what are the pitfalls of such belief for us? What impact does this belief have upon:
  - 1) the witness of the gospel in a post-modern and post-Christian age?
  - 2) those experiencing difficult and challenging times?
  - 3) the priorities of the church for ministry locally, nationally, and internationally?

### Applying: Wrestling with the Implications of the Passages for Our Lives

- One implication of this study is we all struggle with greed. What about God's grace through Jesus speaks to your greed? How may you become content in Christ?
- Another implication is greed is foolish because it leads you on a downward spiral away from Jesus Christ. As you think on this truth, please consider the following and evaluate honestly your foolishness as reflected by:
  - My conversations with others about what makes a person happy, successful, and worthy
  - My comparisons regarding my life, the lives of my loved ones, and the lives of others
  - My belief about what constitutes "the good life"

- My schedule of activities
- My personal goals
- My generosity to people and to organizations in need
- Other areas not listed.

- Yet another implication is greed destroys your ability to experience true contentment. Kevin DeYoung states in his work on the Heidelberg Catechism, *The Good News We Almost Forgot*: "Contentment and covetousness are opposites. Covetousness says, 'I need that. I won't be happy without it. It isn't fair. I don't have it. I want that more than anything else.' Contentment says, 'I have what I need. I am happy in the Lord. He does good to all. I want nothing more than I have.' So if you aren't content, you're almost certainly coveting." What are you really coveting but have not admitted until now? How does this secret covetousness hinder your true contentment? How can you deal appropriately and effectively with your hidden greed?
- One more implication is personal possessions and wealth are not the most important characteristics of life, but instead what is most important is a rich relationship with God. How may you cultivate your relationship with God so it can be described as "rich"? What relationships, habits, and practices will help you grow toward this state? How can you work with others, both in this group and in other groups, to develop and to maintain these relationships, habits, and practices?

## Week 5: *From Lust to Love*

### Setting the Stage

It bears repeating: As we work through our study of deadly sins and saving virtues, we must reinforce the truth that we are not saying we must work our way toward God's grace. Instead, we note that "grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone" is designed to lead to a life given in thankfulness to God. Therefore, as we grow in our relationship with God, we will acknowledge, confess, and strive against the sins that hurt ourselves and others, and we will seek to develop virtues that glorify God.

Now we talk about the change from lust to love. Can anyone argue successfully we do not live in a sex-infatuated age? Look at all the leading indicators. Perhaps the largest growth factor rests with the Internet. Pornography is big business, and viewing online porn is widely accepted. Human trafficking related to the sex trade is at an all-time high. Both men and women fall prey to sexual addictions and dysfunctions made possible by the availability of pornography and the digital means to arrange illicit and sometimes illegal encounters. A news cycle rarely goes by without yet another powerful person being accused of using sex to advance and to maintain that power.

However, we must remember in every age, sex has been a source of fascination, attention, debate, and anxiety. We are sexual beings, and to deny this is to deny a basic element of our humanity. At the same time, Scripture establishes limits and standards for sexual relationships, particularly as it distinguishes between love and lust, between God's plan and our deviations from His plan. Our Scripture passages this week provide both Old and New Testament witness to divine wisdom and insight here.

### Scripture Passages

#### Genesis 1:26-28a

English Standard Version

<sup>26</sup> Then God said, "Let us make man in Our image, after Our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

<sup>27</sup> So God created man in His own image,  
in the image of God He created him;  
male and female He created them.

<sup>28</sup> And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply..."

New Living Translation

<sup>26</sup> Then God said, "Let us make human beings in Our image, to be like Us. They will reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the wild animals on the earth, and the small animals that scurry along the ground."

<sup>27</sup> So God created human beings in His own image.

In the image of God He created them;  
male and female He created them.

<sup>28</sup> Then God blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and multiply..."

#### Genesis 2:24

English Standard Version

Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

New Living Translation

This explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one.

#### Matthew 5:27-28

English Standard Version

<sup>27</sup> "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.'<sup>28</sup> But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart."

New Living Translation

<sup>27</sup> "You have heard the commandment that says, 'You must not commit adultery.'<sup>28</sup> But I say, anyone who even looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart."

### Discussion Questions

#### Introducing: Getting Ready to Discuss the Passages

- Many outside the church (and some within the church) believe God is a "Cosmic Killjoy" opposed to human pleasures of every kind, and thus He is against sex in all its manifestations. Is this opinion about God on target? Why or why not?

#### Discovering: What the Passages Say

- Compare the two translations above for each Scripture passage (Genesis 1:26-28a, Genesis 2:24, and Matthew 5:27-28). What jumps out at you? Similarities? Differences? Overlaps? Things to pursue?
- In Genesis 1:26, why might the New Living Translation's translation team prefer "human beings" as opposed to the English Standard Version's "man"? What contemporary cultural factors may be at work?

- When God creates man and woman, what are they commanded to do according to Genesis 1:28?
- In Genesis 2:24, the phrase “one flesh” is introduced. Who becomes “one flesh”? How does this distinction connect with what was stated earlier in Genesis 1:26-28a? Why might God use this term to express the deepest intimacy?
- Please review the immediate paragraphs both before and after our Matthew 5:27-28 passage in His “Sermon on the Mount.” In your review, you may notice Jesus uses the introductory statement “You have heard that it was said” or “You have heard the commandment that says” a lot. Why might He employ this tactic here? What is He emphasizing by doing this?
- What definition of adultery is the community standard in Matthew 5:27? How does Jesus change this standard in Matthew 5:28?

### Exploring: What the Passages Mean

- Since God created us male and female, what may this creative act tell us about God’s view on sex?
- How does God choose to address the sexual natures and needs of people? Why might He have chosen this specific plan?
- Why do many people believe God’s plan for human sexual expression to be difficult, unreasonable, and problematic? What are sound responses to this commonly shared belief?
- Sin usually takes something originally created by God as good, but then twists it into something evil. How does lust fit this description?
- Jesus expands the definition of sexual sin from action only to either action or thought. What is He emphasizing by this expansion?
- What challenges do those single either by choice or by circumstance face with the “one man and one woman as one flesh” dynamic? With the multiple temptations to lust endemic to today? How do these challenges compare to the challenges faced by those married?
- When we say “love,” we often first think of romantic love. How is this view of love incomplete or insufficient? What is love from God’s perspective?
- In *Mere Christianity*, C. S. Lewis states, “You can get a large audience together for a strip-tease act—that is, to watch a girl undress on the stage. Now suppose you come to a country where you could fill a theatre by simply bringing a covered plate on to the stage and then slowly lifting the cover so as to let every one see, just before the lights went out, that it contained a mutton chop or a bit of bacon, would you not think that in that country something had gone wrong with the appetite for food?” Using Lewis’ analogy as a starting point, what do you think has gone wrong with our culture’s sexual appetites and why? How do you believe God’s love, expressed through His plan for human intimacy and

most concretely in the person and work of Jesus Christ, can make a positive difference in our world?

### Applying: Wrestling with the Implications of the Passages for Our Lives

- An implication of this study is that God is not the Cosmic Killjoy after all, for He loves us and has a gracious plan for human intimacy. How does your view of God change, expand, or become affirmed because of this truth? How can you communicate this truth about God “with gentleness and respect” (1 Peter 3:15b) to your friends who think differently?
- Another implication of this study is we all lust, and this common experience is but one example of our need for God’s grace. How does the gospel address this for you?
- Yet another implication of this study involves Jesus’ definition of lust as not only action, but thought and attitude too. With this new definition in mind, examine yourself as to how you interact with others, how you manage your thoughts, and how you control your heart’s affections. In your examination, please consider the following areas:
  - My behavior and/or attitude with family members, work colleagues, and others with whom I spend a great deal of time
  - My responses when I am tempted
  - My schedule
  - My personal priorities and goals.
  - Other areas not listed.
- One more implication of this study is the recognition that fighting against lust and living out the love of God in today’s sexually heightened world is exceedingly difficult, and therefore we need relationships of mutual support and encouragement to help us. Yet we are reluctant to be so vulnerable about this topic. How can you overcome your fears and establish intentional relationships of mutual, grace-filled accountability? Identify some people who may be helpful to you and pray about how you may contact them.



## Week 6: From Gluttony to Balance

### Setting the Stage

This is our last study of the deadly sins and saving virtues. Over the past weeks we have considered the deadly sins of pride, envy, anger, sloth, greed, lust, and now, gluttony. We have been encouraged by the saving virtues of humility, concern, faith, caring, contentment, love, and now, balance.

As this study concludes, it is important to remember that we do not gain favor with God by our good works, such as acquiring the saving virtues. Only by God's grace and initiative do we have a relationship with Him. Arising from this relationship is a natural desire to obey God's will and to seek what pleases Him.

This week we discuss the sin of gluttony, and the virtue that overcomes it: balance. While many associate gluttony with food, gluttony can take over many different areas of our lives.

### Scripture Passages

#### 1 Timothy 6:6-11

English Standard Version (ESV)

<sup>6</sup> But godliness with contentment is great gain, <sup>7</sup> for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. <sup>8</sup> But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. <sup>9</sup> But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. <sup>10</sup> For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs. <sup>11</sup> But as for you, O man of God, flee these things. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness.

New Living Translation (NLT)

<sup>6</sup> Yet true godliness with contentment is itself great wealth. <sup>7</sup> After all, we brought nothing with us when we came into the world, and we can't take anything with us when we leave it. <sup>8</sup> So if we have enough food and clothing, let us be content.

<sup>9</sup> But people who long to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many foolish and harmful desires that plunge them into ruin and destruction. <sup>10</sup> For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. And some people, craving money, have wandered from the true faith and pierced themselves with many sorrows.

<sup>11</sup> But you, Timothy, are a man of God; so run from all these evil things. Pursue righteousness and a godly life, along with faith, love, perseverance, and gentleness.

### Discussion Questions

#### Introducing: Getting Ready to Discuss the Passage

- Share briefly your definitions of gluttony. Next, go around and share briefly what balance means to you.
- The media oftentimes glamorizes the deadly sins. How do advertisers appeal to our inclination to gluttony in advertisements? How often do they make us feel that if we only had more money, we would be happy? Briefly discuss examples of this.

#### Discovering: What the Passages Say

- As we compare the two translations above for the Scripture passage, we notice they are very similar. What do you notice about differences in the passage?
- According to Paul, what brings great gain or wealth? Why is godliness alone not enough? What must it be coupled with?
- Is contentment the same as happiness? How do they differ? How do they agree?
- In verse 7, how does Paul justify his statement in verse 6? Is this convincing? Why or why not?
- What two things does Paul say we need to be content in verse 8? What else do you need to be content?
- In verse 9, Paul warns about those who desire or long to be rich. What troubles do they experience? Please discuss examples where these have happened.
- In verse 10, is it money or the love of money that is the “root of all kinds of evil”? Is this distinction important? Why or why not?
- In verse 11, Paul speaks directly to Timothy, calling him a man of God. What does he instruct Timothy to run from? What things does Paul tell Timothy to pursue?

#### Exploring: What the Passages Mean

- 1 and 2 Timothy along with Titus are commonly referred to as Paul's pastoral letters. These letters are practical and were written late in Paul's life to his younger colleagues, Timothy and Titus, who will assume leadership in the church. Theologian N. T. Wright in *Paul for Everyone* calls these letters “Paul's Teacher's Manual” for Timothy, Titus, and anyone who wants instructions about living the Christian life. How is this evident in the scripture passage for today?
- Are you surprised that the passage for the discussion of gluttony has to do primarily with money rather than food? Donald Capps in *Deadly Sins & Saving Virtues* says that while gluttony is normally associated with food and

drink, it fundamentally reflects an attitude of mistrust about whether our needs will be met. How do the rich person and the person who loves money distrust God's provision for them?

- How does pursuing righteousness and a godly life, along with faith, love, perseverance, and gentleness bring balance to our lives?

### **Applying: Wrestling with the Implications of the Passages for Our Lives**

- One implication of this study is we have a problem with gluttony in the area of money. How does the gospel speak to this problem for you?
- Another implication is that, at least in part, we may choose to pursue righteousness and a godly life, along with faith, love, perseverance, and gentleness, to bring balance to our lives. Where are you in the pursuit of these qualities? What changes do you need to make to pursue these? Which ones are the most challenging for you? As you reflect on this implication, please consider the following areas:
  - My behavior and/or attitude with family members, work colleagues, and others with whom I spend a great deal of time
  - My response when someone wrongs me
  - My schedule
  - My personal priorities and goals
  - Other areas not listed.
- Yet another implication is any kind of gluttony is dangerous and destructive. What leads you to be gluttonous? How does the media influence you, and how can you manage that? What patterns or habits can you establish to resist any form of gluttony and pursue righteousness?
- One more implication is we should trust God to meet our needs and that we should seek balance. How might this passage help?

Proverbs 30:8-9 (NLT)

<sup>8</sup> *First, help me never to tell a lie.*

*Second, give me neither poverty nor riches!*

*Give me just enough to satisfy my needs.*

<sup>9</sup> *For if I grow rich, I may deny You and say, "Who is the LORD?"*

*And if I am too poor, I may steal and thus insult God's Holy Name.*

How comfortable are you with asking God to give you neither poverty or riches, but just enough to satisfy your needs (not your wants)? What bothers you about such a request and why? What liberates you about such a request and why?

## **A Closing Word**

Thank you for participating in the 2018 Lenten study. I trust God has blessed you during the Lenten season through this study.

We in MDPC's Equipping Ministries hope that you will continue to enrich your spiritual life through Bible study. For resources to find a small group or Sunday school class, or if you want your group to continue beyond Lent, please visit [mdpc.org](http://mdpc.org) or contact me directly at [cbrown@mdpc.org](mailto:cbrown@mdpc.org) or 713-490-9557. I would enjoy the opportunity to talk with you about how God works in our lives through small group study and fellowship.

May God's choicest blessings be with you!

The Rev. Dr. Clay J. Brown

Associate Pastor for Equipping Ministries

## About Digging Deeper

Perhaps one of the topics in this study has raised your interest in learning more. Below are some resources you may use to dig deeper into deadly sins and saving virtues in the context of “grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.” You may find these resources either online or through your local Christian book store.

Rebecca Konyndyk DeYoung, *Glittering Vices: A New Look at the Seven Deadly Sins and Their Remedies*

C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*

C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*

Kathleen Norris, *Acedia and Me: A Marriage, Monks, and a Writer's Life*

Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin*

R. C. Sproul, *Five Things Every Christian Needs to Grow*

R. C. Sproul, *Pleasing God: Discovering the Meaning and Importance of Sanctification*

William Willimon, *Sinning Like a Christian: A New Look at the Seven Deadly Sins*