

## “The Seven Deadly Sins: Acedia (Sloth)”

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The Rev. Todd R. Goddard, pastor  
Zion West Walworth United Methodist Church

### Galatians 5:13-24

For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another. For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” If, however, you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another. Live by the Spirit, I say, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not subject to the law. Now the works of the flesh are obvious: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

Prayer.

The first thing that comes to mind  
when I hear the term “sloth”  
is the tune from my childhood,  
the voice of my mother,  
calling for me to get out of bed.  
It would have never been the first call;  
it was always the one fifteen minutes later,  
when a sense of urgency grew  
but was not yet overwhelmed with  
immediate need:  
“Lazy bones,  
sleepin' in the sun  
How you 'spect to get  
your day's work done?”<sup>1</sup>  
Sloth, today,  
is thought of in terms  
of the word “lazy”  
“a slacker” or  
“someone without any drive or desire.”

Being raised  
in a morally and ethically conservative,  
non-demonstrative, German,  
Protestant, white household  
my parents didn't have to do  
a lot of instruction  
about the value of work,  
because that was all everyone ever did  
in our family  
(or so it seemed),  
- was to work.

Teaching wasn't by word,  
it was by example,  
and, let's face it,  
if you didn't join in and take part,  
one could get mighty lonely  
mighty fast.

Dad worked,  
first as a welder at the Watson factory,  
and when he got home and finished supper,  
he'd head to the garage  
and finish welding a new railing  
he was making for somebody

<sup>1</sup> Lazy Bones, Lyrics: Hoagy Carmichael

to earn a little extra money.  
 Later, he worked  
 as an accountant for Harbinson-  
 Carborundum,  
 and when he got home and finished supper,  
 he'd head to the study  
 and finish the taxes he was completing  
 for somebody  
 for a little extra money.  
 The last seventeen years of his life,  
 he'd do his school work,  
 or parish work every day,  
 seven days a week,  
 rarely taking a vacation or time off.  
 Both he, and my mother, believed  
 the words of Isaac Watts,  
 "For Satan finds some mischief still  
 for idle hands to do."<sup>2</sup>

But a contemporary form of laziness  
 or idleness  
 is not what the early Christian fathers  
 had in mind when they identified sloth  
 as one of the seven deadly sins.

Thomas Aquinas described sloth as  
 "uneasiness of the mind."  
 What is that?  
 Uneasiness can be something  
 as simple as the increase feeling of  
 dis-ease, or lack of ease,  
 to a full blown anxiety disorder,  
 something that is a  
 recognized psychiatric condition  
 (which responds well to treatment  
 in today's day and age).  
 Growing uneasiness may have some  
 self-protective characteristics:  
 the wariness,  
 fight or flight,  
 that one feels as they are backed into a  
 corner,  
 may serve to protect the individual.

---

2 "Against Idleness and Mischief," by Isaac  
 Watts.

Likewise,  
 the wariness one feels,  
 may contribute to pre-existing paranoia,  
 a psychosis that debilitates  
 and makes people crazy.  
 Perhaps Aquinas wasn't splitting hairs  
 between "mind" and "soul."  
 If one is to read that sloth  
 is an "uneasiness of the soul,"  
 well, now, I believe,  
 crowds of guilty would gather with  
 heads hung low.

Who here today can stand boldly,  
 confident,  
 and satisfied with their faith?  
 In many respects  
 I believe faith is similar to science;  
 the more you know,  
 the more you know you don't know.  
 Likewise, the more faith one builds,  
 the more one comes to realize  
 the mysterious nature of God  
 that one will never know.  
 "Preach faith until you have it,"  
 declared a young John Wesley  
 two hundred fifty years ago,  
 "once you have it,  
 you will be able to preach faith,"  
 Wesley concluded.  
 Moving on to the perfection of faith,  
 I believe,  
 means becoming accepting of  
 growing dis – ease.

Dante refined this definition of sloth  
 even further, saying, it was a  
 "failure to love God with all  
 one's heart,  
 all one's mind,  
 and all of one's soul."  
 In other words,  
 failing to heed the words of Jesus.  
 Jesus tells us to love God with all  
 our heart, mind, soul, and strength,  
 and our neighbors, as ourselves.

Love is listed by Paul  
as the first fruit of the Spirit,  
the counter-venom  
of these deadly sins.

Dear bothers and sisters,  
this conceptualization of the  
deadly sin known as sloth  
may be one of the most over looked,  
easiest to correct of all the deadly sins.  
To know and follow the words of Jesus  
one must know what they are,  
and there is no better place to turn to,  
no finer place to begin  
than right here in the Bible.

When is the last time you cracked  
Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John?  
To know Jesus  
is to crawl into his mind:  
to know where he went,  
with whom he dealt,  
what he believed,  
To know Jesus is to listen to what he said,  
how he said it,  
and why he said it the way he said it.  
I heard this past week  
that if anyone remembers the 60s,  
they're probably too young  
to have to have lived through them.  
Similarly with Christ,  
to make Christ present  
one must remember and make fresh  
his presence in our midst,  
as recorded in the Gospels,  
by turning to his Word.  
Worship,  
the Sacraments,  
Devotions,  
and Study  
are all excellent means  
of uncovering Christ.

It is my observation  
that there is a lot of talk about the Word  
in today's world,

but very few people are actually reading it,  
and fewer still are taking it to heart.  
There are a lot of people who use the Bible  
to beat others over the head  
or set up statues in front of courthouses,  
many times  
to proof-text support for their agenda,  
to make it say something entirely different  
that what was intended.  
But there remains very few  
who actually take the time  
to study it  
to learn the words of Jesus  
and to apply those words to their lives.

One can travel back further  
to complete the definition of sloth.  
We look to the Latin "acedia"  
or the Greek, "akedia"  
which literally means  
"an absence of caring."  
How often have we  
returned a one liner,  
something like this,  
"O, yea?" or  
"I could care less!"

Individually,  
and collectively,  
our culture is one in danger  
of caring less ...  
caring less about

- genocide in Darfur
- death row prisoners who are unjustly  
charged, tried, or convicted
- civilian casualties, collateral damages, in  
Iraq
- political oppression in Myanmar
- the more than 850 million people  
worldwide the U.N. recognizes as being  
malnourished

When we lose the empathy to care  
we lose our connection with our God.  
Allowing others to suffer  
while we walk away,  
hoping no one notices,

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is exactly what the priest and Levite  
 did in the story of the Good Samaritan;  
 they passed to the other side  
 whistled nervously  
 and walked away.

This is not what Jesus would do.  
 This is not laboring for God's kingdom.  
 This is sloth,  
 the idle hands of Satan himself,  
 the very one who tempted Jesus in the  
 wilderness.

We care,  
 because Jesus cared,  
 and he continues to care  
 for those who are wounded  
 and broken by the world.

Sloth:  
 lazy, yes;  
 uneasy, or dis-ease of the soul, certainly;  
 failure to love, without question;  
 failing to care, guilty as charged.

Perhaps you are beginning to notice  
 a trend in this sermon series on  
 the seven deadly sins.

Every one of us  
 are guilty of every one.  
 While insightful in their  
 depth and breadth,  
 what is missing  
 is the solution to these sins.

Be content to know  
 in the short term,  
 that Jesus brings us the answer,  
 he is the solution.

Of this  
 we can be assured.  
 Amen.