

“SEVEN SERIOUS SINS: SLOTH.”

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First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA

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Text for the Sermon: Philippians 3:12-14; II Thessalonians 3:6-12

Introduction.

In this season of Lent we are exploring the so call seven deadly sins. But to avoid the implication that other sins aren't deadly we are calling them the seven serious sins.

Sloth, what it is and isn't.

How did this sin make the big seven? What's wrong with a nice nap, or sitting on a beach with a cool drink or looking forward to a day off or a round of golf to relieve the stress of work? All work and no play makes for a dull existence. Of the seven serious sins, this may be the most misunderstood.

What it isn't.

Being still in a noisy and chaotic world is not sloth. We need to withdraw and take time to rest and reflect. It's Biblical to be still and know He is God. Jesus withdrew from busyness.

Sabbath is not sloth, it's also Biblical. God commands us to rest from our work.

Sleep is not necessarily sloth. God created us needing to sleep. It's one of His ways of humbling us and reminding us how dependent we are. It's necessary so our work can be fruitful.

Recreation or play is not sloth. There is a time to play, to laugh, to enjoy God's good gifts and pleasures in life. Goofing off now and then is not the same as laziness.

Retirement is not necessarily sloth. There is a season when our main vocation may be done, and we enter a different season. We can still be useful and productive and glorify God.

What it is.

Sloth has many faces and goes by many names. Sloth is apathy, indifference, lack of interest, lack of enthusiasm, lack of concern. If sloth had been the original sin, we might all still be in paradise.

Our modern mantra for years has been “whatever.” Whatever, don’t care, not my monkeys, not my circus. Now the new whatever is “meh.”

Sloth is procrastination. This is the Round Tuit sin, I’ll get around to it. This is the half-way sin, where we give up early, just quite, don’t care anymore. Our half-hearted efforts end with the first sign of difficulty or resistance.

Sloth has been called the noon time devil, the early afternoon sin.

We have talked about how one sin leads to another which leads to another. King David’s first sin may have been sloth, not doing what he should have been doing.

“In the spring of the year, when kings go off to war, David stayed at his palace, and late one lazy afternoon he got off his couch. Sloth led to lust, lust led to anger, anger led to murder, murder led to pride, and pride led to his fall. Desire leads to sin and sin leads to death.

Sloth is a dangerous sin.

Ecclesiastes 10:18 Through sloth the roof sinks in, and through indolence the house leaks.

II Thessalonians 3:10 If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat.

Someone once said the world won’t be destroyed by those who do evil, but by those who don’t care.

Sloth is wasteful, making poor use of time and resources, it’s bad stewardship of God’s gifts of life, energy, time, gifts and abilities.

Sloth is a kind of lack of love; when I don’t care, I don’t love. When I don’t act or take responsibility I’m saying I don’t care, I am selfish, I just do what I want to do.

We all fight this. We don’t want to take out the trash, wash the dishes, change the diaper, fix the broken window, pay the bills, pull the weeds, do some hard task.

Sloth is a failure to take responsibility. It makes excuses and ignores warnings, silences the prompting of the Spirit and the Word.

Three kinds of sloth.

The idle sluggard.

The lazy sluggard is the most common type of sloth. This is the one spoken of most commonly in the Proverbs. This is the one about whom people like to quote statistics.

In 1960 by age of 30 65/77% men and women had finished college, left home, got a job, and married. In 2000 by age of 30 31/46% men and women had accomplished that.

They call it the Peter Pan Syndrome, trying not to grow up. They shirk responsibility and don't want to plan for the future, just have fun and live for today, prolonging adolescence.

The stereotype of the postmodern male is 30 something, living in mom's basement playing video games. The classis couch potato.

The workaholic.

The workaholic is the less obvious example of sloth.

Vocational diligence is important, the purpose of pursuing a good career is to provide for others. The workaholic goes beyond this, and is seeking something for himself. Approval, identity, wealth, accumulation, to prove something, compensate, avoid something else.

This kind of sloth is trusting himself rather than God and actually ends up doing more than he should or than God intended.

The sluggard and the workaholic are being self-centered and self-motivated. Both seek to control their lives but to different ends.

The sluggard idolizes his free time.

The workaholic idolizes his work time.

The passion-less spiritual Zombie.

The sluggard craves comfort and ease, in his laziness he refuses to work.

The workaholic is driven by desires as well, desires for success or wealth or position.

The passion-less zombie is another form of sloth. He may be busy, but he is going through the motions, just going with the flow on autopilot.

Evenings are spent in front of a screen, weekends are just more avoidance of anything edifying or improving, unengaged in life, his or anyone else's.

This sloth is a worship problem. It doesn't care about God or His Word or His worship or Jesus or the cross or His grace. God and worship and church are not really all that big a deal.

This sloth is worse than just apathy, it's a loss of appetite for God's gifts. It is what keeps us stuck where we are spiritually year after year, with little or no sign of progress. It is prolonged spiritual adolescence.

Sloth is soul-lazy, that's the heart of sloth. This is why Satan loves sloth, it empties of us love for God, of passion for His salvation and forgiveness and grace.

Sloth carries our procrastination and laziness into the realm of our souls where it is most deadly. To be bored with God is to truly be bored to death and doomed to death.

The writer of Hebrews gives a serious warning about spiritual sluggishness.

Hebrews 5:11-12 About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become *dull* [sluggish] of hearing. 12 For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food.

They have been so lazy with spiritual things they are still on milk and not on meat. Sloth stunts our growth. We think we can somehow reap without sowing.

Proverbs 24:30-34 I passed by the field of a sluggard, by the vineyard of a man lacking sense,
31 and behold, it was all overgrown with thorns; the ground was covered with nettles, and its stone wall was broken down.

A slothful heart is untended, neglected, fertile ground for the weeds of vice and immorality and all that comes from a lack of discipline and self-control.

Paul writes against this in II Thessalonians. He commands the idle to work. He sets an example of hard work that is motivated for the sake of others and not himself. All of life from beginning to end is to be lived for Jesus Christ, for a spiritual purpose, to a spiritual end.

The American soul is a slothful soul. Disconnected from God, there is no meaning and purpose to life. It really is just going through the motions until we die.

Work is boring, home life is tedious, the future doesn't look particularly exciting. What's the point of it all? So we anesthetize our souls with some mind numbing substitute.

It is the affliction of this post-modern, post-Christian culture we live in, and it infects us as well. It is ironic that we live in the most affluent country with the most food and water and housing and employment opportunities, yet there is a booming business in counseling, therapy, and medications, all trying to help people who are living lives of "quiet desperation."

Sloth test. Sloth diagnostics.

Let ask a series of questions to help root out where sloth might be hiding in our hearts. Like all sin it can be sneaky and we can be easily deceived.

(ten by Jarred C. Wilson.)

Do you have a difficult time starting projects, or staying on task, or finishing projects?

Are you prone to procrastination?

When people are soliciting help for something, do you try to avoid being asked?

Do you make a lot of excuses?

Would you be embarrassed if your employer knew how much time you spend surfing the Web, chatting with friends, or just generally goofing off while at work?

Do you struggle to maintain a regular time of prayer and Bible reading?

Is your house constantly cluttered and/or in need of cleaning?

Do you pretend not to notice obvious messes or areas of attention, expecting someone else to take care of them?

Do you have a lot of regrets about opportunities you didn't seize?

Do you watch the clock, bored, can't wait for this to be over?

Do you check e-mail or Facebook or your phone for text messages dozens of times a day?

Do you live for weekend, or for vacation, or for retirement?

Do you daydream, wish you were someplace else, or had a better, easier life, or wonder what life would have been like if only ... ?

Does your mind frequently wander to unfruitful or unholy places with little resistance from you?

Battling the beast of sloth.

Sloth may be one of the harder sins to fight, because it's not viewed as badly as the other sins. It's an acceptable way of living in much of our culture.

First we must *confess our sloth* for what it really is, serious sin against God. We begin by hating our sloth and all of its negative effects in our life, our irresponsibility, our laziness, our apathy, our neglect of spiritual things.

But repentance doesn't stop at the words of confession. True repentance produces fruit.

The indwelling of the Holy Spirit is evidenced by a transforming work, a work we must cooperate with, but sloth resists and sabotages sanctification. We must resist with grace-driven effort. Yes, hard work.

Why do we think *hard work* is such a virtue in the physical world but not in the spiritual world? Why are fathers proud their sons are such hard workers, but lazy spiritually? What does it profit a man to gain the whole world and lose his soul?

God's good work in us should inspire us to hard work for the sake of our souls. Jesus has already made us His own, Jesus bought and paid for us with His blood. So now let us lay ahold of what He has done.

Paul calls us to spiritual work and spiritual effort. We can't coast into Christlikeness or drift into holiness.

Press on with earnestness. Forget your stumbling efforts and failures, forget what you haven't done, don't resign yourself to where you are, or that any effort is hopeless at this point or that you are too old. Lies, all lies from the pit of hell. Heed Paul's admonition:

Galatians 6:8b-9 ... the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. 9 And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.

It's a fight, a fight to the end, a fight to the death, so fight. Press hard into the throne of God's grace in prayer, plead for an increased measure of His Spirit and His strength. Read His Word and take it to heart. Fan the flames of zeal for worship and service. Do something.

The antidote to sloth is a sense of purpose and zeal for life and our mission in it. In the Bible everyone who had an experience of God, ended up being sent. Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, Jonah, Peter, James, John. The problem with a "whatever-culture" is it has never seen God.

Do you know God? Do you know why you are here, do you know your purpose? And lest any think it has to be something great, 99% of the people on this planet are not great,

or rich or famous or done some headline-making thing. God sends us to humble purposes.

We can name the famous people in the Bible. Someone should go through the Bible and count up the nameless people, the humble souls who served, who gave, who helped. The owner of the donkey Jesus rode on, the owner of the upper room He borrowed for the last supper, the little boy who gave up his lunch, the good Samaritan.

Small good things are just as noble and pleasing to God as great good things. True joy and satisfaction is found in a life of faith, lived for God and others, less focused on ourselves.

We kill sloth when we live life aware of God and how God wants us to be used. We don't just go through the motions, we live with a sense of usefulness, meaningfulness and willingness to be used by Him for His glory, not for ours.

We are working for and investing in God's kingdom not our own. We are part of something much larger than us and our own little world. There is a kingdom size goal to life and a cosmic purpose.

Missions weekend seemed the perfect weekend to consider this sin. We are reminded of God's call in our lives and His claim on our lives. We heard a call last night at the missions dinner that we are the ones through whom God intends to minister to the poor and needy, the least, the lost, the lowly. And we can serve where we are.

Dan made an appeal last week for those willing to serve in several small ways in the SERVE project. We still need a dozen or more occasional volunteers for our nursery. Chris Roos is looking to return to Nigeria for the third year in a row, and would love to have some visitors the end of next January.

The slothful person sees needs as an interruption rather than as an opportunity. The grace God has given us is not just for us, it is meant to be shared in love.

Why is it that the most selfless people seem to be the most free and content and peaceful?

Galatians 6:9 And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.

Matthew 11:28-30 Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."