

TAKE AIM, DON'T MISS! DEALING WITH THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS

– The Sinister Sin of Sloth –



Of The Seven Deadly Sins, sloth might be both the least understood and one of the most sinister. Most of us associate “sloth” with either TV-addled couch potatoes or those odd, tree-dwelling mammals that TV-addled couch potatoes watch on the nature channel. In our day-to-day used of the word, *sloth* is found, usually, in the same neighborhood as laziness – if not a synonym of laziness. Sloth, while it may include laziness, is something more . . . and more sinister.

Dorothy Sayers says it well: *“Sloth is manifested in an attitude of indifference, and attitude of ‘I could care less,’ an attitude of apathy and emptiness, bordering on joyless despair.”* Sloth is a sin, a sin that’s dangerous and deadly in a number of ways. But what IS sloth, why is it dangerous, and what can we do by God’s grace to overcome it?

1. What IS sloth?

It’s a sin that catches folks in its vice-like grip, a sin consisting of 1 of and/or 2 components, usually blended together at various strengths.

- *Acedia = apathy, or without care. [“Apathy Rules”. A-PAY-THAY = what is it?? Who cares!] It’s indifference to whatever. Sayers calls it “. . . the sin that believes in nothing, cares for nothing, seeks to know nothing . . . enjoys nothing, loves nothing, hates nothing, finds purpose in nothing, lives for nothing, and remains alive b/c there is nothing worth dying for.”*
- *Tristitia = a despair that overwhelms every form of effort or striving. “What’s the use? The Universe is expanding . . . “*
- Taken together, and in light of *Hebrews 5:11-6:12*, sloth is: Sluggishness to the point of unwillingness to and even resisting doing what needs to be done.

In his classic work on indwelling sin, theologian John Owen uncovers four features of slothful people. But first, an underlying dynamic about sloth (& THIS IS A KEY DYNAMIC OF SLOTH): ***Sloth is SELECTIVE. You can DO a lot, but sloth shows up in***

what you do NOT do. Even workaholics can be sloths in certain areas of their lives! [1 of my 4 favorite artists, Dean Martin, worked hard in the studio, on set of movies, and walked 36 holes of golf every day; but when he got home, he was classic sloth . . . Relative that could tear a car engine down and put it back together perfectly w/in a couple of days; but, “Have you studied for tomorrow’s test?” “Whaaaaaat??”]

- **1st feature: Slothful people are CARELESS people.**
 (The lesson of *Proverbs 24:30-34*...)
 Neglect leads to poverty, both fiscally (\$\$) and spiritually. Sloth sort of accumulates, little by little, until the weight of the decisions of your non-decisions accumulate and overtake you. [Trash in the house . . .]
- **2nd feature: Slothful people are UNWILLING to ACT.**
 (*Proverbs 20:4*)
 Procrastination, or unwillingness to be stirred to duty. [“What is procrastination? I’ll tell you later.” “I’ll do it tomorrow, but tomorrow never comes, b/c when tomorrow comes, it’s today. “I’ll do it when I get around to it,” so Dad gave me a “Round Tuit”. For me, immediately or never.]
- **3rd feature: Slothful people give HALF -- hearted EFFORT.**
 (*Proverbs 24:16*) = great word picture!
 Always beginning and never finishing projects, etc. Coaches call it “loafing”. My heart’s just not in it. Begins well, and never finishes. My 1 mile relay run @ HHS
- **4th feature: Slothful people allow the slightest DIFFICULTY to shut them down.**
 (*Proverbs 22:13*)
 When it comes to DOING anything, slothful people are easily discouraged. Any obstacle standing in the way is seen as an insurmountable wall to scale! Sometimes, they will even be silly with excuses for not doing something. And they see danger, usually imaginary, keeping them from doing what they need to do. [Not the right time, it will take too long, I’m trying to balance my life right now, Dean Martin for not pulling over when a highway patrolman tried to pull him over for speeding, "My wife ran off with a state policeman and when I saw your flashing lights I didn't stop because I thought you might be the trooper

who is trying to bring my wife back to me." Parental excuse for a slothful child: Please excuse my son for doing so poorly on the test. The hour he puts aside to do homework and studying each week was lost when the clocks "sprung forward" over the weekend.]

2. WHY is sloth dangerous?

There's a uniqueness about sloth. What is it? Here are some effects (and dangers) of sloth. Think of sloth as a breeding ground, or a "favorable" condition for other threats to grow in your life. [Like stagnant water & mosquitos]

- **Sloth STUNTS your GROWTH.**

(Hebrews 5:12-14)

To use the illustrative language of Hebrews 5, sloth turns scholars into schoolchildren who need to be taught their spiritual / moral / emotional / relational "abc's" all over again. Or, sloth turns people into adults needing formula when they should be eating a three course meal @ Table 100. Inattentiveness to God's Word, applied, leads to prolonged immaturity, or stunted growth.

- **Sloth TEMPTS you to QUIT.**

(Hebrews 6:4-6)

J. Vernon McGee used to say, "I believe in the SECURITY of the BELIEVER; and the INSECURITY of the MAKE-BELIEVER." This is a warning of what would happen in our lives IF sloth were ALLOWED to take its course in our lives. The PROMISES of Scripture assures us that God's GRACE will prevail, while the WARNINGS of Scripture serve as a means of motivating us to make sure that GRACE does NOT equal SLOTH in our lives. 1 Corinthians 15:10: [New International Version](#) ***But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them--yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.***

[New Living Translation](#)

But whatever I am now, it is all because God poured out his special favor on me--and not without results. For I have worked harder than any of the other apostles; yet it was not I but God who was working through me by his grace.

Apart from God's grace which is GREATER than your sin, sloth can do real HARM to your life!

- **Sloth never leaves you in NEUTRAL.**

Picture a car going up a hill. If you take your foot off the gas, and put the car in neutral, what will the car do? Go backward or forward? Sloth leaves you in spiritual “Neutral” mode and therefore causes you to drift BACKWARD. There’s no standing still. To put it another way, spiritual growth is not like riding a bike where once you learn, you’ve got it. Spiritual growth is more like GOLF. If you ignore your “short game” for a few weeks, you will be chipping over the green or triple putting (or 5 putting!) the green.

- **Sloth takes advantage of the MIDDLE period.**

When doing a project, or a task, the toughest time is HALF-TIME. *In Spiritual Depression*, Dr. David Martyn Lloyd-Jones observed from Galatians 6:9 that the “middle period” of life is a difficult time for almost all of us. Nehemiah and when the wall was ½ built. Marriages in “mid-life” crisis when the honeymoon is over & doing the work to make the necessary adjustments seems like just too much effort, so we trade our spouses in for a newer model. Or school. Or losing weight, getting fit, dealing with health issues, dealing with menopause . . . or reading dia the Bible . . . or dealing with the “middle stage” of church growth . . . too big to be small, too small to be big. Satan uses sloth to tempt you to “phone it in” instead of doing the work.

3. HOW can sloth be resisted?

There’s 5 answers, 3 are negative, 2 are positive.

- **Don’t QUIT.**

That’s the great temptation. Just throw in the towel, run up the white flag. When sloth is telling you to give up, know that voice is NOT God’s voice! The BIBLICAL perspective and practice is one of PERSEVERENCE. God will give you grace to persevere, but YOU must keep on keeping on!

- **Don’t RESIGN yourself to this CONDITION.**

God is sovereign, strong, good, gracious, and GOD never gives up on you. God NEVER says, “Well, that’s just the way he/she is, and they’ll never change.” No, GOD is in the people-CHANGING business. Not only DO people change. They MUST change. Only God doesn’t change. He doesn’t need to! As soon as you believe change is NOT possible, not only have you let go of hope; You’ve taken your eyes off GOD.

- **Don’t resort to artificial STIMULANTS.**

When “down” about . . . whatever is making you slothful and not doing the work, sometimes people seek “escape” from their struggle. Could be drugs [Dean Martin on Percodan], alcohol, raiding the ‘fridge and consuming mass quantities of “comfort food”, vegging out on “Binge Watching” television, or engaging in not “REALITY therapy”, but RETAIL therapy. When tempted to despair or escape, that’s SATAN speaking dia his disciple, Sloth.

- **Be earnest in your pursuit of ASSURANCE.**

(Hebrews 6:9-11)

ASSURANCE in your Xny is NOT only like a birth certificate, something get, file it away, and then pull it out when you need to PROVE your identity. ASSURANCE is something that ALSO needs to be PURSUED with diligence! DO THE WORK! Pray, read your Bible, go to church, pursue fellowship, construct a plan that works for you, and then work the plan! [3 days a week walking, then 4, then 5, then 6 . . .] Don’t REST IN your works, but DO THE WORK. Grace actually PRODUCES good works! Plus, remember: Doing RIGHT thing is never initially easy OR convenient!

- **Look to the promises of God with PERSEVERING FAITH.**

(Hebrews 6:11-12; Proverbs 6:6)

You NEED to read *Pilgrim’s Progress* by Bunyan . . . yesterday. It was when climbing HILL DIFFICULTY that Pilgrim suffers a TEMPORARY defeat by SLOTH. But the fact is, the RIGHT road is almost NEVER the easy or safe road, but it IS the RIGHT road! And it’s the ONLY road that ends up at the destination we desire! To go BACK is to return to the city of destruction, to go forward is to go into what is feared, but BEYOND that, there’s everlasting life. Looking BEYOND helps you to go FORWARD.

The way ahead is the way of REPENTANCE (re-thinking your decision to give in to sloth) and EMBRACING the promises of God. He/she who PERSEVERES will find all the grace they need to persevere. God will ENABLE you to do the work, but YOU must DO the work!

[From Ricci Martin’s *That’s Amore*: “Dad was 78 when he died early on Xmas AM in 1995. No matter the official cause of any death – in Dad’s case, the Coroner called it “acute respiratory failure,” – people die when their heart no longer beats. For Dad, his heart just wasn’t in it anymore...”] [In the movie *The Shawshank Redemption*, Morgan Freeman said, “Get busy living, or get busy dying.”] Either you let sloth get ahold of you and drag you down, or by God’s

grace you grab hold of the promises of God and persevere. Either way, it's a CHOICE you make. For the Christian, the choice is clear: hold on to hope, focus on the promises of God and principles of God's Word, rely on the Grace of God, and empowered by God's grace, let's get on with livin'!