



WHAT  
*Lies*  
BENEATH

A LENTEN EXPLORATION  
OF THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS

# What Lies Beneath?

Envision a war-torn battlefield. Guerrilla warfare lurks at the edges. Entrenched battle lines struggle toward one another. Tactics of deception and distraction are everywhere. This is an epic battle between good and evil! And yet, in the fog of war, murky motivations and flimsy justifications abound.

I am describing the terrain of the human heart. As Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn wrote in *The Gulag Archipelago*: “The line separating good and evil passes not through states, nor between classes, nor between political parties either—but through every human heart.... This line shifts. Inside us, it oscillates with the years.” The heart, for ancient peoples, is the deep seat of being. Out of the heart, we think, feel, and do. Inside the heart, we struggle.

Designed to depend upon God and to love God with all of our heart, we assert our autonomy and say, “Who needs God anyway? I’m doing just fine all by myself!” The repercussions are a littered topography of lies told and bodies buried. The good, true, and beautiful get warped and distorted, mangled into evil, falsehood, and ugliness.

We long to be redeemed, to be rescued from the battle and carried into peace and safety. Yet, the guilt over what we’ve done and the shame in who we’ve become is a thicket impossible to escape in our own power. Christians believe that only Jesus rescues us from ourselves, delivers us from the waging war of sin and death, and brings us back to God, granting us peace.

And yet, even in the new hope of a truce forged by our surrender to Christ, we often sink back into what lies beneath. We lurk in the shadows under the surface, unable to fully embrace the faith, hope, and love that God has bestowed upon us. And in this subterranean world, we succumb to the lies that lie beneath, falsehoods coaxing us into the belief we can never be forgiven, cleansed, healed, and made whole again. And other bundles of lies that suggest we can find our healing and wholeness by clasp, possessing, attacking, or abusing.

Lent is a season of introspection where we, through God’s love and truth, explore what lies beneath in the underworld of our own hearts, and expose the lies that distort and deceive. This year we will do so in light of seven historical narratives found in the Hebrew Scriptures (what Christians call the “Old Testament”), each a depiction of one of the seven deadly sins.

# The Teaching Topics and Dates

<b>Date</b>	<b>Sin</b>	<b>Text</b>	<b>Story</b>
February 14 <i>Ash Wednesday</i>	Sloth	Daniel 1:1-21	Daniel and the King's Court
February 18 <i>First Sunday</i>	Greed	1 Kings 21:1-19	King Ahab and Naboth
February 25 <i>Second Sunday</i>	Lust	2 Samuel 11:1-27	David and Bathsheba
March 3 <i>Third Sunday</i>	Envy	Genesis 37:1-36	Joseph and his Brothers
March 10 <i>Fourth Sunday</i>	Gluttony	Numbers 11:18-35	Moses and the Israelites
March 17 <i>Fifth Sunday</i>	Wrath	Genesis 4:1-16	Cain and Abel
March 24 <i>Palm Sunday</i>	Pride	Daniel 4:1-37	Daniel and Nebuchadnezzar

One might look at this list and think: Why so many men? Where are the women? Well, Bible times were patriarchal times. Most ancient stories were written by men about men. And frankly, the stories were mostly about men behaving badly. And so, it isn't difficult to find men as exemplars of the Seven Deadly Sins. Hence, this list! Women do show up as antagonists, but more often show up as heroines, protagonists who do what is right in the context of complicated situations (e.g. Tamar, Rahab, Deborah, Ruth, Esther, etc.). Women have featured prominently in the character cameos we explore in our teachings (see "Rough Roots and Beautiful Branches" for an example), and we do well to, more often than not, correct misogynistic impressions by especially highlighting the heroines (note a forthcoming series: "Unlikely Heroines").

# Why explore the “Seven Deadly Sins”?

The Seven Deadly Sins might conjure up a preacher wagging his finger in the pulpit or a weekend of decadence in Vegas. However, Rebecca DeYoung, in her brilliant book, *Glittering Vices*, explains how the Desert Fathers and Mothers used this taxonomy of sin as a means to approach vice and virtue in Christian Formation: “The [sins were] a kind of diagnostic schematic. Here’s a lens to name the things that people tend to struggle with. And then once you’ve got the diagnosis, they would then bring people to Christ, the Physician of Souls, for healing, spiritual rehabilitation, sanctification, and so on.”

For the fathers and mothers of the Christian faith, putting down a “vicious” life and picking up a “virtuous” one was not “ledger living,” recording + and - marks at the end of each day. Instead, the accompanying character transformation of Christian formation was experienced as the restoration of what it means to be fully human in Christ in the here and now and preparation for the life to come.

Putting down vice and picking up virtue is the common language of virtue ethics and character formation, yet the powerful dynamic in Christian practice is the framing of vice and virtue around love. God loves us and our response is to love God in return. Yet, our loves get disordered, our desires become distorted, and these vices begin to have their way with us. The journey back to virtue begins with the recognition of how much we are loved by Christ, welcomed into God’s love, and *then* compelled to offer requited love.

And so, present day, as we become more and more intentional in living the Christian life, we recognize the familiar pitfalls and obstacles, and thus, this list of vices becomes a bit of a “Top Ten” list of common struggles to address. Giving heed to how these vices show up in our lives can bring us back to Jesus, while steering us away from destructive ways of being and toward *practices* and *habits* that form redemptive *rhythms* in our lives (more on this below).

# What is Lent, anyway?

Throughout much of the church's history, Lent has been broadly observed as the season of forty weekdays and six Sundays leading up to Easter. In the Middle Ages, the English word, Lent (meaning "spring"), was adopted for this spring season, a period of preparation for Easter via self-examination and contrition, ushering in a season of spiritual renewal.

Protestants may hold aversion to Lent for a couple of reasons. Some view Lent as commending a legalistic approach to life. Lenten practice is seen as an external, behavioral modification of the self through rigid discipline or denial: "Aren't Christians saved by grace after all?" Others are bothered by the rituals of Lent—things like ashes, candles, and darkened rooms, all of which create a mood of somber lament: "Aren't we past the sad, empty rituals of religion anyway?"

Yet, we should not see Lent as an endeavor to win God's favor. Rather, Lenten practice is a heightened response to God's rescue and our favor in God's eyes through Christ. The Scriptures are full of indicatives (God loves you. God saves you. God forgives you.) followed by imperatives (So obey him. So walk with him. So be grateful). Lent trains us to respond to grace (the indicative) via obedience (the imperative). Lent should not be avoided for fear that it is legalistic. Rather, Lent should be observed as a season of amplified awareness of God's work on our behalf and the cultivation of our obedient response to that work.

Additionally, what might be said to those who ask, "Aren't we past the smells and bells, whistles and thistles, incense and nonsense? Aren't candles and ashes the relics of a bygone era? Mere objects that take up space in empty traditions?" Answer: "Absolutely not!" For we are creatures of habit who connect to tangible objects and expressions of faith. We are people who fully embody deep patterns, behaviors, and rituals—rhythms we might call liturgies for living. To be human is not to be a mere bundle of nerves, a bag of hormones, or a brain on a stick. Rather, it is to be a fully embodied self that thinks, feels, and does—and often not in that order!

Think about the habits, patterns, and rhythms in your own life. What do you first do when you wake up in the morning? Or when you get to work? What do you feel on the commute home? What sort of smells do you love and what do they remind you of? Where do you go when you need to escape? What do you do when you need to feel released from anxiety or fear? What you think, feel, and do in these situations cultivates your liturgies for living: *Practices* become *habits* become *patterns* become *rhythms* become *liturgies for living*. I like to think of a practice as something you might try for 30 days, a *habit* as something forged in a season, a *pattern* as something that becomes almost sub-conscious for months, a *rhythm* as a valued cadence in your life that may be established for years, and *liturgies for living* are what form the decades-long trajectory of a life well-lived.

Good liturgies for living form and shape us in humanizing ways. Bad ones form and shape us in dehumanizing ways. Lent is a special season that trains our focus on the how's, what's, and why's of life. Lent allows us to center ourselves as we practice taking off vices and putting on virtues. Lent helps us to become human again.

# What is Our Prayer for you this Season?

Rebecca DeYoung offers this line of questioning to her philosophy students, "It's really helpful to ask, 'What is the right thing to do?' That's a very helpful ethical question. But it's another layer of ethical questioning to ask yourself, 'And if I did this over and over again, every day for the next month, well, what kind of person would I be headed toward becoming?'"

Lent creates an opportunity for every person at WCPC to live into this question: "What kind of person am I becoming?" This is not a question that only applies to a twenty-one-year-old, though that is such a great time to ask it! Instead, we know our lives are dynamic, we are changing every day, and who we are in one decade of life might look quite different than who we are in another one. Let us pay close attention to who we are becoming right now in this very moment. May we be persons who are the pleasant aroma of Christ. May we wear his name well. This is our prayer for you this season! And this is why we've suggested Redemptive Practices to help you along...

# Redemptive Practices to Combat the Seven Deadly Sins

<b>Sloth</b>	Service, Sabbath
<b>Greed</b>	Service, Generosity
<b>Lust</b>	Fasting, Prayer
<b>Envy</b>	Prayer, Solitude
<b>Gluttony</b>	Generosity, Fasting
<b>Wrath</b>	Solitude, Sabbath, Prayer
<b>Pride</b>	Service, Solitude

Lenten Practices, like New Year's resolutions, tend to start with our best intentions and fizzle out in the jumble of our old routines, business of life, and discomfort with change. This Lent we invite you to enter into practices with three guidelines:

1. *Enter prayerfully.* Seek God's wisdom about how He might shape you during this season.
2. *Enter realistically.* Change is hard, and most often comes incrementally. For this reason, we would recommend that you only adopt one new practice from this list.
3. *Enter within a community of accountability.* If you adopt a Lenten practice, set concrete goals, and share those goals with a friend, family member, or others in your Community Group.



## Service

Service is the act of putting others' needs before your own.

**Lenten Practice of Service:** Each day, replace one act aimed at yourself with an act of service. This could be buying a stranger's coffee, letting someone else merge ahead of you, doing someone else's chore, or asking someone about their day, rather than sharing about your own. It could also mean serving at the Care Cottage or some other volunteer opportunity.

## Sabbath

Sabbath is intentional pausing from work in order to rest, worship, and delight.

**Lenten Practice of Sabbath:** Each week, take a four-hour period of Sabbath. Open and close this time with ten minutes of prayer. During this time, refrain from doing work, either paid or personal. We also recommend refraining from using technology during this time. Use this time to enjoy nature, enjoy community, rest, and feel God's presence.

## Fasting

Fasting is the practice of abstaining, historically this has been abstaining from food, though in recent times, other people fast from other things like alcohol, social media, or television.

**Lenten Practice of Fasting:** Each week fast from one meal. We recommend lunch. Rather than working through the time normally devoted to preparing and eating lunch, spend that time in prayer, thanking God for his provision.

## Generosity

Generosity is the practice of joyfully giving away your time, talents, and treasures.

**Lenten Practice of Generosity:** What do you guard most jealously? What do you hoard? Money? Possessions? During this Lenten season, make a weekly practice of giving them away. Donate money, leave extravagant tips, give away clothes, make someone dinner, loan someone your car, etc.

## Prayer

Prayer is the practice of speaking to and listening to God.

**Lenten Practice of Prayer:** Each morning, spend ten minutes in prayer, using the Lord's Prayer as a guide to prompt your prayers.

## Solitude

Solitude is a practice of withdrawal, in order to meet with Jesus.

**Lenten Practice of Solitude:** Set aside 30 minutes, twice a week, for solitude. Solitude involves withdrawing from two things: other people and distraction. It also involves being present to two things: your internal life and God's presence. This might be on a front porch, a park bench, or on a walk. During your times of solitude, set aside your computer, phone, headphones, and other noise, find a place of solitude, and rest in God's presence.

# A Taxonomy of the Seven Deadly Sins

May these descriptions assist you in understanding what lies beneath in your heart as you take up redemptive practices to combat them.

## Sloth

- *Latin: Acedia* -

"I do not care that I do not care that I do not care."

Not merely idleness of the mind or laziness of the body, but the poisoning of the will which, beginning with indifference and an attitude of "I couldn't care less," extends to the deliberate refusal of finding the joy of the Lord as your strength.

## Greed

- *Latin: Avaritia* -

"I want this treasure so that I can have a rich life."

The inordinate love of wealth, and the power that wealth gives, whether it is manifested by miserly hoarding or by lavish spending; belief in the lie that more will make us happy.

## Lust

- *Latin: Luxuria* -

"I want this person so that I can have a pleasurable life."

The divorce of sexuality from responsibility; a burning unfaithfulness that refuses to say, "No," and objectifies, uses, and possesses others.

## Envy

- Latin: *Invidia* -

"I want your happiness, and I don't want you to be happy."

The proud person is self-sufficient, rejecting with contempt the notion that anybody can be their equal or superior; the envious person is afraid of losing something by the admission of superiority in others, and therefore looks with grudging hatred upon another person's gifts and good fortune, taking every opportunity to run them down or deprive them of their happiness.

## Gluttony

- Latin: *Gula* -

"I want this comfort so that I can have a full life."

An undue attention to the pleasures of the palate, whether by sheer excess in eating and drinking, or by the opposite fault of fastidiousness; more generally, it includes all over-indulgence in bodily comforts – the concentration, whether jovial or fretful, on a "high standard of living."

## Wrath

- Latin: *Ira* -

"I despise you for being inferior to me."

The first type is an active and ferocious venting to inflict pain and destruction on anything and everything it meets; the second type is a passive and sullen withdrawal into a black sulkiness that can find no joy in God or man or the universe.

## Pride

- Latin: *Superbia* -

"I am more important than you."

The endeavor to be "as God," making self instead of God the center about which the will and desire revolve; an egotism so overweening that it cannot bear to occupy any place but the first, and hates and despises all fellow-creatures out of sheer lust of domination.

# Works Explored

*Glittering Vices*, Rebecca DeYoung.

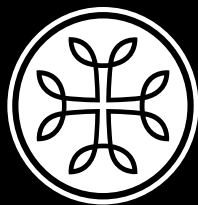
The Seven Deadly Sins, The No Small Endeavor Podcast.

*(great summary of DeYoung's book)*

*Steering Through Chaos*, Os Guinness and Virginia Mooney.

*The Seven Deadly Sins*, New York Public Library Humanities Lectures.

*On Our Best Behavior: The Seven Deadly Sins and the Price Women Pay to be Good*,  
Elise Loehnen.



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