



TOXIC DISCIPLESHIP

Toxic churches produce deadly disciples

DENNY WAYMAN

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**DEADLY
SINS**

Pride
Greed
Wrath
Envy
Lust
Gluttony
Sloth



**MISUSE
OF GIFTS**

Counsel
Mercy
Healing
Missions
Hospitality
Leadership
Proclamation
Worship

TOXIC SOILS

Worship Self — Selfish Ambition — Wilful Ignorance

Superiority - Arrogance - Competition - Deception - Domination
Manipulation - Vengeance - Malice - Insidiousness - Comparing
Slander - Addiction - Apathy - Laziness

INTRODUCTION

“Take this rule: whatever weakens your reason, impairs the tenderness of your conscience, obscures your sense of God, or takes off your relish of spiritual things; in short, whatever increases the strength and authority of your body over your mind, that thing is sin to you, however innocent it may be in itself.”

— Susanna Wesley (Letter, June 8, 1725)

Praise be to you, LORD; teach me your decrees. With my lips I recount all the laws that come from your mouth. I rejoice in following your statutes as one rejoices in great riches.

— Psalms 119:12-14

In healthy Christian discipleship, the soil into which we place our spiritual roots nourishes the development of the fruit of the Spirit. Such soil can best be described as the very presence of God.¹ When we join together in worship, immerse ourselves in prayer, study the Bible, and engage in other spiritually nourishing practices, we begin to notice first the blossom and then the bud and then the fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control.² However, if we place ourselves or are placed by our family, culture, or church into soil that is permeated by the poisoning

presence of toxic elements, then the fruit that is produced will be not only malformed but also spiritually, morally, and communally dangerous.

As in all ecosystems, the whole impacts the part, and the part affects the whole. This interactive unity is a predictable reality such that we can look at any individual part and accurately describe the whole in which that part must fit. Similarly, when we look at the whole of the ecosystem, it is then possible to predict how the various parts are formed or malformed to exist within that system.

Recognizing that in human ecosystems each individual has a choice and therefore creates a community consisting of the aggregate of those choices, it is often not recognized that the created community also has choices. The life of the community is larger than just the sum of its parts, and it therefore has its own existence.

The biblical word that describes this reality is *συνεργός* (*synergos*). Appearing 13 times within the New Testament, the word combines the union of “with” and “work” and describes how people working with other people, or God working with His people, create a transcendent reality.

In Christian thought, *synergy* is an important aspect of Wesleyan and Arminian theology as contrasted with monergism. In Wesleyan/Arminian explanations, *synergism* explains how the joining of the work of divine grace and human freedom create eternal salvation. In monergism, salvation is the work of God alone, and humans are the recipients of His choice. As can be imagined, this foundational difference changes the very nature of the ecosystem creating salvation.³ Yet, we know human freedom to be necessary not only for love to be possible, but also for salvation to be just.

Supporting the biblical view of Wesleyan theology are the observations of the social scientists. In the 1990s, social psychology⁴ studied *synergy* and affirmed this basic reality within individuals

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and human societies alike. These complex systems, or ecosystems, are therefore shown to be healthy, toxic or a combination of both. However, when they are toxic, ecosystems produce the poison fruit experienced in the larger moral and justice struggles within individuals, churches, communities, and nations.

In this work, we will explore the importance of discipleship in identifying and mitigating the toxic soil into which we and others have been planted. We will identify and thoughtfully consider making whatever changes are necessary to bring health and wholeness through God as our *helper*⁵. Our study is designed to provide instruction whether read by a single individual, small group, or class. The following chapters are based on the wisdom of Scripture with the added resources of reason within the social sciences, the verification of personal experience, and the consistency of church tradition, following the Wesleyan Quadrilateral approach to discovering truth.⁶

Reminding ourselves of the reality of the ecosystem of discipleship, the first chapter will present a tree as our model for exploring the toxic components lying within our collective soil. The toxic poisons will then be identified in the next seven chapters as we determine their effect in our lives such that we nourish the seven deadly sins, and then how such sins cause the deformed use of spiritual gifts which then produce an unhealthy, toxic, unbiblical community.

In the last chapter, we will turn our attention to the processes used in the natural world to purify toxic soil and how these same processes can inform the spiritual purification process to bring about healthy discipleship, church life, community wholeness, and individual sanctification.

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CHAPTER 1

TOXIC ECOSYSTEM

“The woman said to the serpent, ‘We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.’”

— Genesis 3:2-3

“Some people retreat into religion and shift their burdens onto the shoulders of a benevolent God. They think only about themselves. It is therefore natural for them to believe that God, this extraordinarily honored and worshipped being, is concerned entirely with serving them and is responsible for their every action.”

— Adler, *Understanding Human Behavior*

The presence of a poisoned produce within a garden full of nourishing fruit has caught our imagination. From the fairytale of Snow White to the logo of the Apple computer, the peril and possibility of appropriated power and infinite knowledge is placed in the third chapter of the Bible in a way that clearly infers danger. Whether that

danger comes from power we cannot control or knowledge we cannot fathom, we know that even in paradise there is poison that can lead to death.

Why that danger is present even in Eden causes a discussion ranging from freedom to responsibility, from disobedience to consequences, from love to instinct. But in all such discussions, the larger reality that poison fruit is always present is undeniable. Whether long ago at the advent of history or today at what some would call humanity's zenith, every one of us knows that this very day we could both take from or give to someone toxic fruit that not only doesn't nourish life but also can kill.

Knowing this to be true, the thoughtful person turns to God for wisdom in knowing both the source of such poison and how to avoid producing or eating such fruit. To assist in this important task, the toxic tree ecosystem provides a graphic depiction to help provide us with insight on these vital questions.

Throughout church tradition, Christians have experienced and taught the dangers of the deadly sins.⁷ Discussed by the Desert Fathers in the third and fourth centuries and formalized in the Middle Ages,⁸ the church has identified seven deadly sins.⁹ These are: pride, greed, wrath, envy, lust, gluttony, and sloth. As is true in all ecosystems, these poisoned fruits do not just happen but rather grow from the contaminated toxic soil that nourishes them. Such soil is not so much sinful in itself as it is the underlying experience that is predictably present in the person's life and community. It is not enough for us to say that greedy people produce greed-infused fruit; we must also acknowledge that greedy people spread that sin throughout the ecosystem of family, church, community, and nation. As seen in the toxic discipleship tree, toxic soil produces the deadly sins which cause a misuse of spiritual gifts, which then causes toxic soil to spread throughout an ongoing toxic discipleship ecosystem.¹⁰

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The larger system is that as each of us reproduce the seed(s) of our ancestors and share in the unique fertilizer of our home, church, or community, even though the greed did not begin or end with us, it permeates the entire generational, familial, ecclesial, national, and international ecosystem.

This universal toxicity is what makes sin far more difficult to remove even after we've asked for forgiveness. We often don't realize our roots are still deeply embedded in soil that reproduces the poison. Additionally, when we try to remove ourselves from familial and ancestral soil, we find that our roots themselves carry the poison with us into the new relationship, marriage, family, church, and community. What makes all of this so deceptive is that we often don't identify a new soil as *home* until we've made it smell and produce like our former toxic garden. Identifying more with the toxic blossom as well as the aroma of the noxious fertilizer, we are often unaware that we have reproduced the toxicity we were attempting to escape.

TOXIC SOILS

Just as in healthy discipleship we find three spiritual activities that are universally helpful in growing the fruit of the Spirit — worship, prayer, and study — we also find three universally toxic soils that develop the deadly sins — worship of self, selfish ambition, and willful ignorance.¹¹ Though other toxicities are unique to specific sins, these three seem to be a lethal cocktail present in all toxic soil, each diminishing the soul's ability to live the life God offers.

WORSHIP OF SELF

When God met Moses on Mt. Sinai in the Wilderness of Sin,¹² He provided the list of ten commandments that would protect the people on their journey to freedom. It is no coincidence that the first two of those commandments focuses on who we worship. The first

is to worship God only, and the second is to not attempt to create a representation of God in any way.¹³ Both are incredibly insightful and define the very foundation of a healthy versus a toxic life.¹⁴

The first commandment is not as simple as many believe. It is not so much a statement of “Do not have any gods before me,” implying that there are many gods from which to choose, and we are to choose Yahweh and put the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Moses in first place — the place of greatest *worth*. Rather, it is, “Your very being is based on having no other gods!”¹⁵ The Hebrew used here begins with a very common verb, הָיָא, *hāyâ* (H1961) and can be translated “to exist” or “to be.” It is used early in Genesis when God says, “*It is not good that the man הָיָא, hāyâ should be alone; I will make a help meet for him*” (Genesis 2:18). It is also used in the familiar prophesy of Isaiah: “*For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulders: and his name הָיָא, hāyâ shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace*” (Isaiah 9:6). In both instances, the word describes the very essence of being — whether of Jesus or of humanity.

The same is true of us. For us to be who God created us to be requires that we have no other gods — and that includes worshipping ourselves. When we live for self as though we are the god of our lives, then we cease to even *be*, or at least *to be* who God created us *to be*. We have lost the essence of our being.

Before we explore how this loss of being, loss of self, and the endless search for meaning and being creates toxic soil, let’s explore the complementary second commandment. Longer than the first with its weaving of the impact on generational ecosystems, this guidance can also be over-simplified. Knowing the pandemic of idolatry within humanity, we could take the words as referring only to physical idols made of wood or stone:¹⁶

“You shall not make for yourself an image in the form

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of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments” (Exodus 20:4-6).

Undoubtedly, such a statement is intended to stop the creation of golden calves¹⁷ or stone goddesses like Artemis.¹⁸ But in addition to this worship of the creature rather than the Creator,¹⁹ the danger of worshipping ourselves as beings made in the image of God is clearly implied. Like Narcissus of Greek mythology who fell in love with his own image,²⁰ it is easy to see ourselves in the beauty and abilities given to us by God and fall in love with and worship our own selves. We then set out to satisfy this *god* and dedicate every part of who we are to serving our sensual desires, our lust of the eyes, our will for power, our obsession with fame, and our insatiable desire for wealth.

Each of these aspects of worshipping self, from satisfying sensual desires to seeking inequitable wealth, is a unique toxicity that produces uniquely devastating sins. However, at this point, it is important to realize that all of these individual toxins are emanating from the deeper and pervasive sin of worship of self.

Combining both the first and second commandments into the foundational soil that nourishes our lives and relationships, we might state it like this: “The health of your being is based on having no other gods, including worshipping yourself.” And, “this is such a powerful reality that if you worship *only* the living God, then you will *be a being* who creates, or continues *to be* within, an ecosystem of blessing for a thousand generations to come.” Conversely, just as this healthy ecosystem can bless a thousand of your family’s generations, if the foundational soil is toxic such that “you base your being on

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worshipping yourself,” then the toxicity will harm not only you but also the next four generations who are born into your devastated and devastating family. Similarly, it matters greatly whether you are born into a healthy or toxic ecosystem in your family, your church, your community, and your culture. Healthy soil produces the fruit of the Spirit, while toxic soil produces deadly sins. Both fruit and sins are nourished by your choices and the choices of those around you, creating the ecosystems of your life.

SELFISH AMBITION

Ambition is often misunderstood. Some of the best leaders are ambitious. But as Jim Collins discovered in his research for his book *Good to Great*, the ambition of business leaders is not for their own advancement. It is for the good of the company. He explains in business language what Paul describes as a disciple of Jesus Christ. Collins says it this way:

“Level 5 leaders display a powerful mixture of personal humility and indomitable will. They’re incredibly ambitious, but their ambition is first and foremost for the cause, for the organization and its purpose, not themselves.”²¹

Compare this description with Paul’s:

“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.”²²

Continuing, he lifts up the example of Jesus Himself:

“In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used

to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!”²³

Without a doubt, the very definition of *humble ambition* is Christ’s willingness to die so that others might live.²⁴ Christ’s dedication to the cause of eternal salvation while behaving as a humble servant is difficult to even imagine, let alone imitate. Perhaps that is why Paul states it in its toxic form of selfish ambition. We can all recognize that. We know when someone is using position, power, influence, resources, or even gifts for their own gain. But imagine what would have happened to God’s eternal ecosystem if Jesus had lived only for Himself, even for a moment. Thankfully, He did not. Jesus lived a selfless, humble ambition, putting others’ needs before His own.

Though it is true that selfish ambition is a tumor nourished by noxious worship of self, it qualifies as a separate aspect of the three foundational toxic soils, not because of its distinctive origin but because of its pervasive presence. In virtually all of the deadly sins, the disregard for what happens to others is obvious and alarming. It could even be said that if there were just a hint of love for others, then each of the deadly sins would not only be impeded but could not be enjoyed, at least not beyond the momentary thrill sin provides. Like the archetypal Dr. Jekyll/Mr. Hyde tale where the two parts of a single person had to be divided in order for each to become their best and worst self,²⁵ the reality is that many of us live *morally dissociative* lives in order to continue in our sin.²⁶

Having grown up in the “Bible belt,” I experienced personally the effects of being a person who lives a *morally dissociative* life. For me, I simply did not try to decide whether my “true self” was the

one sitting sincerely in the sanctuary, and therefore dissociating when I actively participated in the sinful use of others on Saturday, or whether my true self was the willing participant in the immoral lifestyle of Saturday and dissociating as I sat in piety on Sunday. Like the Gemini twins of Greek mythology,²⁷ one of whom was mortal and the other immortal, my worldly and religious selves were twin aspects of a deceiving toxicity that was devastating my soul. As I began to integrate my developing *self*, I at first decided that my true self was to affirm my worldly ways and leave out the nagging guilt of an imposing Christianity. But I soon experienced a complete loss of all that I had experienced as being good about myself. I experienced the poisonous effect of selfish ambition. It was not until I repented of that toxic lifestyle and transplanted my roots into a humble servanthood relationship with God and others that I found life and health.

WILLFUL IGNORANCE

To be uninformed is how each of us begins life. We are therefore dependent on the wisdom of our family, church, and community ecosystems to give us the knowledge we need in order to make wise choices that will bless not only ourselves, but also all of those within our ecosystems. However, there is a toxic soil that denies the truth and the value of education. It comes in various forms, all of which can be identified as willful ignorance.

There are those who decide that there is no such thing as truth. We see this toxicity in the life of Pilate as Jesus — Truth Himself — stands before him. Convinced there is no such thing as truth, Pilate is not impressed when Jesus says that He *“has come into the world to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.”* Pilate deflects by saying “What is truth?”²⁸

Today this approach to life is often called post-modernism²⁹ and has many adherents. Understanding that bias and subjective

experience often taint propositions claimed to be true, each of us seeks to transcend such human or individual limitations and receive a reliable truth. However, the same biases can often keep us from looking for truth as it is “witnessed” by Jesus and revealed in Scripture. Thus, many today are willfully ignorant of the truth presented in Jesus Christ, His Word, and His church.

I witnessed this directly as a pastor in Santa Barbara when one of our new, university-graduated couples came to the church and were, for the first time, exposed to the Bible. I did not know what to say when they told me a short time later that they were excited to have discovered in a local bookstore that the “Bible was in English.” Not willfully ignorant of biblical truth, this sincere couple were nevertheless a part of two primary ecosystems: their family, and their top-tier California university that was willful in keeping them ignorant of Jesus and His Word. This toxic soil then produces generations of graduates who often continue in biblical ignorance in increasingly willful ways, avoiding Jesus, the Bible, and Christianity, as these were all derided in their university and family.

But denying the possibility of truth is not the only form of willful ignorance. A more deliberate bifurcation of life into *facts* that can be known exists because of a scientific reliability and opinions that cannot be proven through such methodology. This kind of thinking has also progressed to include the distrust of cultural differences which cannot be proven through the social sciences. These cultural and methodological questions are pervasive and impact not only the ecosystems of our culture and media, but also our personal lives as individuals and families.

When taken to its extreme, such an acceptance of only the physical world and its knowable aspects is called *Scientism*.³⁰ Although the name implies a scientific viewpoint, it is actually a belief that is internally inconsistent. As one scholar explains, “It is one thing

to celebrate science for its achievements and remarkable ability to explain a wide variety of phenomena in the natural world. But to claim there is nothing knowable outside the scope of science would be similar to a successful fisherman saying that whatever he can't catch in his nets does not exist. Once you accept that science is the only source of human knowledge, you have adopted a philosophical position (Scientism) that cannot be verified, or falsified, by science itself. It is, in a word, unscientific.”³¹

The result of bifurcating the world into *facts* and *opinions* is that most of life would fit within the *opinion* category. Love cannot be proven to be more than the biological reactions of an evolutionary creature, and God certainly doesn't fit within the categories that would prove not only existence and creation, but salvation and sanctification. When someone believes philosophically that love, God, salvation, and sanctification are outside the possibility of human understanding, then a life of willful ignorance results with all the toxicity one can imagine.

FOUNDATIONAL

As we will see in the chapters to come, many other toxicities permeate the root system of individuals, churches, and societies. These include such toxins as: superiority, arrogance, competition, deception, domination, manipulation, vengeance, malice, insidiousness, comparing, slander, addiction, apathy, and laziness. But worship of self, selfish ambition, and willful ignorance seem to be foundational to all other poisons. It is therefore beneficial to note that when deadly sins are present in a church, identifying the toxic elements can provide the beginning of healing and purification. If poison is in the system and yet we see only symptoms but do not know the source, then we are like physicians treating a cough without knowing if it is COVID or a cold. The solution in each case requires very different interventions

for the individual and the family and even for the community. Both COVID and colds are contagious and can spread from individual to individual within their ecosystem, but one can result in death while the other seldom does. The deadly sins are similar, and the cause of these lethal behaviors must be identified if health is to be achieved.

REFLECTION/DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

In each chapter these questions are divided into those by which we evaluate ourselves and those by which we evaluate our church. Both can be answered individually or discussed in a group.

Self-Evaluation:

1. In the fifth century, St. Augustine, arguably one of the most devoted and authentic of the early Christian leaders, noted that we are created to *Worship God*. He said: “You move us to delight in praising You; You have made us for Yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You.”³² What have you experienced when you *worship self* rather than God? Is it restlessness? Unsatisfied seeking? Inability to find your true *self*? Is our seeking after fame or admiration in social media a symptom of *worshipping self*?
2. The desire to do something for God can come from a godly, humble ambition or from a *selfish ambition* that is dressed in religious form. What have you experienced in your own moments of selfishness where you put yourself above others? Did you find yourself disengaging or even dissociating from your moral compass? Do you struggle to accept others’ humble ambition because they will get credit that you want to receive?

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3. All of us tend to read news sources and watch pundits with whom we already agree. Such a practice creates an increasingly extreme belief or position that is not balanced by hearing and knowing the other side.³³ This natural tendency ends up creating opposing positions and parties rather than a wise unity that transcends the toxicity of this world. How has your own *willful ignorance* of God or others impacted your life? How do you attempt to create a wise, middle way (*via media*)³⁴ view in this divided partisan world? What commitments do you make to assure that you are not ignorant of the things of God? How do you avail yourself of transcendent truth and knowledge? How do you open your thoughts to God's transforming presence?

Church Evaluation:

1. How do you see *worship of the self* in your family? In your church? In your community? Are such symptoms as *celebrity worship* a part of this or does that come from some other toxin? What does humble service look like in you and others? Does your church ecosystem create humble servants or toxic and deadly leaders?
2. How has the soil of ambition in your own family or church become a nourishment for true servanthood and how has it become a toxicity to create a competitive environment? Does your church seek to be better than other churches — defined as being more popular, bigger, having larger buildings, more programs, superior music, or other factors not related to the Great Commission?
3. How does your church seek the necessary knowledge that

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creates a healthy rather than a *toxic ecosystem*? Does your church fall within a specific political category or walk the uniting path of the middle way? What are the means by which your church becomes aware of other ways of understanding differences within the Christian faith? within the world's religions? within cultural and philosophical communities? Are there any areas where you would identify your church as being *willfully ignorant*?

CHAPTER 2

DEADLY SIN OF PRIDE

*“In his pride the wicked man does not seek Him;
in all his thoughts there is no room for God”*

— Psalm 10:4

*“Lucifer acts on his jealousy, too, in a way that is illuminating.
Instead of trying to be like God by modelling himself on God’s goodness,
kindness, and creativity, he tries to be like God by grabbing what God has.
He thinks that if others give praise, worship, and obedience to him instead
of to God, then he will be like God — forgetting that the reason why praise
and worship are offered to God
is because of what God is already like.”*

— Jane Williams commenting on *Paradise Lost*

Pride is the first sin that grows from the toxic soil of self-worship.
As for Lucifer in Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, this sin of rebellion against

worshipping the Son is not because Jesus is undeserving of worship, but rather because he pridefully asserts that he is even more deserving. This self-centered life causes one to then not only be cast out of heaven, as was Lucifer, but also to be forever seeking the adoration and honors that are due only to the living God. However, just as we see in Lucifer's life, this desire devolves into simply a hatred of the living God and a desire to destroy His creation, eventually including even ourselves as His creatures.

One of the insightful contributions to Christian literature is also found in Milton's work when he suggests that the twelve angels in Lucifer/Satan's cabinet also shared in this desire to be worshipped, thus establishing themselves as gods of the ancient world with Moloch and his required infant sacrifices being representative of the group. Milton bases his insights on both the biblical allusions and the mythical descriptions. These are not fictional suggestions of his imagination, but rather Milton's expansion of biblical references that name them as demonic, fallen angels whose limited but spiritual power is twisted from its heavenly purpose to horrific forms of worship.³⁵

This twisting of God's good gifts into evil is the sin that is born from worship that is not focused on God. Thus, Moloch requires the destruction of precious human infants in the fire of his worship. Toxic worship of self daily sacrifices the well-being of our own and others' children, even the future of all humanity as a whole, on the altar of our own deformed, prideful self.

In a different form, we have Belial, whom Milton describes as "the dissolutes Spirit that fell/the Sensualist."³⁶ Rather than creating a form of worship focusing on sensual, sexual pleasure, as seen in the temple prostitutes of Aphrodite,³⁷ Belial did not have a group of fanatic worshipers, but rather "To him, no temple stood/Or altar smoked."³⁸ Belial is the god of sensual atheists. Though he had no temple of his own, Belial turned priests, pastors, and people away from worshipping

DEADLY SIN OF PRIDE

God, yet had these previous God-worshippers remain in their Jewish and Christian temples and churches. Milton says:

*“...yet who more oft than he
In temples and at altars, when the priest
Turns atheist, as did Eli’s sons, who filled
With lust and violence the house of God.”³⁹*

Implying that the worshippers of Belial turn the night into their sanctuary, he continues,

*“and, when night
Darkens the streets, then wander forth the sons
Of Belial, flown with insolence [pride] and wine.”⁴⁰*

As can be seen from this description, the most dangerous form of self-worship is that of Belial. Keeping up appearances and regularly attending church, a Belial worshiper can easily deny their hidden darkness and prideful sensuality. “Being-a-liar,” the toxic Belial soil nourishes a superior and prideful attitude toward those who continue in the Way, the Truth, and the Life, but more importantly, Belial worshippers set themselves as pridefully superior toward Jesus Himself.

PRIDE and HUBRIS

As language shifts, “pride” is a word that has taken on opposite and confusing meanings. It can mean, as we’ve used it so far in this chapter, an arrogant superiority, excessive self-esteem, and overly self-concerned to the point of self-worship. In current language, this definition best fits the word “hubris,”⁴¹ whereas the word “pride” today often applies to a positive opinion of one’s self.⁴² Rather than a prideful arrogance or even disordered narcissism, this type of pride comes not from self-worship but from an appropriate celebration of one’s own excellence, as Saint Augustine describes it.⁴³ But perhaps

the reason for this confusion of meaning is representative of the fine line between the healthy and toxic soil into which we are planted.

It has been suggested that if a child is grown in “soil” where they are given praise for only participation and not accomplishment, then the child grows a sense of entitlement or unearned confidence. However, it is not that simple. If a child’s achievement is compared to others’ accomplishments or measured by an external standard of what should have been accomplished by a particular grade level, then a lack of esteem or confidence grows. This could be a part of the toxic soil that develops the deadly sin of sloth. However, if a child grows in “soil” where their effort is praised, they develop a “growth mindset” that relates to increasing ability based on the level of effort⁴⁴ — a subtle difference, but a profound shift in outcome. *Prideful superiority* or a *growth mindset* can be based on what is praised.⁴⁵

Consider how this distinction applies to the deadly sin of pride. Toxic soil is found when indiscriminate praise is lavished upon the person, while healthy soil is found when appropriate praise is given. Thus, praise itself comes into focus. What is praised in both God and others will have a profound impact on what is grown in each type of soil.

Consider these three soil types: first, a church or faith community where everyone is affirmed no matter their beliefs or behavior, a kind of “can do no wrong” environment; second, a church or faith community where everyone is condemned no matter their belief or behavior, a kind of “can do no right” environment; and third, a church or faith community with clearly defined behavioral goals toward which everyone is mutually encouraging, a kind of “pressing on to win the prize” environment. Which of these soils would produce what results in a person’s life? Which one would likely produce an excessive self-esteem or self-concerned pride? Which would cause a depressed surrender and perhaps the sin of sloth? Which would cause

a life of purposeful direction towards Christlikeness with humble gratitude and commitment?

One of the interesting realities of living in this early part of a new millennium in an arguably post-Christian America is the superiority and even mockery expressed by those who have decided that there is no such thing as sin. As gods of their own lives and living in excessive self-concern, their social, moral, and intellectual superiority demonstrates a pervasive and deadly pridefulness in both the person and those who grow in the soil tainted by such prideful people.

BIBLICAL EXPLANATIONS

The Bible reveals truth that is not only based in this world and can be seen by using reason, experience, and tradition,⁴⁶ but also transcends this world by revealing the eternal, spiritual reality of human life. This transcendent revelation takes human behavior beyond a mere understanding of the personal, familial, social, and global consequences to the eternal level of ontology and sin.

In this chapter we focus on six Greek words used in God's revelation which give us insight into the nature of the deadly sin of pride. These words are: Ανυπότακτος (*Anupotaktos*), Ματαιολόγος (*Mataiologos*), Ψεύστης (*Pseustes*), Απειθεῖς (*Apeithes*), Αιρετικός (*Hairetikos*), and Ηπερεφάνος (*Huperephanos*).

Ανυπότακτος (*Anupotaktos*)⁴⁷

Coming from the root word meaning *to submit one's self to*, the prefix negates such submission of self to another. Thus *Anupovtakoß* means *not subject to* and therefore *unruly, not subject to control, disobedient*.

As is easily seen, the consequence of making one's self our own god and not submitting ourselves to the living God is that our lives exist in a chaotic self-serving realm. It is this idea that caused Milton

in *Paradise Lost* to call the realm between heaven and hell *chaos*. He also calls the capital of hell *Pandemonium*, meaning *all demons* — all the time. As the names imply, persons who have chosen to not submit to the Creator inhabit a world of chaotic confusion, sinking into demonic pandemonium. Like Pilate, who did not know what truth is and who killed Jesus in an attempt to still the chaos of his world, persons who live in toxic self-interest, utilitarian and antinomian soil become *anupotaktos* — prideful in their supposed place of superior existence since they are not subject to the living God.

Within Scripture, this deadly sin is referred to in such verses as these:

“We also know that the law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels [anupotaktos], the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers...” (1 Timothy 1:9).

“An elder must be blameless, faithful to his wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient [anupotaktos]” (Titus 1:6).

“For there are many unruly [anupotaktos] people, full of meaningless talk and deception...” (Titus 1:10).

Ματαιολόγος (Mataiologos)⁴⁸

Coming from the root word meaning *devoid of truth, useless*, *mataiologos* describes language, or words which are not grounded in truth and therefore have no lasting purpose.

Language is always a difficult vessel to use to describe infinite, spiritual truths. Even when used by the sharpest mind of a believing, submitting, committed person, words often fall short. But when words are purposefully used to mislead by those who have no submission to anyone or anything beyond themselves, then stubborn

misrepresentation or even complete deceit results in such *mataiologos*. For thoughts to move from one person to another, words must have a respectful, meaningful commonality.

I spent a year of my life in a weekly discussion with a New Age practitioner. Along with the usual struggles to understand similarities and differences in our beliefs, what made the discussion all the more difficult was the appropriation of certain Christian theological words which were given not only a different meaning but often an opposite one. A primary example of this was the use of the word *Christ*, the Messianic description of the Son of God. The Christian view is stated in Colossians 1:15: *“He is the image of the unseen God and the first-born of all creation, for in Him were created all things in heaven and on earth: everything visible and everything invisible...Before anything was created He existed and holds all things in unity.”*⁴⁹

However, in New Age language, *Christ* describes what is often called the Cosmic Christ. Matthew Fox states it:

*“The Cosmic Christ is the divine pattern that connects in the person of Jesus Christ (but by no means is limited to that person). The divine pattern of connectivity was made flesh and set up its tent among us (John 1:14)...The Cosmic Christ...leads a new exodus from the bondage and pessimistic views of a Newtonian, mechanistic universe so ripe with competition, winners and losers, dualisms, anthropocentrism, and the boredom that comes when our exciting universe is pictured as a machine bereft of mystery and mysticism. The Cosmic Christ is local and historical, indeed intimate to human history. The Cosmic Christ might be living next door or even inside one’s deepest and truest self.”*⁵⁰

Often referred to as a *Christ consciousness*, the presence of which we seek within ourselves, to follow Christ then is to follow not the

Creator but our own self, in a worship of self. Such worship does not connect to truth and is therefore *mataiologos* or meaningless.

The decision to make one's self the center of one's life as well as the reference of all language is the *mataiologos* form of pride. It is used in Scripture in Titus 1:10 in tandem with *anupotaktos*, "*For there are many rebellious people, full of meaningless talk [mataiologos] and deception....*"

Ψεύστης (Pseustes)⁵¹

Coming from the root word meaning to *deliberately speak falsehoods*, to *deceive by lying*, *pseustes* refers to a person who lies, a person who breaks faith.

In contrast to a person from another religion, such as New Age, that has created a self-referent theology and takes the Christian meaning out of words like *Christ*, the *pseustes* person simply lies. Deciding that there is no one to whom they are accountable, breaking trust has no meaning. Language and relationships are simply utilitarian vessels or even weapons to be used for personal gain. Within the Decalogue, we see the ninth commandment telling us to not bear false witness against someone.⁵² Some had translated this prohibition into simply, "Do not lie." However, the emphasis is not only on the importance of the truthfulness of our statements but also the result that false statements have on others. When our lie harms a person, deceives, breaks trust and faith, then we become a prideful *pseustes*. It is when our concern is only for ourselves and, by submitting to no higher power than our own self-interests, we leave damaged people in our wake, revolving around ourselves as the sun of our own universe. Or, as Scripture reveals, we imitate the one for whom lies, deception and destruction are a chosen way of life, the *father of lies*, the devil. Jesus explains: "*Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding*

to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.”⁵³

Pseustes occurs elsewhere within Scripture as God reveals the lasting harm deliberate lies cause both within the liar, *pseustes*, and the persons who are lied to.

“Who is a liar [pseustes] but he that denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denies the Father and the Son” (1 John 2:22).

“If a man says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar [pseustes]: for he that loves not his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?” (1 John 4:20).

Απειθες (Apeithes)⁵⁴

Coming from the negative of the word meaning *to be persuaded, convinced, to believe*, *apeithes* means *to be unpersuadable, not compliant, contumacious*. An *apeithes* person is not mentally unable to understand reason or why cooperation is necessary for peace in a family or a society, but rather is willfully or stubbornly defiant of any authority in thought, word or deed, as the word *contumacious* infers.

As noted in the previous chapter, one of the three most toxic soils is that of willful ignorance: the decision to not allow any reasonable explanation or constructive expectation to be accepted. This prideful independence is actually a stubborn *apeithes*.

Years ago, I knew a man well whom I had come to love and with whom I enjoyed spending time. He came from the Jewish tradition, and we became good friends, often sharing an evening together. We had discussed who Jesus is many times when I finally asked him, not in a confronting manner but more pleading with him as a friend, would he just be *willing* to open himself for Jesus to show him, convince him, persuade him that He is the Messiah, long sought by

Jews everywhere? Without hesitation, this wonderful, gentle man firmly said, “No.” I immediately thought of the parable of the soil where a few inches below the warmth of a quickly germinating seed was a solid rock — unable, unwilling to let the roots go down. This is perhaps the best image illustrating the toxic soil of willful ignorance.

I have met many people since then who also will not let God persuade them of the veracity of the biblical account, but I feel each time the raising of the preventative wall of pride. Polite in their refusal perhaps, they may be a gentle man, a gentle woman, but unwaveringly firm in their *apeithes*. Others, often from the faculty or students of the university in our town, are more superior-acting as they arrogantly look down on the logic of *Mere Christianity*, or *Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, or *More Than a Carpenter*, declaring they could never be convinced by such incompetent presentations, but their end result is the same: *apeithes*. As noted in the previous chapter, mental categories, structures, evidentiary boxes often entomb the mind such that Truth in His transcendent personal form will not be allowed to enter, much less take root in their minds. This strong toxicity of the soil poisons the mind such that anything to which it might need to submit is rigidly rejected.

Within God’s revelation, *apeithes* occurs several times in verses such as these:

“And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the disobedient (apeithes) to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord” (Luke 1:17).

“...slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey (apeithes) their parents...” (Romans 1:30).

Αἱρετικός (Hairetikos)⁵⁵

Coming from the root word meaning *to take for oneself, to prefer, to choose*, *hairetikos* means a person who *chooses a schismatic, factious path following a self-chosen false doctrine*.

Brought directly into the English language as “heretic,” a *hairetikos* is not a person who honestly struggles with various theological statements and has suggestions or differences that are respectfully submitted. No, a *hairetikos* has as a primary motivation the desire to divide the unity of the Body of Christ, even to the point of leading others out of the Bible study, church, denomination, or Christian faith.

History is traumatically filled with *hairetikos* people who desire to be at least leader of their own group, if not god of that group. This is seen in not only the call of Joseph Smith to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints or the psychological encasement of Scientology by L. Ron Hubbard or the prosperity gospel of Joel Osteen, but also in countless churches and denominations where *hairetikos* pride is seen devouring the unity and respect of the church of Jesus Christ. The toxicity of the soil such leaders create where they use their spiritual gifts for personal and prideful purposes cannot be underestimated. Scripture reveals the importance of addressing *hairetikos* pride in Titus 3:10: “*Reject a factious [hairetikos] man after a first and second warning.*”

Ἡπρεφάνος (Huperephanos)⁵⁶

Coming from the combining of two root words meaning *above, beyond, exceeding* and *appear, shine, resplendent*, *huperephanos* means *arrogant, proud, showing one's self above others, overtopping, conspicuous above others, pre-eminent, with an overweening estimate of one's means or merits, despising others or even treating them with contempt, haughty*.

As can be seen, *huperephanos* takes all of the other biblical words we studied to the lethal level. Not only is pride now a self-aggrandizement

which can become physically manifested as the mental disorder of narcissism,⁵⁷ but the spiritual impact of *huperephanos* is one of actually seeing one's self on the level of God with everyone else below them. But *huperephanos* is not even a superior looking down on others with loving benevolence but with *despising contempt*.

Sadly, we all know of examples of prideful persons in business, politics, and media, but we would hope not to find such a deadly sin in the church. But that is where sin is most deadly. As the instrument of God's salvation,⁵⁸ the spiritual temptations and the destruction caused by sin are most intense in the church. It is also clear that when a pastor, leader, teacher, counselor, proclaimer, or worship leader has pride, then the misuse of their spiritual gifts will contaminate the ecosystem of the church, creating toxic soil and toxic discipleship, which will then corrupt the whole church.

One of the difficulties in identifying this sin is that there is a fine line between *confidence* and *narcissism*. Most persons in ministry have behaviors that could also be characteristic of a person with narcissism, but at the level of *confidence* — a *confidence* to step up and lead — which is not *narcissism*. For example, in counseling, the diagnostic manual used to evaluate a person as having a Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) provides nine descriptive characteristics.⁵⁹ However, it is not enough to have two or three of those characteristics, but rather the person must show a consistent pattern of five or more of these behaviors which began as a young adult and continue to the present time in a variety of contexts. As we will see in the development of all the deadly sins, each one grows over time if planted in toxic soil. What may start as *confidence* can develop into pride and, if the church is toxic, then the very people we expect to help us by pointing out to us where we are developing pride are unable to see it in either us or themselves.

Huperephanos is found throughout Scripture in verses such as these:

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“He has performed mighty deeds with His arm; He has scattered those who are proud (huperephanos) in their inmost thoughts. He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble” (Luke 1:51-52).

“Furthermore, just as they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, so God gave them over to a depraved mind, so that they do what ought not to be done. They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed, and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant (huperephanos), and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they have no understanding, no fidelity, no love, no mercy” (Romans 1:28-31)

“But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud (huperephanos), abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God” (2 Timothy 3:1-4).

“But He gives a greater grace. Therefore it says, ‘God is opposed to the proud (huperephanos), but gives grace to the humble’” (James 4:6).

MISUSE OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS

As Christians, we often think of spiritual gifts as abilities with responsibilities given by God at the time of our conversion to Christ. Although it is true that God gives the gifts, it seems that the Spirit distributes to all, preveniently, continually, and eternally. That means that every person, both believing and unbelieving, healthy and

unhealthy, mature and immature, has special abilities given by God for our *common good*.⁶⁰

An example of this occurred before the attacks on the World Trade Center twin towers on 9/11. The Scriptures are filled with examples of people with the gift of prophecy. For Daniel and Isaiah, it was the ability to have a vision of the future and see the attacks that would come upon Israel and upon the Messiah. But in the summer of 2001, months before the actual attack on September 11, two graphic artists envisioned the attack on New York. *The Coup* cover looked like an actual picture of the towers' destruction, and the *Dream Theatre* gave a general warning.⁶¹ We could ask the question: how different would our church, nation, and world need to be to take such prophetic visions seriously and prepare for the coming attack? But it is easy to see that Israel did not hear Daniel or Isaiah, and America did not understand these prophetic visions by our graphic artists.

The truth is that God the Holy Spirit gives gifts, and some are *prevenient* — going *before* faith and before the commitment to use them for the sake of others and the common good. Instead, we misuse them for simple graphic art fame or sell them for financial gain. The result is a toxic prostitution of God-given gifts that harms not only the receiver but also the user of the gifts. The gifts, which are meant to create the soil out of which fruitful lives may grow, produce instead a toxicity that produces the deadly sins, and then these sins cause a person to misuse their gifts. This reproductive ecosystem then perpetuates the toxic, sinful, shameful cycle.⁶²

In this chapter, we focus our concern on the deadly sin of pride and ask, “How does a prideful person misuse the spiritual gifts and exhibit no concern for others and the common good, but instead uses them for self-worshipping, selfish ambition?”

GIFT of COUNSEL

The setting of a counseling session provides opportunities for a superior/inferior relationship as the one seeking counsel comes in need of what the counselor has to offer. When the counselor allows a lack of a mutual, therapeutic alliance to be formed, then not only is the counsel ineffective, but it also can be damaging. This can be clearly seen when a prideful counselor brings his or her toxicity into the counseling relationship. The results can be disempowering as the person seeking counsel can come to mistakenly believe that they cannot live a healthy life without the counselor's weekly if not daily input.

As a pastor, I have seen this dependency stoked by several professional counselors not only for financial gain as they required frequent expensive sessions, but also when a person tried to get free from the control of the counselor, the pride (and greed) of the counselor turned abusive and demeaning, *demonstrating arrogant and haughty behaviors or attitudes*.

In a different form of toxic counsel, a prideful counselor demeans the work of pastors or other counselors in order to set themselves up as superior. Though there are times when a realistic evaluation of the abilities of a pastor or counselor are necessary, the difference between healthy evaluation and promoting a prideful superiority becomes apparent in their clients and parishioners over time. If the counselor is healthy, then healing will be experienced in a timely and effective way. Additionally, other counselors are consulted, and appropriate ongoing resources are referred to as transformation occurs. But if the counselor is toxic, then transformation does not occur in the clients and parishioners because, for the pridefully *arrogant and haughty*, seeking consultations and making referrals are out of the question.

It is also true that toxic pride can cause some counselors to decide that there are certain people who are too far beneath them for them to "waste their time" by providing their counseling services. This can

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be based on anything to which the pride of the counselor has attached itself: from wealth to education to social standing to race. As the harmful ecosystem then sets up toxic discipleship/toxic internship, those who are trained within that toxic counseling practice will perpetuate the toxicity as it goes on to the next generation of counselors in a deformed and dangerous form, which then goes on to their disciples in this continuing deadly toxic ecosystem.

GIFTS of MERCY and HEALING

Similar to the pride of a counselor, when a person provides mercy from a toxic superior attitude, the result is unhealthy emotionally and spiritually disempowering. Helping a person financially or physically is best experienced from a humble servant who shares a mutual thanksgiving to God for His provision. A toxic person using gifts of mercy or healing to bring honor to themselves and feed their superior pride will eventually reveal to those being helped that the price they are paying is to puff up the prideful person's own honor and self-esteem. If the person being helped is healthy, they will stop receiving the gifts of mercy or healing from that prideful person and find someone who can help them as an equal — a brother or sister within the church family.

GIFT of MISSIONS

Perhaps no better place exists for toxic racial pride to be exhibited than when a person has the gift of missions but uses it to subjugate rather than elevate the people they serve. Throughout history, toxic missionaries who see themselves as pridefully superior to the people they have come to serve have dishonored the cause of Christ. The result is increasingly obvious both within that missionary's ministry as well as within the missionary movement as a whole. If it is not recognized and healed, then the next generation of missionaries will

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also have a toxic form of pride in considering themselves to be superior compared to those who are not Christians, or not of the superior race, class or education. A responsibility of those who choose and oversee missionaries is to have the discernment to know the deadly sin of pride. The fact that a person is gifted from God to do the work can be confusing, but if the overseer is not prideful and doesn't rationalize what they see or blind themselves because of their own sin, then they will seek the input of others to help identify and verify the suitability of candidates for service. These overseers would most often include those with healthy gifts of counsel and discernment.

GIFT of HOSPITALITY

Making a person feel welcome in the family of God, whether they come from down the street or another part of the world, requires true love and friendship. If there is a toxic pride in limiting the invitations to only *our kind of people*, or *rich people*, or *professional people*, all things I have heard in pastoral ministry, then the end result will be toxic soil. I once knew a youth pastor who built pride in her kids coming to their church by putting down other churches. The result of this was a toxic youth group that then produced young adult leaders who took this toxic attitude into the larger Christian community of the city. The way the gift of hospitality is used comes from the soil. Healthy soil rooted in the presence of God produces loving, peaceful, kind, joyful persons who welcome everyone into the church family in humble service to God.

GIFT of LEADERSHIP

The gift of leadership is undoubtedly the most appealing for a person with deadly toxic pride. Desiring the place of prominence at the banquet table, the sanctuary, and the community is a clear warning given by Jesus to His disciples. The same is true today. I have often

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asked young, ambitious pastors who want to grow a large church, “Are you prepared to do the hard work that caring for a large church will require?” Most pastors know that when God sends more people to your congregation, it is not a reward to be worn like stars on your shoulder, but a weight of responsibility to be carried unselfishly to make sure that each one is cared for and each one is put first over the pastor’s own needs. Selfish ambition is most toxic in prideful leaders who create systems of leadership development that reproduce this damaging poison.

I recently advised a young pastor who had gone to an overseer for guidance about the pastor’s own path as a developing leader, only to have that overseer turn everything around to a personal focus and how the young pastor’s decisions would affect the overseer’s ministry. Unable to see the need of the young pastor who was looking for discerning, honest feedback, the overseer took their conversation personally and defensively, and even disempowered the ability of the young leader to hear the call of God on their own life. Such toxicity doesn’t just miss the moment in which healthy leadership could have been provided, but it creates a lasting distrust of leadership, denominational systems, and even ministerial call. This is deadly, toxic discipleship.

GIFT of PROCLAMATION

Standing before the people of God and speaking on behalf of our Savior is a tremendous responsibility. Learning to hear God’s voice and then speak what God would have us say requires a clear heart and an attentive mind without debilitating conflicting desires or passions. But when a person has been impacted by the toxic soil of prideful proclaimers who seek the praise of people rather than the affirmation of God, then the ability to hear and obey God is not only hampered, but often closed completely. Like Samuel coming to Eli,

the proclaimer of God's Word opens heart and ears and says to God, "Speak, for your servant is listening." Eli knew this truth in theory but had lost the actual ability to be a true, attentive, and obedient servant.

Similarly, the message of God is seldom something people want to hear and certainly not something that will be valued in the non-Christian world. The prideful proclaimer will struggle with that and will be tempted to remain silent about what God would say to today's church and world. The calls for justice, righteousness, purity, humility, servanthood, wisdom, love, and forgiveness are seldom desired in this toxic world, in part because the prideful proclaimer values cultural acceptance more than allegiance to God's truth.

GIFT of WORSHIP

As can be imagined, if the *worship of self* is the primary soil out of which the sin of pride grows, then a person with the toxic gift of worship would use that corporate experience to bring attention to themselves. This can be seen in musicians who seek glory for their abilities as well as in the preachers who want people to leave thinking about how good their sermon was rather than what God said to them. But it is a subtle line. Quality in music and preaching is necessary so that attention is not drawn away from God due to an inadequacy of the experience. Thus, having pride in leading a quality worship service is a healthy ambition. But a *selfish ambition* that uses corporate worship to advance the fame, reputation or career of the worship leader is a deadly sin, not only for the toxic leader but for the people who weekly join in toxic worship that brings glory to the musicians and their performance rather than to God.

Conversely, toxic worship also shifts our focus from God to ourselves: What am I getting out of this? From manipulation of emotions to the unbiblical promise for wealth, worship leaders who swing our focus to our own selfish desires are toxic. However, this

is also a subtle line. Worship that does not connect with the people and their spiritual need for renewal, encouragement, conviction, and sanctification is also toxic. Whether stubbornly committed to a past or inappropriate worship style, or willfully shallow so as not to disrupt the comfortable or provoke the critical, the worship moment which is meant to be a meeting with God can be toxically deceptive. Thinking they are worshipping God, they instead are worshipping self.

REFLECTION/DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

In each chapter these questions are divided into those by which we evaluate ourselves and those by which we evaluate our church. Both can be answered individually or discussed in a group.

Self-Evaluation:

1. Why do you think there is such confusion in the meaning of the word *pride*? Why would it mean both a *deadly sin* and a *positive opinion* of one's self? Is this a smokescreen or an admission of its complexity? In the development of the psychiatric manual to evaluate mental disorders, (DSM-5), an attempt was made to remove narcissism as a unique disorder.⁶³ Do you believe this confusion even among psychologists is a reflection of the spiritual *sin of pride*? The joke at that time was that the narcissists were wanting to remove narcissism as a disorder. This is true of most sins as a person or a culture wants to no longer call it a sin, which implies it is wrong and must stop. How do we protect ourselves from self-deceit as well as cultural and professional deceit?
2. Excessive self-esteem most often comes from a culture that praises participation rather than effort and achievement. How have you been praised? How do you praise others? What do

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you observe about the effect of such praise?

3. Worship that is not centered on God is toxic. How often do you experience corporate worship as being about something or someone other than God? What do you do to shift your attention to the only One worthy of worship? How do you avoid making worship about yourself and what you are getting out of it? How do you walk the fine line between appropriate self-reflection in worship and inappropriate self-centeredness?
4. Looking at your own *spiritual gifts*, how do you keep from misusing your gifts? If you developed those gifts in *toxic soil* so that now you are attempting to not repeat the past, how do you find mentors and coworkers to help you create a healthy use of your gifts?
5. Looking at the primary *toxic soil of worship of self, selfish ambition and willful ignorance*, which one(s) of these have nourished the *sin of pride* within you? What other soils would you identify? Superiority? Competition? Arrogance? How can you find God's healing of past *toxic soils* and the *deadly sins* they produced in you to move into *healthy soil* environments to produce *healthy spiritual fruit*? Who can you ask to help you do this?

Church Evaluation:

1. Since self-deceit is a primary problem with *pride*, how do you think a church can deceive itself? What part does a culture's demands or professional expectations play in such deception? In what areas or assertions do you suspect or experience deception in your church or denomination?

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2. In what ways does your church help create excessive self-esteem? How do you keep from doing so? A church that praises participation, as in only coming to watch a worship service rather than using one's gifts to achieve Christ's mission, could create a false sense of deserving praise. How does your church express praise and gratitude to one another for each one's faithful service? How does your church avoid and prevent the cultivation of *pride* and instead encourage and praise humble service?
3. Do the worship experiences in your church center on God or on someone or something else? Worship that is not centered on God is toxic. Do you experience such *toxic soil* within your church? What do you think needs to change to avoid making worship about yourself or anyone else other than the living God? Churches often use worship as an attraction and performance to entertain. What do you think trying to *please the customer/consumer* does to the validity and transformative power of worshipping God rather than ourselves? How does your church walk the fine line between appropriate self-reflection in worship and inappropriate self-centeredness?
4. Does your church provide mentors and supervisors to help identify people's *spiritual gifts* and those who misuse them? How do they do so with love, protecting the dignity of each servant of God? How does your church help a person identify their gifts without producing competition, superiority or inferiority among the people? How do you think the *deadly sin of pride* most often keeps us from recognizing or admitting our *toxic misuse of spiritual gifts*?

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5. Is your church aware of the *toxic soils* that nourish the *deadly sin of pride*? What can you do to help cleanse the toxicities that may be present? Looking at the primary *toxic soil of worship of self, selfish ambition and willful ignorance*, which one(s) is primary in creating a *healthy* or *toxic ecosystem* in your church? What other soils would you identify? Superiority? Competition? Arrogance? Would your church humbly accept the guiding wisdom of your superintendent or bishop to help identify and confess these so that healing could begin?

CHAPTER 3

DEADLY SIN OF GREED

“No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.”

— Matthew 6:24

“Greed is a sin against God, just as all mortal sins, in as much as man condemns things eternal for the sake of temporal things.” “Greed can be a sin directly against one’s neighbor, since one man cannot over-abound (superabundare) in external riches, without another man lacking them, for temporal goods cannot be possessed by many at the same time.”

— Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*

When Aquinas noted the dual focus of greed in the quote above, he helped us understand that the deadly sins are against both God and others. They are against God because they worship the creation rather than the Creator,⁶⁴ and they are against others because the toxicity of this “worship” distorts and perverts the health of our shared community. This exchange of the truth for error shifts the entire ecosystem that was intended to bless us spiritually and physically. Thus, when we love this world and its wealth, we replace our love for God and others with a toxic imitation of love.

Placed in descending order by the damage each sin causes, the second sin of greed is only eclipsed by the sin of pride. But as we will see, each sin grows out of the toxic soil produced by the sins listed before it. Thus, prideful leaders create toxic families and organizations which easily shift their responsibility of caring for one another and replace it with manipulating for selfish gain. When this shift permeates the culture, then leaders in business, community, and even the church become greedy seekers of profit, power, and prestige. Often these are used to keep score in order to feed the pride upon which greed is based.

What is interesting is that these first two deadly sins are most often at odds with each other. Pride wants to build the largest house on the top of the hill for all to see, while greed wants to hide its wealth behind obscuring walls of stone and forests. Pride can be based on competition to beat others to attain glory while greed is often based on an envious disregard for others that is content to destroy another's wealth in its own pursuit of accumulating more for selfish gain.

It is interesting that the tenth commandment given by God is focused on this envious greed⁶⁵ while the first commandment focuses on who we worship. Like bookends to the Decalogue, worship of self and selfish ambition encapsulate the very nature of sin with its dual focus of sinning against others and sinning against God.

I have seen the hiding of wealth in two very different cultures, but both for similar purposes. In a wealthy region next to Santa Barbara called Montecito, you cannot see the homes of Prince Harry and Meghan or their neighbor Oprah Winfrey from the road. Their dense hedges shield their estates from sight and hide them behind protected gates. Similarly, when I taught on the island of Mindanao in the Philippines, I observed that the wealthy build compounds with high walls to hide their wealth from those living in subsistence poverty just outside their gates. Although it is clear that the height of the walls and the acreage of the estates could fuel pride, the privileged access to enter these estates and compounds hides an inordinate affluence from the eyes of the poor.

Greed is not concerned with the poor. Often blaming them for their own financial condition by creating mythologies of laziness or ignorance, the toxic soil of *willful ignorance* keeps them from seeking the truth. Knowing that the truth will set them free from greed is not a price they are willing to pay. The self wants what the self wants, which creates a toxic growth in pride and greed.

Though privilege has generational aspects with inherited wealth reaping benefits from systemic racism, nationalism, and classism, the basis of privilege that sees one's self as superior and deserving, and subsequently others as inferior and not deserving, is a part of the toxic soil of this world's ecosystem. From the perks of leadership to the inequities of incarceration, the toxic soil of self-worship and selfish ambition, buttressed by willful ignorance, devastates our world and our lives.

But these are not the only toxins.

Greed is also nourished by deception, both of others and of self. For example, the attempt by some economists to separate self-interest from greed⁶⁶ is an attempt to solve a toxic cultural problem. This problem was demonstrated during the COVID pandemic when

the wealth of the United States allowed us to purchase over four times the number of vaccine doses than were needed for our adult citizens.⁶⁷ Like other wealthy nations, the U.S. used our privilege to over-purchase needed medicine, and the result was a lack of vaccines available for most of the world. This cultural expectation that it is appropriate to use wealth to acquire more than we need is greed. To call it “self-interest” is a deception because it is far beyond what we need to take care of ourselves.

In a similar manner, greed has long been identified as the sin against future generations. Using resources disproportionately with disregard for both the ecosystem of the environment and the ecosystem of the human generations to come is greed. The same is true of national and private debt. Living off the taxes and revenue of future generations, greed compels politicians, parents, business leaders, and other decision makers to look only at satisfying short-term desires and not the long-term sustainability of the future.

However, it is not only the future that will be harmed. Greed also harms those thought to be competitors, whether in business, politics, neighborhoods, or nations. Intent on harming the competitors’ opportunities both in the present and in the future, greed may hide its intention by labeling it as being simply “good business” or “self-interest,” but it goes far beyond the goal of earning a living wage or reasonable profit. Greed seeks to dominate the field in which it is planted like the thorns in Jesus’ parable.⁶⁸ In the toxic soil that produces painful and useless weeds to outgrow a healthy crop based on fair practices and respectful competition, greed rejoices in the wrong experienced by others and works to deny equal opportunity by *cornering the market*. The toxic soil of domination nurtures destructive, deadly greed.

BIBLICAL EXPLANATIONS

When preparing sermons as a pastor, I hesitated when I came to the verses about money, wealth, generosity, and greed. I knew intuitively, and then knew it experientially, that there are few topics that will create more resistance among church people than that of greed. Knowing as well that to directly accuse or expose sin most often increases people's resistance to hear, admit the truth, confess, and change their behaviors, I sought to be wise in my preaching and teaching.⁶⁹ But having said that, few sins are as clearly denounced in Scripture as those having to do with stockpiling inordinate wealth with disregard for the poor. From the painfully simple but alarming description of separating the sheep from the goats in Jesus' teaching,⁷⁰ to the equally clear yet difficult teachings of the prophets,⁷¹ the Bible is very concerned with this deadly sin of greed and how we treat the poor.

Focusing once more on the Greek language that describes the various aspects of greed, we will study these three: Αἰσχροκερδής (*Aischrokerdes*), Μιαινο (*Miaino*), and Ὀρέγω (*Oregomai*).

Αἰσχροκερδής (*Aischrokerdes*)⁷²

Coming from two root words meaning to *shamefully gain*, *aischrokerdes* takes that a step further and explains that this is called "shameful gain" because it is *dishonorable* or even *filthy*, to be *greedy for money*.

In the parable of the unfaithful servant who did not gain talents for his master,⁷³ it is clear that Jesus honors those who work hard in business and gain wealth. But He is equally clear that we cannot gain in a dishonorable or filthy way. So how we gain wealth is part of the complexity of greed and the focus of many disagreements about what is dishonorable. Is it dishonorable, for example, to create or use products that harm the environment? More specifically, is it dishonorable to produce, sell or use fossil fuels? In this case, we are

all guilty.

Filthy is easier to describe. Wealth gained by staining the purity and dignity of a human being is clearly filthy. Thus, human trafficking, though extremely lucrative, is filthy, as is any business that demeans a human being in the making of a product or a pornographic video. But is it filthy gain to create a video game that is based on dominating, killing, and looting virtual enemies and persons? Is it filthy when the pornography is a cartoon? Is gambling filthy because it takes from another person without benefit of a true exchange of goods or services? Is it filthy if you create a computer gambling game that does not use real money?

Similarly, what is dishonorable and shameful gain? Is it gain made from owning stocks in weapons manufacturing or in companies that use children to harvest chocolate or make shoes? Does it make a difference if you run the business or only own stock in the business? Is it dishonorable to make a profit by not paying a living wage to employees or by overcharging for a product or service because you can get away with it due to taking advantage of a monopoly?

As we have seen, *aischrokerdes* is a helpful distinction to consider in each of our financial dealings as we ask ourselves something like, “Am I ashamed to be identified with this business? Is it dishonorable in some way?” Greed that leads to death requires the wisdom of God to help us make those assessments. Within Scripture, *aischrokerdes* is described in these verses:

“An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not dependent on wine, not violent but gentle, peaceable and free of the love of money (aischrokerdes)” (1 Timothy 3:2-3)

“Deacons likewise must be serious, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for gain

(*aischrokerdes*)..." (1 Timothy 3:8).

"Since an overseer manages God's household, he must be blameless—not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain (*aischrokerdes*)" (Titus 1:7)

ΜΙΛΙΝΟ (Miaino)⁷⁴

A primary word, *miaino* means *to stain, to defile, to pollute, to contaminate, to soil*.

Where *aischrokerdes* is concerned with the way we gain our wealth, *miaino* is concerned with what we do with our wealth once gained. There are ways to use the resource of money as a tool for God in the family, church, community, and world. Tithe is a beginning step when we take the firstfruits of all we gain and present it as our offering in our worship of God. In fact, it is a clear indication of who we worship if our very first penny and the first tenth of all we acquire is given in our offering as a regular part of our worship to our God and Savior. If, however, we take the first of our gain and contaminate it with worship of self, spending it on ourselves or our own interests, then not only is that tenth polluted, but the very act of greedy worship of self will contaminate all of our wealth. When and if we get around to giving an offering, it is not the cheerful giving of a pure and God-worshipping heart, but of a soiled soul fulfilling an obligation rather than putting God first and getting free from the power of greed.

In another way, our wealth can be defiled as demonstrated by our decisions of whether or not to share our wealth with the poor. Just as the tithe belongs to God,⁷⁵ so do the "corners of our harvest" belong to the poor.⁷⁶ The idea presented in Scripture is that we not only give to God what is God's so we don't worship self with our wealth, but we also give to the poor the "edges of our fields" so we don't dishonor the hard-working poor by our greedy hoarding. Getting every last cent out

of our customers and our neighbors is a toxic soil that produces and feeds a deadly greed. Just as the tip invites our servers into the joy of our meal, so the sharing of profits invites our neighbors into the joy of the harvest.

And finally, the defiling of wealth occurs when we use our resources in ways that directly damage others. From producing destructive products like tobacco and recreational drugs, to manufacturing products designed to kill humans rather than help them and sustain life, the willful use of money to harm others is *miaino* — defiling us and our businesses. As the word is used in Titus, when we are defiled by greed, then our minds and our consciences are damaged and soiled.

In Scripture, *miaino* is used in these verses to help us understand how wealth can be contaminated in such a way as to make it greedy.

“To the pure, all things are pure; but to those who are defiled (miaino) and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their mind and their conscience are defiled (miaino)” (Titus 1:15).

“Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness spring up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled (miaino)” (Hebrews 12:15).

Ὀρέγω (Oregomai)⁷⁷

Coming from the root word meaning mountain, *oregomai* has a literal meaning of *to stretch one's self out in order to touch or to grasp something, to reach after or desire something; to give one's self up to the love of money*. It is translated *desire* or *covet after*.

As is true of all sins, greed progresses into full spiritual destruction. It may begin as an *aischrokerdes*, or dishonorable gain, but it proceeds to a *miaino*, or a defiling of all that we gain, until eventually it evolves into the very definition of who we are. *Oregomai* is not a description of the wealth and how we gain or use it, but rather it defines us as

DEADLY SIN OF GREED

someone who has *given one's self up to the love of money*. We become all about money all the time, and virtually everything we do is an expression of our love for money. This love began as a form of worship of self as we gave God's tithe to ourselves, but it has now evolved into a full expression of a *toxic love* that is willing to abandon God, family, others, and even our own health in service to money.

Sadly, for all of us who are living in the toxic soil of the worship of self and selfish ambition, our only hope is to no longer be willfully ignorant but take into our thoughts, meditations, and decisions the truth about the impact greed is having on our lives. The ecosystem of which we are a part has many deceptive myths and convincing arguments for why we have to get more money if we are to ever be happy. But the truth revealed to us by God is that this toxic soil will only devolve us into greedy lovers of money which, as Jesus reminds us, is the root of all kinds of evil.

MISUSE OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS

It would be true to say that money is a gift given by God to be used as a tool for living His life in His way. However, we can easily shift our focus from God and the blessing of the money He has provided to worship the money rather than the Giver, our Master. This shift is not as easy to recognize as one might expect.

As a pastor and superintendent of pastors, I was very aware of the blessing that money can be for accomplishing ministry. But the temptation was to think of ministry as following money: that we have to focus on getting the money if we are going to be able to do the ministry. However, I learned through the wisdom of our lay leaders that I had it turned around. Money follows ministry. We first step our foot into the water in obedience and trust in God's leading⁷⁸ and then, when we do the ministry, observe how God is supplying the resources by changing the very course of the river of revenue.

But that is not easy. Institutions, whether churches, conferences, schools, or businesses, claim primacy in our concerns as we face the reality of payrolls, insurance, business plans, accountants, and all the rest that clamors for priority. At one point as a pastor, I had over 30 people on the payroll; and when the offerings and tuitions were faltering, I lost sleep with worry. But, in over 40 years of doing that work, I have to admit that we never missed a payroll. That's not to say we didn't have to make hard decisions and shift funding and make financial appeals, but the money followed the ministry. If I were to live those years over again, I would hope I would not lose trust or sleep!

Additionally, I have seen that an overfocus on money in some has caused a toxic misuse of spiritual gifting. Using what God has given to get more money rather than do more ministry is an easy hole to fall into and requires a God-empowered repentance to free us. The church, conference, or school that has lost its way will leave a wake of broken people not only on staff but also in congregants and students, board members and donors.

GIFT of COUNSEL

It is obvious when a counselor or pastor is more concerned about getting and keeping the payments of clients and donations of parishioners than in bringing healing into their personal lives and relationships. I have personally known therapists who have used their God-given ability to help others to instead create a practice/ecosystem in which people were manipulated into attending weekly private and group sessions and monthly weekend retreats, all at great financial cost such that they could hardly pay their other bills while the counselors' finances thrived. What is especially sad is that the people caught up in this abusive greed were convinced they had a *superior* counselor with *superior* skills, and they "wouldn't make it without them."

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Similarly, when a pastor uses their moments of pastoral care during a difficult time to convince or manipulate a parishioner into giving more than their tithe with “sacrificial” giving, then the misuse of their counseling gift has become toxic. The focus of every healthy counseling session is meant to be the well-being and empowerment of God’s people to make their own wise and healthy decisions. It is true that every Christian needs to tithe, not for the church’s sake but for their own. As we saw above, to take what is worship of God and place it instead on worship of self will not only hamper spiritual growth but also can evolve into deadly greed.

GIFTS of MERCY and HEALING

Although most people working within the nonprofit and medical worlds do so with pure intentions to serve and help others, the alarming disconnect comes from those who are in it *for the money*.⁷⁹ The toxic soil of the pharmaceutical and medical industry which courts doctors in hopes that they will then prescribe their drugs is greed that is harming the health of our nation. The government’s attempts to help patients by creating accountability for which doctors are getting money from which companies to push which drugs⁸⁰ may help, but we all know that deadly greed is not held accountable by government. When the *love of money* has replaced the practice of medicine to help patients, then greed will find a way around such accountability.

GIFT of MISSIONS

The financial cost for effective missionary work is obvious. When a trained physician, nurse, evangelist, pastor, or teacher goes into a low-income area of the world to serve, the people being served do not have the resources to provide for the ministry they receive.⁸¹ The obvious solution is that those of us with resources need to generously provide missionaries with a living salary and the mission

itself with operating money. The problem is not in the vast majority of these wonderful self-sacrificing missionaries, but in some mission organizations and a few missionaries who manipulate our compassion and generosity with a toxic love of money. Using the profound success of Christian missionaries to turn lives around by sharing the gospel of Christ around the world, there are those who use these stories of transformed lives to get and keep money that is given to continue that work. It is the responsibility of all of us to ask for accountability of mission organizations and missionaries to keep the power of greed from its deadly impact on God's work.

GIFT of HOSPITALITY

It is usually in grade school when we learn that you cannot buy friends. But it is fascinating when churches and Christians think that giving away free things will win the hearts and minds of those who come to church seeking God. In many ways, the seekers' focus then shifts to what they can receive rather than to receiving the One who can save their lives. Though it is seldom recognized, confusing hospitality with buying new congregants through marketing strategies and free giveaways is often a sign of a lack of trust in God to bring new people and birth them into our church families. Trusting in money rather than in God, greed hides behind an unreasonable outreach and hospitality plan. But this is again a fine line. In our church, we gave away a mug with the church name on it and the Gospel of John to all visitors. Such a gift, we prayed, would remind them every morning as they drank their coffee that God is love. Whether they became a part of our church or any church, our goal was to bring God's love into their heart and mind. But the line between trying to buy members and being hospitable needs to be assessed by those whose gifts of hospitality are healthy and focused on sharing the love of Christ with others and not developed in toxic manipulative or marketing soil.

GIFT of LEADERSHIP

Just as with deadly pride, destructive greed is most damaging when misused by a leader. One of the reasons that teachers and leaders will be judged more closely by God⁸² is that such persons have more opportunity and influence to help or to harm. If a person is overcome with the love and worship of money, then their greed will create churches and organizations that lose sight of God's Great Commission⁸³ and replace it with a selfish ambition for more money. Similarly, the resources of the organization will increasingly move up the chain of the organizations as salaries for top leaders become disproportionate to the whole of the community and their coworkers.

Recently, it was exposed in national news that the leader of a new organization seeking justice for persons who are Black used the donations given for that cause to buy herself four luxury homes.⁸⁴ Though this is an obvious example, the greed of leaders throughout the world is a major misuse of the leadership gifts received from God.

GIFT of PROCLAMATION

The privilege of teaching and proclaiming God's Word can easily devolve into seeking a privileged financial situation. From the television evangelists with their private jets⁸⁵ to the local pastors who put the church property into their own name, the gift of proclamation can bring celebrity status that is used by greed for leaders to gain personal wealth. Perhaps the most obvious examples of this are the preachers of the prosperity gospel.⁸⁶ Requiring hefty offerings from their congregants with the promise that they will receive abundant resources in return, the financial benefit to the proclaimer of such a theology is obvious.

Similarly, the toxic soil of a greedy proclaimer is supported by the greedy desire of many people to use God for their own financial gain. Called *Simony* in theology because of the desire of Simon the Sorcerer

to buy the power of God so he could make money using it,⁸⁷ there are those who come to God asking for wealth and attempting to use God for their own gain. As a pastor, I was often asked to bless a new business or financial plan and used that opportunity to pray for God to help the person use their new business, finances, and home for His purposes.

GIFT of WORSHIP

The value of our musicians and worship leaders cannot be overstated. As was noted in a previous chapter, the quality of the worship experience facilitates congregants to experience and meet with God without distractions and so find encouragement, conviction, repentance, and faith. Thus, the responsibility to compensate a worship musician well is appropriate. However, if greed has overtaken this person with the gift of worship leadership, then the use of that person's God-given abilities shifts from serving Him to focusing on personal gain. This is obviously a fine line. Thankfully, there are resources in modern church administration that establish standard guidelines for fair and equitable remuneration for all pastors and church leaders based on the size and income of the congregation. Such a resource⁸⁸ allows the worship leader to be appropriately compensated without the greed of anyone hampering the decision. However, when the musician is not satisfied with such an equitable solution and requires a far larger remuneration, then perhaps greed is the true motivation, and this will produce a toxic soil in which other musicians and ministers could become spiritually sickened by reproducing the symptoms of greed in their own lives.

REFLECTION/DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

In each chapter these questions are divided into those by which we evaluate ourselves and those by which we evaluate our church.

Both can be answered individually or discussed in a group.

Self-Evaluation:

1. As with any addiction, the deadly sin of greed is a progressive taking over of the entire person's life until that person will sacrifice everything and everyone on the altar of money. What has been your experience with money? Have you journeyed down this road going from the worship of self by keeping God's tithe for yourself — to the misuse of money for selfish ambition — to the consuming of your identity so that money has become the measurement of your *worth*? If you have, where are you now on that journey and how can you repent and turn around? Who can you ask to help you make the necessary changes this will require of you?
2. It has been said that the most obvious sign of the presence of an addiction is by looking at the use of money. For example, using an inordinate amount of money on alcohol, drugs, gambling, or pornography so that there is a lack of money for housing, food, and medical needs is a clear sign of having an addiction. But it is also true that some use money to justify other addictions. This is seen when a person puts themselves into debt so that they have to work more to satisfy their workaholic addiction. As you make an honest assessment of your use of money, what does it indicate about you and your soul? Where do you spend your money and why? Do you hoard rather than save? Do you keep for yourself rather than give to others? Do you support an addiction rather than provide for your family, your church, and the poor?

Church Evaluation:

1. The addictive power of greed can also take over a church, conference, or denomination. What is your experience with your church's use of money? Are resources used in service to God, the needy, the poor, or are these left out of the budget and the church's resources are increasingly used for the congregation's comforts? What needs to change and how can you be an instrument of needed change for your congregation?
2. Making an honest assessment of your church's use of money is the beginning of freedom from sin. Such truth-telling, or confession, is the first step for individuals and churches in breaking the power of addiction as well as sin. How can you help your church make an honest assessment and act on the truths uncovered? Willful ignorance is often the toxin that keeps us from making such a study. How can you help overcome willful ignorance?
3. The way that the sins of pride and greed combine to twist the spiritual gifts into a toxic braid demonstrates the ways that the soil of a family or church becomes toxic. As an ecosystem where toxic people misuse their gifts by producing toxic soil which then grows deadly sins which then cause people to misuse their gifts demonstrates that a break at any point in that cycle would benefit everyone in the system. As you look at the ecosystem of your family, church, conference, and community, where could you bring a healthy break to a toxic cycle? Who could you ask to partner with you in that attempt to bring health? Where would the break be most likely to bring real and lasting change?

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4. Some claim that the touted self-interest in the capitalistic economic system is good. One film even proclaimed that *"Greed is good."*⁸⁹ What do you think? If we need private ownership in order to tithe, how do we bring the practice of generous tithing and offerings into our own finances and into the national economic ecosystem? Would another economic system bring about less greed or is this deadly sin a part of human life no matter what the economic system is? Do other economic systems encourage the growth of other deadly sins such as sloth? Can we legislate generosity, or must it be a freely chosen act in order for it to reflect spiritual health?

CHAPTER 4

DEADLY SIN OF WRATH

“Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil...Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.”

— Ephesians 4:26-27, 31

“The explosion of anger never simply comes from the incident. Most people carry a supply of anger around with them.”

— Dallas Willard

Wrath is anger that has become an intentional desire to punish or get revenge.⁹⁰ Unlike anger which flares up in a moment like a piece of straw that instantly catches flame, wrath is a fire on which we place more and more logs, stoking its burn continually. The deadly sin of wrath becomes most dangerous when we use our quiet moments — intended to bring our injuries to God and ask for His help to heal and forgive — to relive the event, increase the resentment, and stoke the wrath. And instead of having asked for and received forgiveness and restoration by the end of our “prayer time,” we are focused all the

more on our intent to punish or get revenge. This is wrath.

Years ago, a man hurt my father and brother, both personally and professionally. As is often true of such sin, I took on the injustice they experienced, doubled the hurt they felt, and became intent on punishing this man. I was committed to the task of getting him removed from his place of power. I was consumed with wrath. It invaded my prayers, my shower time, my creativity, my gifts. Thankfully, soon after this destructive thinking began, I was at a pastor's retreat and was invited to come forward and kneel at the altar of forgiveness. But, though I had assumed the appropriate outward religious posture, inwardly I was still stoking the fire of wrath. Sin is never more powerful than when it is near the altar of God.⁹¹

Then, as God has done numerous times in my life, a thought, a verse, entered my mind. I know it was God who joined me in my mind's fiery furnace, for He said, "Vengeance is mine. I will repay."⁹² But my wrath argued back, "But I don't trust You to do that! I know You to be merciful and forgiving. I don't trust You to make this person suffer like my father and brother did." However, the thought of being able to release my wrath and get out of my self-imposed incinerator grew. Over the next few months, I changed. I don't remember specific prayers or acts to illustrate the change, but it was simple: When I stopped stoking the fire of wrath, it went out. I was in prayer one day and realized that it had been weeks since I had even thought about this man, and some time after that I found myself able to pray that God would forgive him, and me.

The desire to destroy the life of another person can include anything that is intended to end their liveliness. Scott Peck, in his book *People of the Lie*, explains that evil, e-v-i-l, is simply the reverse of live, l-i-v-e.⁹³ In the personal example given above, my desire was to end the livelihood of the man who harmed my father's and brother's livelihoods. But alarmingly, that is not where the deadly sin of wrath

stops. If not repented from, wrath will move us from a lesser intent to punish a person at the same level of an eye for an eye, to the eventual desire of taking their life. What is deadly is that wrath is the same deadly sin at whatever level our opportunity permits. As Peck notes, the action we take is often limited only by our power to do what our wrath desires. He explains: “But except in rare instances, such as in the case of Hitler when they might achieve extraordinary degrees of political power that remove them from ordinary restraints, their crimes are so subtle and covert that they cannot clearly be designated as crimes.”⁹⁴

Wrath is a deadly tumor nourished by a diabolic ecosystem. Like a cancer nourished by hormones in the physical body, vengeance is a toxic spiritual hormone providing all that wrath needs to become life-threatening.

Based on the three primary evils of worshipping self by making one’s self “god,” the selfish ambition of seeking first the self with little concern about others, and willful ignorance that protects the rationalizing defense of vengeance, wrath is perpetuated by those who use their gifts that have been poisoned by wrath. As evil begets evil, persons infected with wrath are simply continuing the curse through the generations of family and church.⁹⁵

However, as Peck observes, the toxicity doesn’t have to be at a criminal level for it to be poison to our souls. The subtle *putting people in their place* based on our jaundiced, subjective superiority, the pervasive *making people pay* for either perceived or real injustices, the *standing up for rights* instead of working to maintain unity, and other *justified* acts of vengeance create just as toxic a soil as a criminal one.⁹⁶

That is not to say that a criminal gang or a crime family is not unimaginably toxic. In a world where evil is good and good is evil,⁹⁷ that inversion doesn’t just poison our sense of justice but justifies our craving for vengeance. Thinking of ourselves as “good,” we project

onto others the very evil we are denying within ourselves. Thus, a mobster's *family first* ethic that causes him or her to kill someone who threatens the *family* or *gang* is hailed as "good."

This same ethic of vengeance can also permeate a nationalistic ecosystem in which a supposed or real threat to a person's nation, in whatever way, justifies a vengeance response to those who attack us. With a shocking level of retaliation, the desire to kill is then accepted as a good response within this toxic nationalistic soil. In an attempt to mitigate this poison, the church early on developed the evaluative tool of *just war*.⁹⁸ Recognizing that killing is *seriously wrong*, the *just war* theology gives a reasoned approach to the use of force in an attempt to protect the innocent. This engagement of human reason attempts to take the armed response out of the realm of an emotional reaction by wrath to one of thoughtful national defense. But this is a fine line. *Just war* can and has been used in a way that rationalizes vengeance rather than creating a just response and can be used more for appearance's sake than for seeking real justice.⁹⁹ This is all the more true as people use their gifts from a place of wrath born out of vengeance and then themselves further contaminate that same toxic soil. The power of the toxic ecosystem is that it consistently reinforces the deadly sin of wrath.

GOD'S WRATH

What is confusing about the deadly sin of wrath is that the Bible repeatedly claims that God's wrath is an expression of God's judgment against evil. So how can this be? If wrath in us is a deadly sin of vengeance, and vengeance is the Lord's, then does the meaning of wrath and vengeance change when used to describe God's actions?

Much has been written about this, but Pope Benedict XVI states it clearly when he says: "The wrath of God is a way of saying that I have been living in a way that is contrary to the love that is God. Anyone

who begins to live and grow away from God, who lives away from what is good, is turning his life toward wrath.” God does not have an emotional response of anger toward the evil person, but rather always has love for everyone, even the enemies of God. God thus expects His people to have that same kind of love, even for an enemy.

But love requires freedom of choice, and freedom of choice requires a real option with real consequences. Thus, every person is free to love God or to turn their back on God. We can choose God’s way of living or we can seek a self-worshipping, selfish ambition rationalized by willful ignorance. When this way of turning our back on God is chosen, then the consequence is to leave the garden of God’s provision and enter the weed-infested toxic soil that produces toil, sorrow, and death. It is this self-chosen path of sorrow and death that is meant by the words *God’s wrath*. God does not want that *wrath* for anyone and therefore sent His Son into the world to save us from perishing. It is not that God sent wrath, but wrath describes the life we already chose, a life without God. We live then under the curse of death when we are meant to live the blessing of eternal life, the heavenly life made possible by Jesus.¹⁰⁰

Another way of saying it is this: God created a just and moral ecosystem. This ecosystem has a choice that is real. We can choose to live nourished by God’s presence producing the fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control; *or*, we can choose to live outside His garden. If we choose to live outside His garden, then we live in the consequence of that choice: a life of struggle, sin, sorrow, and death.¹⁰¹

That way of life is called *God’s wrath*. God does not want us to live this life of wrath and sent a Savior to save us from this curse of sin and death.¹⁰² The deadly sin of wrath is a poison that grows within us from being planted in the toxic soil of this fallen and cursed world. This deadly wrath destroys us and those upon whom we wage this war.

BIBLICAL EXPLANATION

In chapter three of Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath*, he tells the allegorical story of a turtle facing the wrath of this world.¹⁰³ Symbolic of the migrant family seeking a better life but facing an overwhelming struggle, the turtle comes to a dusty, desert highway and attempts to cross. Attacked by a fire ant who carried its fatal venom within his shell, overturned by a truck driver intentionally aiming for him and barely missed by a speeding roadster who swerved to miss him, the turtle faces dangers large and small, intentional and accidental, and yet all possibly fatal. Like the people in the novel who die of natural causes and are murdered, who are assisted and manipulated, who are paid and cheated, who are helped and impoverished, this life is filled with toxic experiences that define the human condition.

However, the biblical explanation is clear: God intended for us to live in paradise, but humans chose to leave. And yet, this choice to not live in obedient peace but instead in pain and struggle is not the full story. God Himself came into this fallen world in order to lift us to a path of ultimate love, joy, and peace. But we have roots that are often more deeply planted in the toxicity of this poisoned soil than our lives are implanted in God's presence. It is God's call to confess, repent, and be cleansed from the deadly sins that makes purity and holiness possible.

In order to confess, we must know the characteristics of the deadly sin of wrath. Although there are many words that speak of this desire to destroy others, we will focus only on these: Οργίλος (*Orgilos*), Πλεκτες (*Plektes*), Μάχη (*Mache*), and Κακια (*Kakia*).

Οργίλος (*Orgilos*)¹⁰⁴

Coming from the root word meaning *wrath, anger, vengeance, indignation, agitation, violent emotion* or even the *punishment* itself, *orgivlos* describes a person who is *prone* to these acts, *prone to anger*, or

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quick to anger. Complex in its meaning, *orge* and *orgilos* speak of this whole stance toward life that devolves into a deadly sin, destroying both the one with wrath and those upon whom the wrath becomes focused.

Perhaps the most informative statement using this word is found in the Sermon on the Mount when Jesus says, “*You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ But I tell you that anyone who is angry (orgizo) with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment.*”¹⁰⁵ In my pastoral counseling sessions, I often help people try to understand and then become free from their addiction to anger, or their *cycle of rage*.¹⁰⁶ The first step is to confront the common myth that murder and anger are two different sins. As we saw above, the evil that wrath produces is not based on the level of our addiction to this deadly sin, but on the opportunity to act upon it with impunity. I once heard a man confess, “If I could get away with it, I would kill my brother for what he did to me.” I did not doubt him. Whatever wrath had been stoked time after time was just waiting for an opportunity to act. But this *moral disease* was eating up this man, first with alcohol addiction and then with physical illness. The evil of his brother that had slowly taken away his life was now being matched with the evil his wrath produced. Whether or not he ever acted on it, he wanted to end his brother’s life. It doesn’t take much imagination to picture the toxic soil these two brothers had shared that had now matured to a mutual hatred.

However, this is the problem we often see with *orge*, *orgizo*, and *orgilo*. Convincing ourselves that we are not really *that* bad, because we have never physically harmed someone, we nevertheless poison the soil of our relationships with a deadly wrath. Jesus does not allow us to use this rationalizing defense. Unless we are willfully ignorant of the truth taught by Jesus, we will confess our sin, turn away from the

wrath back toward God, and transplant our roots into the presence of His love, receiving His strength to forgive as we pray “Father, forgive them.”¹⁰⁷

Many verses speak of this, but here are a few that are representative:

“For God hath not appointed us to wrath (orge), but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ...” (1 Thessalonians 5:9).

“I will therefore that people pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath (orge) and doubting” (1 Timothy 2:8).

“...because human anger (orge) does not produce the righteousness that God desires” (James 1:20).

“Be ye angry (orgizo) and sin not: Let not the sun go down upon your wrath (orgizo)” (Ephesians 4:26).

“And he was angry (orgizo), and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and intreated him” (Luke 15:28).

“For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God, not self-willed, not soon angry (orgilos), not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre” (Titus 1:7).

Πλεκτες (Plektes)¹⁰⁸

Coming from a root word meaning *to strike*, *plektes* takes it to the interpersonal level and means *contentious, quarrelsome, pugnacious*. The implication of being *plektes* is that it is the beginning of wrath when a person is simply contentious and looking for things to quarrel about.

As we discussed in previous chapters, sin seldom comes in its fully mature form, but is rather birthed from small and often unremarkable attitudes. In pastoral counseling, we speak of *unsafe behaviors*, with being *disagreeable* as a moderately unsafe behavior. However, many

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take it as a badge of independence that they don't just *go along with* what others think or decide. Disagreeing as a general practice, quarrelling just to assert control, and striking out with disregard of the other's intention are all behaviors that are *plektes* and are the gateway to the deadly sin of wrath. Often concerned with appearances, a person's quarrelsome behaviors may appear only in certain relationships or with certain people or when no one is there to witness it. *Plektes* is seen in the parent whose disrespect poisons the soil of the family in such a way that when their child enters puberty and burgeoning adulthood, they begin to exhibit their own quarrelsomeness. Having begun years before, *plektes* between parent and child explodes, bringing contention and quarrels between everyone in the family as the soil reveals its toxicity.

Plektes is also seen in a church community when certain people, for whatever reason — gender, race, education, wealth, poverty — are treated with contentious interactions or disagreeable quarrelling. As a superintendent overseeing a variety of churches of different sizes and varying types of interactions, I observed a smaller church with an extended family in control treat a pastor with *plektes* disregard. Whatever the pastor suggested was disagreed with and any progress was thwarted until the pastor became so discouraged that in addition to leaving the church, the pastor left the ministry. It doesn't require wrath in its mature, evil form to destroy a life.

In Scripture, *plektes* is the word often used to describe the lack of unity within a church or family. It is also a word that would be appropriately applied to political bodies where there is not cooperation for the good of the city, county, nation, or world, but where a contentious disregard for others creates a destructive *plektes* from this toxic soil. It is important to take appropriate action to stop the spread of all the diseases that can infect a church, and it is the responsibility of the pastor, leader, member, superintendent, and bishop to not

allow *plektes* toxicity to remain a part of a church community. *Plektes* needs to be identified, confessed, cleansed, and turned away from so that the disciples can grow in soil that is no longer toxic.

Here are two representative verses which both describe that an overseer must be free from *plektes* in order to appropriately keep it out of our churches.

“Here is a trustworthy saying: Whoever aspires to be an overseer desires a noble task. Now the overseer is to be above reproach, faithful to his wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome (plektes), not a lover of money. He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him, and he must do so in a manner worthy of full respect” (1 Timothy 3:1-4).

“For the overseer must be above reproach as God’s steward, not self-willing, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious (plektes), not fond of sordid gain...” (Titus 1:7).

Μόχη (Mache)¹⁰⁹

Coming from the root word meaning *armed combatants, hand-to-hand fighting, a war of words, or a legal battle*, *mache* implies the next level from that of quarrelling, *plektes*, to attacking.

This progression of sin from a contentious attitude to a physical, verbal, or legal conflict, and finally to the deadly sin of wrath is easily understood. As seen in counseling charts that show the various levels of anger and rage, the person with the deadly sin of wrath has a full arsenal of increasingly damaging attitudes and behaviors. It is also true that such people do not leave behind the less damaging attitudes and behaviors, but rather their arsenal of wrath grows over time as their inhibitions lessen and their attack skills progress.¹¹⁰

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In most situations, whether professionally, legally or organizationally, the level of *mache* is the point at which a person can lose their marriage, employment, freedom or position. But the sin began far before this *warring madness* as the toxic soil of the individual's family, church, community, or organization poisoned their mind such that violence became an acceptable if not preferred action. The fascination of popular culture with people who achieve *greatness* in battle, whether real or fictional, is undoubtedly part of that toxicity. Invading dreams and aspirations, graphically portrayed in the video games played by our children and teens in their formative years imprint this destructive behavior that is grown in toxic soil.

The same is true within the church. As a child, young pastor, senior pastor, and superintendent, I have personally observed leaders at the highest levels who use anger and contentiousness to gain acquiescence to their desires. The result of such toxic use of wrath at its developing levels is devastating to those being mentored within such a toxic discipleship soil. Similarly, I have seen tears used to manipulate others' emotions with a different weapon of battle in an attempt to control others to win a particular battle.

Within Scripture, these are very instructive verses for understanding this developing form of wrath.

"For when we were come into Macedonia, our flesh had no rest, but we were troubled on every side; without were fightings (mache), within were fears" (2 Corinthians 7:5).

"But foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strifes (mache)" (2 Timothy 2:23).

"But avoid foolish questions, and genealogies, and contentions, and strivings (mache) about the law, for they are unprofitable and vain" (Titus 3:9).

"From whence comes wars and fightings (mache)

among you? Come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?” (James 4:1).

Κακία (Kakia)¹¹¹

Coming from a root word meaning *evil, loathsome, bad, injurious, pernicious*, *kakia* takes this on to the level of intention and means a *desire to injure, malice, malignant, wicked, and depraved*. Moving from a mortal to a spiritual level, *kakia* takes the wrath into the soul as the individual becomes so depraved as to live in *malice* desiring to injure others like a *malignant* spiritual cancer.

As the toxicity continues to work on the person whose roots are firmly implanted in the poisoned family, church, community, or nation, the person is now clearly formed into a *malignant* form of human being whose wrath is contagious and pervasive. Purposefully injuring others, a person of *kakia* often resorts to abusive manipulation in order to groom the unsuspecting person into living under their control.

Though most people are surprised that people will stay in a relationship where they are treated with malice, it is easier to understand once grooming is explained.¹¹² The person seeking to abuse has the intention to take a child or intern or spouse or parishioner or any victim and slowly weaken their defenses until they not only accept the abuse but feel complicit within it and find it virtually impossible to report. One author explains: “Often, the first violations are boundary issues but not physical violations...But desensitization works hand in hand with the illusion of a special relationship. This is produced by a mix of positive reinforcements, simulated affection, and possibly trauma bonding.”¹¹³ What makes this a step into spiritual evil is the intent to injure a person who has most often done nothing deserving injury except for being naively vulnerable. Coming from a place of dominance and abuse, the deadly sin of wrath shows its

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demonic core. And, as in all toxic soil, the likelihood that an abused person will abuse someone else if they do not seek the healing of professional or pastoral counseling is greater than if there was no abuse. This *multigenerational transmission process*¹¹⁴ comes from the toxic soil of family, church, and community across generations.

The Scriptures are helpful in warning us of this danger.

“Therefore repent of this wickedness (kakia) of yours, and pray the Lord that, if possible, the intention of your heart may be forgiven you” (Acts 8:22).

“...being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil (kakia); full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips” (Romans 1:29).

“Therefore let us celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice (kakia) and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth” (1 Corinthians 5:8).

“For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice (kakia) and envy, hateful and hating one another” (Titus 3:3).

“Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness (kakia), and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls” (James 1:21).

“As free, and not using your liberty for a cloak of maliciousness (kakia), but as the servants of God” (1 Peter 2:16).

MISUSE OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS

In its most mature form, the deadly sin of wrath should be easy to spot. However, we’ve seen that this deadly sin evolves over time, yet

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never loses the less obvious components of contentious or quarrelling behaviors. Thus, as we look at the misuse of God's gifts, it is important to look more closely at all the deadly sins in their developing forms. Each has a devastating toxicity that, when used within the church, allows those twisted spiritual gifts to become poisons producing evil rather than the rich, nourishing soil that discipleship and church life are meant to produce.

An example of this is evident when the values we espouse as Christians become the cloaks behind which wrath hides. For example, it is not our desire to produce disciples who simply parrot back the theological or ecclesial answers given to them. It is our desire that each person will have a personal relationship with God and seek the Spirit's guidance in their ministry as a whole and the ministry of each day. Thus, biblical discipleship doesn't create grandchildren but children of God, dependent not on us or other church leaders, but on Christ directly.

However, creating such a mature disciple includes necessary dialogues and discussions that embrace doubts and disagreements. It would be easy to cloak a toxic form of self-worship and willful ignorance within that process. This can occur both by the one who is discipling and by the one who is being disciplined. Therefore, having an awareness of what toxic discipleship looks like is necessary in order to identify any deadly toxicities that have contaminated the discipleship process and the church ecosystem.

In this chapter we ask: "How does a wrathful person misuse the spiritual gifts and exhibit not a protective concern for others but rather an injurious intention toward those under their care? What does toxic soil coming from the deadly sin of wrath look like?

GIFT of COUNSEL

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As a pastoral counselor married to a licensed marriage and family therapist, my wife Cheryl and I have observed the destructive wake left by the path of angry and toxic counselors. As already discussed with pride and greed, much is inherent within the dynamics of counseling that can cause harm to a client or parishioner when the counselor or pastor is not healthy and wise. As is true of all professions, some are in it for the prestige and/or the money. However, to find a counselor or pastor who is in it for the power is even more troubling.

To avoid the damage of possibly harmful and toxic counselors, we refer people in need to Christian counselors whose reputations we know, trust that they have surrendered themselves to Jesus and worship Him only. These trustworthy counselors believe that they continue to learn and grow in their Christian faith as well as their counseling competency. We avoid referring to those who seem to be selfishly ambitious. But as already noted, the hiding of power and the intent to abuse is not absent from the church or its people. To gain influence over another person at their expense in order to control or abuse them is actually much more common than we realize or want to admit.

When they trust inappropriately because they put their blind trust in the processes of ordination or church training, some parishioners can be even more vulnerable to the abuse of pastoral or Christian counselors within whose care they place their hearts and minds. But what if these counselors, pastors, or mentors are not trustworthy?

It is recommended that the following steps be taken to protect ourselves and others and that these steps be taught not only in counseling but in mentoring, internships, and discipleship:

1. Use the process of trust-check-trust-check in all counseling relationships. Rather than jumping in with both feet, the wise person checks the depth of the water slowly by looking for evidence of the counselor's integrity, signs that they keep confidentiality and speak with godly wisdom. Share a little and

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check it out. What does your spirit say about their counsel and what do they do with this little bit of personal information? I once had counseling from a pastor about something personal and heard him use me (without my name) in his next sermon as a poor example of faith. I didn't trust him again.

2. Listen to your own intuitive sense of the intention of the person. God has given most of us a strong sense of what others' intentions are. But I have heard person after person say, "I ignored my feelings" or "I trusted them anyway."
3. Share your experience with a trusted and wise person who over time has proven their own integrity and love, and who wants the best for you. Listen closely to what they say and do not discount their insights.
4. Watch the effects of this counselor/pastor's counsel/discipleship/pastoring/supervision in the lives of others. Do these people thrive in their growing empowerment and ministry or is there something truncating their growth, making them dependent upon the counselor/pastor rather than developing their own growing competencies?
5. If you observe a debilitation in someone who is being counseled or if they are getting worse rather than better, then trust that observation. Do not seek that person's counsel or mentoring.
6. When you suspect that a pastor or counselor is not trustworthy or has a harmful intention or destructive effect on you, talk to their senior pastor, superintendent, counseling center director or counseling supervisor about your concerns.

GIFTS of MERCY and HEALING

As has been already discussed as it relates to the deadly sins of pride and greed, the abuse of vulnerable people is a clear red flag of

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the misuse of gifting. This is especially true with the gifts of mercy and healing. By definition, a person in need of mercy and healing is vulnerable. Thus, when an angry, contentious, malicious person who has expertly covered their true self with a superficial mask misuses their gifts, the damage to the vulnerable person will be extensive. As a pastor, I witnessed people who *became contentious* with poorer relatives, ill parents, dependent children, and legally bound spouses for no other purpose than to express a clear intent to harm. This is the deadly sin of wrath.

It is obvious that if the very person on whom a vulnerable person depends to show mercy and bring healing is the source of their harm, then the ecosystem is toxic. The toxicity harms everyone who is a part of that family, church, community, and nation. An example of this is the government's program for Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). Almost 50 years ago, I researched for a seminary class how this program forced fathers out of their homes in order for the children to be eligible for financial help which resulted in creating the effects of *father absence*¹¹⁵ in the communities when such welfare programs were meant to provide the mercy of a caring nation. Such an ecosystem was devastating on the vulnerable wives and children who lost the daily presence of their husbands and fathers in their lives.

Similarly, this deadly sin eventually strips the masks off, leaving the person with wrath, isolated and rejected. Having to put up protective boundaries to keep the contentious and malicious behavior from harming them, the people in their family, church or community eventually remove themselves from the life of the wrathful person. This can help keep them safe and the ecosystem as a whole from becoming toxic, but at the same time, the person with unfettered wrath often migrates into increasingly unhealthy ecosystems of what we call "extremists."

GIFT of MISSIONS

The historical fact that the missionary movement often collaborated with governments in abusing the *indigenous people* they were colonizing is a blight on the church and difficult to understand. But if we insert into this confusing puzzle the deadly sin of wrath, contention, malice, and control-based fear, then it sadly makes it worse. Rather than exemplifying the love, joy, peace, and kindness of a healthy, fruitful Christian, the missionary with wrath misuses the opportunity to bring faith and hope in Christ so as to cause harm rather than to save.

An example of this is when the church declared that it was “right to take the land from *pagan, native* people because they were not *human* enough to own it.” This *doctrine of discovery* is an example of both of the deadly sins of pride and greed, and also of wrath in which intentional harm was done to vulnerable, indigenous populations.¹¹⁶

GIFT of HOSPITALITY

Where most relationships bond around a mutual attraction toward the other and their common interests and values, the deadly sin of wrath seeks to bond around mutual maliciousness toward a common enemy. In the church, rather than creating a mutual bond around our love of Jesus Christ, the misuse of the gift of hospitality can create a false unity among those who look alike and agree, a community of excluding others who look or think differently, or a community of chaos as a church joins together in a superior or malicious intent toward some other church or group.

Perhaps the most obvious example of such toxic belonging is seen in a church where their mutual hatred for persons with same-sex attraction causes them to maliciously attack and harm them.¹¹⁷ It is also obvious in this season of contentious political parties so that a church can bond around their mutual malice toward a specific

politician or political party. Rather than uniting in Christ and showing a respectful attitude toward those with whom they disagree, the wrathful contention, quarrelling, and fighting tear apart congregations and families as well as our nation. As a superintendent, I was deeply saddened to see congregations split along political party lines and extend a welcome only to those visitors who were of the same race and economic class, and who held the same political ideologies as they did. Quarrelling over wearing or not wearing face masks unbelievably divided some congregations during the COVID pandemic. Our mutual faith in Christ and extending His love to others, no matter who they are, is the healthy expression of biblical hospitality. The toxic soil of wrath produces divisions and makes enemies of even brothers and sisters in the family of God.

GIFT of LEADERSHIP

As is true with all the deadly sins, persons with the gift of leadership can magnify toxicity. Responsible for both the health of the individuals and the organizations they lead, the intention to help is more powerful, or to harm is more lethal, than almost any of the other gifts. As a superintendent, I have sadly seen the impact of a leader who is angry toward their people. Castigating them from both the pulpit and in board meetings, the leader who has a contentious, quarrelling, malicious heart will often attack other leaders, people with wisdom and discernment, as well as the most vulnerable. Often combining a prideful superiority with wrathful malice, such a leader will leave a wake that can be identified easily:

1. The most effective and healthy leaders leave, being replaced with increasingly weak and unhealthy leaders.
2. Wise and discerning people leave, being replaced with naïve and impressionable people.
3. People with healthy boundaries leave, being replaced with

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those who are unable to protect themselves.

4. The ecosystem of the church becomes increasingly toxic with more and more anger, contention, quarrelling and malice. It becomes increasingly small, ingrown, and unattractive to visitors.

GIFT of PROCLAMATION

It is an understatement to say that what is taught from the pulpit will help create either a healthy community of God's people or a toxic discipleship that will poison the spiritual fruit and create deadly sins. But what is most important is not so much the words that are said as it is the diseases that are spread. More is *caught* than taught in any educational moment.

It is interesting in the recent pandemic that we learned how the breath we breathe on one another carries within it the deadly virus. The same is true as we *spire* and *conspire* together. When we breathe together the toxins of the soil, we infect others that have not yet become a part of our church or ecosystem.

GIFT of WORSHIP

Similar to the gift of proclamation with its ability to spread toxins present within the preacher or teacher, a toxic worship leader will spread either a godly worship or a poisoned worship.

Years ago, I was standing outside as a youth camp worship service was about to begin. The leader of worship was talking to a musician on his team and said something like, "I love how we have the power to take the emotions of the kids high and then bring them low." I don't think he was speaking as a toxic person but rather just remarking at how a worship leader can control the emotional responses of a congregation. It struck me then and now as manipulative. Rather than trusting the Holy Spirit to draw these precious young Christians to

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Himself through worship music, Scripture, sermon, prayer, and other elements, this leader was using his gifting to emotionally manipulate people. If a person is intentionally malicious or quarrelsome, if a deadly wrath has poisoned his/her soul, then the result would be devastating, and yet no one would be aware of it at the time. It is only as we watch the results in the lives of the worshippers through the rest of the camp and in the years to come that we might realize their time of meeting with God in worship had been usurped for nefarious reasons by a person intent on hurting them.

REFLECTION/DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

In each chapter these questions are divided into those by which we evaluate ourselves and those by which we evaluate our church. Both can be answered individually or discussed in a group.

Self-Evaluation:

1. As you look at the progression of this *deadly sin* from being prone to anger, to contentious, to quarrelsome, to fighting, to warring, to malicious, to malignant, to depraved, to vengeance, to violence, to *wrath*, what characteristic of this sin have you experienced? Where did it come from? What *toxic soil* did it develop within you? How did you recognize and confess it? How did God help you turn away from the path of *wrath* into a way of love and peace? Who were those who led you into *wrath*, and who were those who led you in the way of Christ?
2. What *toxic soil* do you identify as the most powerful in producing this deadly sin of *wrath*? Does *worship of self* remove you from the influence of God in true worship? What masks keep you from the breath of God? How does your desire for *vengeance* get stoked in your life? How does the call of God

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for forgiveness and peace encourage your holiness? How does malice contaminate your relationships? Where does this deadly toxin come from? How can you turn from malice and have peaceful relationships?

3. When the Bible tells us to be angry but not sin (Ephesians 4:26), how have you applied that distinction in your own life? How do you deal with a temper that flares and a rage that is stoked? How do you break free from desiring the momentary sweet taste of revenge? How do you keep from becoming a part of a group within the church or community that identifies a common enemy to hate and despise? If you are a part of such a group, how do you disentangle your roots from theirs in your shared *toxic soil*? How do we rise above the divisions and battles of this world and use our influence to encourage unity?

Church Evaluation:

1. Looking at the interactions of the people of your church, can you identify any behaviors within this continuum: prone to anger, contentious, quarrelsome, fighting, warring, malicious, malignant, depraved, vengeance, violence, *wrath*? If any are present in a pervasive way, why do you think the *sin of wrath* has been tolerated? What *toxic soil* is present that nourishes this sin in the roots of the people? Who can lead the congregation into a healthy, wrath-free environment? What actions can you take to help do that?
2. As you live within the community of your church, what *toxic soil* do you see present? Where do the toxins originate? Who is best suited to help the church identify the danger

- and help cleanse the toxins from the church's soil? Does the congregation lack sincere worship or spiritual counseling or does it have healthy leadership? How can you be part of bringing the healing, reconciling work of God into your congregation?
3. Who are the pastors, counselors, leaders, teachers or others who you have seen misusing their gifts and helping create a toxic environment in your church? What can you do to identify malicious people and stop their contentious behaviors that hurt others without becoming malicious or contentious yourself? How do you protect yourself from their impact on your own life?

CHAPTER 5

DEADLY SIN OF ENVY

“But if you have bitter envy and selfish ambition in your heart, don’t brag and deny the truth. Such wisdom does not come from above but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where envy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every kind of evil.”

— James 3:14-16

“Envy, propelled by fear, can be even more toxic than anger, because it involves the thought that other people enjoy the good things of life which the envier can’t hope to attain through hard work and emulation.”

— Martha Nussbaum

In the award-winning film *Amadeus*,¹¹⁸ the plot does not so much revolve around the musical genius of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart as it does the malicious envy of Antonio Salieri. Also a good musician but not blessed with a genius talent, Salieri became consumed with his belief that Mozart did not deserve the musical gifting he had

received from God. Thus, by embracing the deadly sin of envy, Salieri set out to purposefully destroy the young musician's physical and mental health. In the end, he succeeded by deceiving Mozart to write a Requiem, claiming that it was commissioned by his dead father. Having manipulated the passion that infused his genius, Salieri watched Mozart's health decline while planning to premier Mozart's work as his own at Amadeus' funeral. In the end, Salieri's guilt causes him to attempt suicide, and he is committed to a psychiatric hospital.

Considered to be one of the best films of all time, the ingredients of envy and its deadly scheme to destroy the one upon whom the envy is focused are on full display: wanting what belongs to another; willing to kill to get it — or at least to make sure that the envied one can't keep it; becoming overcome with guilt and seeking to make amends; recognizing that all has been lost including the very genius that was envied until life itself is not worth living.

Joseph Epstein has noted that “of the seven deadly sins, only envy is no fun at all” and “envy may be the subtlest — perhaps I should say the most insidious — of the seven deadly sins.”¹¹⁹ Noting that all other sins have at least a momentary payoff, envy only has a void, an absence, a seething desire that “if I can't have what you have, then you can't have it either.”

Similar to the prohibition against coveting as noted in the Decalogue,¹²⁰ the distinction has been made that the deadly sin of envy brings a consistent discontent and resentment, while coveting is simply wishing and wanting. However, it is difficult to hold that distinction.¹²¹ The simple truth is that both envy and coveting leave a person pervasively unhappy.

Most of us know from experience that a difficult part of friendship can be to try to follow Paul's advice to “*rejoice with those who rejoice*,”¹²² but that the second part of that verse, “*to mourn with those who mourn*,” seems to come far more naturally. Perhaps the reason is that envy

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encapsulates all three of the deadly sins we've studied so far — the sins of pride, greed, and wrath: our pride fuels envy when we see a person who is treated “better” than us in any way, our greed focuses our envy toward those who have more than us, and our wrath enrages envy when we find someone who is happier than we are. Envy stops our rejoicing with others in their good fortune while our “superior” position as “comforter” allows us to express sympathy for another's losses which cause them to need to be comforted.

In 1972, Jim Ryun fell during a qualifying round to defend his title as the best mile runner in the world. After this event, he noted that when he set the world record, he received only two or three congratulatory messages, mostly from previous record holders. But when he fell, he got thousands of messages offering him encouragement and understanding and shared experiences of loss. Few rejoiced with his success, but virtually everyone identified with his loss. Exploring why that is true is helpful in understanding the nature of envy. Comparing and competing are toxic elements in the soil of our relationships. Rather than putting the interests of others before our own, we place our roots into the toxic soil of selfish ambition with worship of self, which contaminates our ability to love. This inability to love is deadly at every level of our lives — body, mind, and soul.

It is not difficult to imagine how an envious person will misuse their gifts. Biblical revelation explains that the gifts of God are given for the *common good*.¹²³ These supernatural abilities are given so we may build up individuals and the church as a whole. They are not for our own use, for prideful claims of superiority, or for special status. Thus, when a *spiritual narcissism* takes over our discipleship training, which is nourished by a toxic ecosystem, the whole body of Christ is infected. This is especially true in what are called the *miraculous gifts* such as prophecy, tongues, healing, and knowledge. These more public and awe-inspiring gifts are then sought and practiced more

than love, the greatest gift.¹²⁴ It is then, Paul explains, that the *more excellent way* of God becomes twisted into a deadly envy growing in the toxic soil of competitive comparing. And as we've discovered, the ecosystem reinforces this toxicity as the gifts are misused by prideful, greedy, wrathful, envious persons who produce increasingly toxic patterns of discipleship and church life.

BIBLICAL EXPLANATIONS

Before I became a pastor, I was confused by why God would list coveting at the same level of destruction to our spiritual well-being as murder in the Ten Commandments. From my limited experience, I did not see how being envious of another person's possessions or family was anywhere near as serious as taking a person's life. But then I began to see beneath the polite veneer of society and church attenders and recognize that the truly spiritually empty people were those who were never satisfied with their blessings. Always comparing and competing, they constantly found someone who had what they didn't have, and then they were driven to have whatever that was in order to be happy. Fueled by media's ever-present advertisements designed to point out what is lacking in our lives as well as comparing the idealized pictures friends post on social media, envy becomes a way of life, causing increasing devastation within our souls.

That is not to say that murderous wrath or idolatrous pride does not cause unrelenting sorrow and spiritual destruction, but envy produces an emptiness that rivals even the deadly sin of sloth, and this poison increases over time if it is not confessed and forsaken.

From the first family when Cain envied God's approval of Abel's sacrifice and angrily, wrathfully killed him, to the last Anti-Christ who envies God and His kingdom and sets out to destroy Him, Scripture is clear that this deadly sin of envy must be identified, confessed, repented of and replaced with God's supernatural fruit of love.

Within Scripture, several Greek words can help us understand the nature of envy: Ἀπατάω (*Apatao*), Ανατρεπο (*Anatrepo*), and Φθονος (*Phthonos*).

Ἀπατάω (*Apatao*)¹²⁵

Though we are unsure of its etymology, *apatao* means to cheat, beguile, deceive.

When Joseph Epstein noted that envy is the *most insidious of the deadly sins*, he was identifying the deceptive aspect of envy.¹²⁶ Since being overtly envious would not be acceptable in virtually any relationship or organization, *apatao* hides behind masks and personas that are often the exact opposite of the person's true self. Termed *reaction formation* by Freud,¹²⁷ the outward behavior puts on appearances, claiming to be the opposite of envy in order to deceive not only others, but often one's own self as well.

However, the use of *apatao* can also denote an intentional act to *cheat* or *beguile*. This means a person plays a role or puts on a mask to *consciously hide* their insidious guile, their deadly envy. An example is when Salieri acted as though he was a friend and admirer of Mozart while, in reality, he was working to not only steal his music but also destroy his life. A similar example is when a pastor puts on a supportive front toward another pastor, superintendent or bishop, while belittling or betraying them behind their back.

Biblical examples include:

“Let no man deceive (*apatao*) you with vain words; for because of these things comes the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience” (Ephesians 5:6).

“And Adam was not deceived (*apatao*), but the woman being deceived (*apatao*) was in the transgression”¹²⁸ (1 Timothy 2:4).

“If any man among you seems to be religious, and

bridles not his tongue, but deceives (apatao) his own heart, this man's religion is vain" (James 1:26).

Ανατρεπο (Anatrepo)¹²⁹

Coming from a root word meaning to *shift* or *turn*, *anatrepo* takes envy in the nefarious direction of wanting to *overthrow*, *overturn*, *destroy*.

As we've seen in the other deadly sins, a progression within the elements of envy begins with *deception*, *beguiling*, and *cheating* in order to take the next step and act to *overthrow*, *overturn*, or *destroy* the one being envied. Envy is not just the unhappiness caused by not having what someone else has, but also a downward spiral on the deadly path where we step into acts of purposeful *deception* and then *destruction* of the person we envy.

In his insightful work on *Envy*, George Foster¹³⁰ states: "Envy is a pan-human phenomenon, universally feared, at least subconsciously, as a particularly dangerous emotion, since it implies hostility and aggression capable of destroying individuals and even societies." Suggesting that envy is more a fear than a competition, Foster helps us understand envy as a deadly destruction. He provides this anatomy: first, "envy is present when one person has something a second person would like to have;" second, "envy exists only because [a person] feels that there are insufficient quantities of the good things in life — however he may define 'good' things...in this zero-sum game, one player's advantage is at the expense of others;" third, people are reluctant to advance beyond their peers out of fear that sanctions will be leveled against them as neighbors "convert their envy into direct or indirect aggression."¹³¹

Biblical verses which speak of this overturning and destroying people out of envy are:

"Men who have gone astray from the truth saying

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that the resurrection has already taken place, they upset (anatrepo) the faith of some.”¹³² (2 Timothy 2:18)

“For there are many rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, who must be silenced because they are upsetting (anatrepo) whole families, teaching things they should not teach for the sake of sordid gain.” (Titus 1:10-11)

Φθονος (Phthonos)¹³³

Coming from a root word meaning to *corrupt* or *destroy*, to *lead away from holiness*, *phthonos* means to *envy*, or to do something prompted by *envy*.

As we’ve seen, the power of envy to destroy the good — both the good gifts a person has as well as the good person themselves, most often by using *deceit* and *upsetting* or *overturning* them — is why envy is an insidious, deadly sin. Although we often think of envy as having to do with earthly possessions and reputations, endemic to the meaning of envy is *leading away from holiness*. That implies that envy of a person’s relationship with God is a primary part of this toxic sin. Thus, when a person misuses their spiritual gift in a way that leads another away from God, then the toxicity of the church corrupts the very souls of her people.

Within Scripture, this toxicity is identified often. Here are some representative verses:

“At that time they were holding a notorious prisoner, called Barabbas. So when the people gathered together, Pilate said to them, ‘Whom do you want me to release for you? Barabbas or Jesus who is called Christ?’ For he knew that because of envy (phthonos) they had handed him over.” (Matthew 27:16-18)

Romans 1:28-32: “And just as they did not see fit to

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acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy (phthonos), murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful; and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.”¹³⁴ (Romans 1:28-32)

“Some, to be sure, are preaching Christ even from envy (phthonos), and strife, but some also from good will; the latter do it out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel; the former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition rather than from pure motives, thinking to cause me distress in my imprisonment.” (Philippians 1:15-17)

“For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy (phthonos), hateful, hating one another.” (Titus 3:3)

MISUSE OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS

Although we would think that a deceptive, destructive, envious person would not be interested in God, His gifts, ministry, or the church, that simply is not true. From the envy of a Christian’s relationship with God, to envy of the happiness and blessings of Christians, to the desire to look like a “good moral person,” to the persona and masks behind which many of us live, such *deceptive, destructive, and envious* people are often drawn to the church. Not only

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is there ample opportunity from within the church to harm those they envy, but the intent to create a toxic church is also reminiscent of Satan's desire to create a toxic garden.

The warning Jesus gave for His followers to be *wise as serpents, yet innocent as doves*¹³⁵ can best be accomplished as we identify the behaviors of an envious person misusing their spiritual gifts to cause harm. As we have seen in our study of previous deadly sins, there is not so much a difference in the kind of harmful behaviors that are done to others as there is in the opportunities to harm that various gifts provide. For example, an envious person with the gift of mercy may not have the same opportunities to behave in toxic ways as a person with the gift of leadership, but the deadly disease of envy will manifest similar symptoms in whatever gifting or area of church life it is found.

GIFT of COUNSEL

Perhaps the most dangerous of all the gifts in which envy can cause destruction is that of counsel. The reason is simple: when a client or parishioner places themselves in the hands of a person giving them counsel, if that person is deceptively working against them due to envy, it would be unexpected and unrecognized until it has caused lasting pain. Once the injury is done, then the pain itself will sound an alarm, but until then the *therapeutic alliance*¹³⁶ formed by a counselor would mask their Machiavellian scheme. Such a therapist would show characteristics such as these from a list of 20 characteristics of clients, but these apply to therapists as well:

1. Only focus on their own ambition and interests
2. Prioritize money and power over relationships
3. Come across as charming and confident
4. Lie and deceive when required
5. Lacking in principles and values¹³⁷

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As noted in the previous deadly sins, these characteristics develop in the toxic soil of worship of self, selfish ambition, and, surprisingly, willful ignorance. The reason the last can be a surprise is that most counselors and pastors are trained in the dangers of making the counseling about themselves. Recognizing that *transference* and *counter-transference*¹³⁸ change the very nature of the therapeutic alliance, counselor training teaches how to both identify and avoid these twin dangers through seeking supervision so as to not be ignorant of their danger. Thus, to continue in such harmful ways would be willfully ignorant. Though this may not be true in volunteers since they lack the training and knowledge of these powerful dynamics, it is the responsibility of a healthy church to teach volunteer counselors in order to remove such toxins from the soil of the church. My wife, as a licensed marriage and family therapist, trained hundreds of our parishioners through more than 20 years in the basics of *peer counseling* as I taught *pastoral counseling* to other pastors.

GIFT of MISSIONS

The misuse of the gift of missions could develop in the toxic soil of racial prejudice, nationalistic pride or even socio-economic or class superiority. Inverting the sin of pride, envy looks at those in other people groups with an intent to harm them in some way. Those with greed do not so much envy those who have more wealth, but those with envy want to hinder the happiness of more carefree lives. This is often not recognized, in part because we misunderstand the nature of envy. Envy can be directed at almost anything in another person that seems to be an advantage to them, including the lack of something that takes time and responsibility.

GIFT of HOSPITALITY

When a person has the gift of welcoming new people into a family

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and making them feel at home, envy can misuse that gift in various toxic ways. From being envious of the attention that a visitor receives, to the possible threat that the visitor might take over the member's position, role or place, to the freedom the visitor has due to their lack of accountability and responsibility which belonging to a church creates, to envy that the church seems to value new people more than long-term faithful servants, envy creates barriers to the practices of healthy hospitality. In church growth terms, such a person who keeps visitors out of churches is called a *sniffer* because they walk up to a new person to see if they *smell* right to attend their church. If they don't, then the sniffer encourages them to go to a different church.

Opposite to this internal *gatekeeper* that keeps the *wrong* kind of people from feeling at home in a church, it is the toxic culture within the church itself that smells *rotten* to a new person, driving visitors away.¹³⁹ However, just as the physical body gets used to repellant odors and no longer identifies them as noxious, so a church body becomes used to horrendous attitudes of toxic racism, classism, sexism, and legalism.¹⁴⁰ Such toxic soil includes: lack of communication; turf wars; pervasive fear; excessive control; lack of freedom to think, question, and work out one's own salvation; lack of healthy leadership development; disconnected silos; suspicion; and even "slow decision-making, leading to denial by delay."¹⁴¹ People with healthy gifts of hospitality help a church identify and work with leaders to remove the toxic, rotten parts of the church. Conversely, a person with the deadly sin of envy is secretly working to weaken and destroy the health and life of the church body in ways they believe benefit themselves.

GIFT of LEADERSHIP

When pastors get together, the question that is inevitably asked is, "How big is your church?" The question is seldom asked or the answer given so that pastors can rejoice with one another's success, but to

create a hierarchy or pecking order of status and pride. However, for those with the deadly sin of envy, it is also to create a list of pastors and churches that they *hope or work* to harm.

The reality that some leaders work to bring down other leaders is not a surprise. In fact, leadership envy is perhaps the easiest to notice because the leader is focused not so much on their own church's health as in attacking the work of others. The weapons that are used can be a simple theological attack¹⁴² or a slanderous accusation against the reputation and character of another leader.¹⁴³ An example of this was the attack waged by a well-known pastor against the entire Charismatic movement, calling their emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit a *Strange Fire*.¹⁴⁴ More often though, envy shows its *deceptive destruction* through small inferences of theological or biblical error or nitpicking less important church differences such as worship style or baptismal practices.

But there is a fine line between respectfully discussing theological beliefs and ecclesial practices and the deadly attacks and accusations caused by envy. We know when the line has been crossed by the extent a person is willing to go to bring harm. The deadly sin of envy can take a person to the point of death, killing the life of a church or the ministry of a pastor.

GIFT of PROCLAMATION

It is no coincidence that the pulpit of a church was chosen to describe a *bully pulpit*. Webster explains: "*Bully vs Bully Pulpit: Bully pulpit* comes from the 26th U.S. President, Theodore Roosevelt, who observed that the White House was a *bully pulpit*. For Roosevelt, *bully* was an adjective meaning *excellent* or *first-rate*—not the noun *bully* used most often today meaning a blustering, browbeating person. Roosevelt understood the modern presidency's power of persuasion and recognized that it gave the incumbent the

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opportunity to exhort, instruct, or inspire.”¹⁴⁵

This truth that the proclaimer from a pulpit has a powerful opportunity to persuade or to browbeat a congregation is not lost on the dictionary editors. Trying to explain why one is a good use and the other a destructive use of a pulpit simply underscores the fact that pulpits can be used to build up or to tear down. It is not difficult to identify the effect of a particular proclaimer by the response of the parishioners. But this is where it does get difficult to discern. Conviction of sin is part of the purpose of a pulpit as the Word of God is authentically taught. So for a congregation to be quiet in their response to the preached Word as the Holy Spirit works within them could, from an uninformed position, look like the preacher was bullying them. This is where intention must be identified. Does the proclaimer intend to build up or tear down? Is the effect of a series of sermons drawing people close to the justifying and sanctifying grace of God, or debilitating them in their sinful distance? This means that it can be difficult to assess the intention or the true results on a congregation from just one sermon or lesson. But over time, the intention would become clear. Not only would people with the gifts of wisdom and discernment be the first to move away from a destructive pastor, but there would also be a general recognition of something being wrong, even if it could not be specifically identified. However, if this recognition does not happen, then the *deceptive destruction* of an envious proclaimer would create a toxic soil that would produce other *deceptive destroyers* with the deadly sin of envy.

GIFT of WORSHIP

Just as there is *competition* and envy among pastors, a similar toxicity exists between worship leaders and musicians. Often given responsibility by the church to create a meaningful worship experience that will be attractive to people in the community, worship leaders

and musicians who are successful at this can shift to pridefulness as we've seen in studying the deadly sin of pride. But those who envy others' success and musical skills can begin to attack, undermine, and slander those whom they envy.

Part of this problem is that churches themselves are competing for what is thought of as a scarcity of people to bring to faith and to their church. Though this is obviously not true in any reasonable analysis, sin by definition is not reasonable. As Charles Pierce notes, "It is impossible not to envy the man who can dismiss reason, although we know how it must turn out at last."¹⁴⁶ Reality has a way of breaking through the temptations as the mind once more engages the truth. There is no scarcity of people who need the ministry of Christ and His churches.

REFLECTION/DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

In each chapter these questions are divided into those by which we evaluate ourselves and those by which we evaluate our church. Both can be answered individually or discussed in a group.

Self-Evaluation:

1. As we've seen, the *deadly sin of envy* moves through the increasingly toxic process of *deceit to destruction to intentionally* leading a person away from the holiness that comes from being rooted in God. At what level have you experienced *envy* in yourself and in others? What did you do to confess, repent, and get away from the *toxic soil* that was nourishing this *sin of envy* in you?
2. In thinking of a person about whom you are or were *envious*, what is the basis of that *envy*? Is it similar to Salieri's passion for music that caused him to *envy* the genius of Mozart? Did that

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envy become an obsession that pulled you into a *destructive* pattern that was not only harmful to the person you *envied* but also harmful to you? Has it harmed your relationship with God such that you could not pray for blessing for them or did you become unable to be thankful for the blessings in your own life?

3. Have you found it difficult to rejoice with those who rejoice? Do you think instead about how you deserved what they got, or you wish they hadn't received what they received? Did you really, if you were honest with yourself, want to take it away from them — or at least discount its value? How often do you rejoice when you hear bad things have happened to someone about whom you are *envious*, causing you to delight in evil?¹⁴⁷
4. It isn't unusual to compare *coveting* and *envy*, but it is clear within Scripture that *coveting* and *envy* will both empty your life of joy. Why do you think that it is so difficult for us to choose *love and joy* instead of *coveting and envy*? Is it just that we have a fallenness of soul, or is it the *toxic soil* in which we were or are being nurtured? Or is it both in a toxic symbiosis?

Church Evaluation:

1. What does your church do that actually disciples you in a *toxic soil* producing *envy*? Who can help you change that soil and its *toxic discipleship*? How can you help change the *toxic* to *healthy soil* that can produce good spiritual fruit in faithful followers of Christ?
2. In the growth of the *deadly sin of envy*, it is clear that there is a lack of rejoicing over one another. Has your church held

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celebrations to acknowledge and express gratitude to all of the various people and the use of their gifts to benefit others? If not, why do you think that it hasn't happened? What is missing in your discipleship and leadership development? What can you do to help your church cultivate and express an "attitude of gratitude" to God and one another?

3. Often, those who use their *gifts* within a church are compared and contrasted such that *envy* is nourished. What actions do you think would be effective to help everyone accept and appreciate the unique gift and place each person fills?

CHAPTER 6

DEADLY SIN OF LUST

*“And the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches,
and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word and it becomes
unfruitful.”*

— Mark 4:19

“In love the other is important; in lust you are important.”

— Osho

In the Apostle John’s wise counsel after a lifetime of living in obedience to our Lord, he explains that there is a *lust of the flesh* and a *lust of the eyes*.¹⁴⁸ Although both speak of an obsessive focus at the expense of everything else, which is the definition of worship, it is clear that the *lust of the eyes* is a focus on *things* which develops into greed or envy, but the *lust of the flesh* is an obsession that worships the *body*. Further, this obsession with the body seems to focus in two general areas: the lust that our own body will not see death; and second, the lust for other people’s bodies to be used for our own

pleasure with little to no concern for them.

Although it is easy to see how people can be caught up in service to their physical bodies, it is not the lust for longevity that is the primary concern of Scripture, but rather the deadly misuse of God's gift of sexual intimacy. Rather than being the climax in bonding of marital love as the two bodies join in their mutually desired union of lives, lust separates the flesh from the soul and focuses only on what the flesh desires for itself. Similar to the deadly sin of envy which takes blessings and empties them of their intended joy, lust takes what is meant to be an exquisite act of a sacred relationship's fulfillment and empties it of its relationship and meaning. In the end, lust is deadly because we lose our very selves in this sin against our own body.¹⁴⁹

In the same way that the toxic soil of our individualistic, materialistic world develops the sin of greed, our sex-saturated culture is the toxic soil in which lust grows. But it is not only the modern convenience of hand-held electronic devices that has brought lust-inducing images to our eyes. The ancient world's brothels, temple prostitutes and fertility goddesses presented ever-present temptations of lust in pre-electronic cultures as well. It could even be true to say that the curse of Adam and Eve was the moment when their innocence was lost and they hid their nakedness in shame.¹⁵⁰

We see many examples of lust throughout history and in all cultures, as found by anthropologists; from graphic images engraved in the rocks of ancient Egypt or painted on the Turin Erotic Papyrus,¹⁵¹ advertisements and road signs showing the way to the brothel in ancient Ephesus¹⁵² declaring in ancient symbolism *no money, no honey*,¹⁵³ and the Temple of Aphrodite in ancient Corinth which stood on the hill overlooking the city inviting all "worshippers" to come up and engage in temple prostitution,¹⁵⁴ to the culture of the Roman Empire described by historians as being a sex-saturated society with temple prostitution¹⁵⁵ and erotic mentor-mentee pedagogical

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practices, *lust of the flesh* is ubiquitous.¹⁵⁶ Similarly, in the Western world, this obsessive focus on sexuality continued throughout the Middle Ages¹⁵⁷ and into the Enlightenment¹⁵⁸ up to the present time, as lust has waxed and waned within human cultures.¹⁵⁹ Thus, to assert that we are in a new and more dangerous era of the deadly sin of lust is not accurate.

However, noting that lust has been a human temptation from the beginning to today is really no different than what we would say of any of the deadly sins. All the deadly sins are part of the human condition, and there has always been toxic soil in which they grow. It is also apparent that the primary toxic soil of worship of self, selfish ambition, and willful ignorance nourishes the rampant production of lust.

For example, when we worship the self such that our own lives and desires are the central focus of every day and every act of virtually every relationship, then the *lust of the eyes* and *lust of the flesh* seem natural and normal. If there is no focus on the Creator, then we are left with our focus on the creation and ourselves as creatures. This myopic perspective can cause us to think that what feels good at the moment is what is best for us, not understanding the fact that replacing faithfulness in marriage with acting out of lust in adultery is only a momentary thrill with a life-shattering, deadly consequence to the life of the marriage.

Similarly, though popular culture as seen in television shows like *Friends* depicts viewing pornography and having premarital sexual intercourse with different partners as a normal choice a young adult makes,¹⁶⁰ the research is clear that replacing committed, relational sexual and emotional intimacy with objectified, fantasied, and make-believe pornography leaves our bodies not only unsatisfied and unsatisfiable, but our souls in intense loneliness as well.¹⁶¹

BIBLICAL EXPLANATIONS

Christians place lust well down the list of deadly sins at number five below pride, greed, wrath and envy. Similarly, in Dante's *Inferno*, he suggests that of the nine circles of hell, lust is only level two in terms of increasing impact of evil.¹⁶² However, of all the deadly sins, lust is one of the more frequently discussed sins in Scripture.

Though this is not an exhaustive study of the Greek words that inform us about the nature of this sin and the implied toxic soil that nourishes it, we will focus our attention on these Greek words: Φρεναπάτης (*Phrenapates*), Αισχρος (*Aischros*), Γάστερ (*Gaster*), Αποστρεφο (*Apostrepho*), Μιαινο (*Miaino*), Εκστρεφο (*Ekstrepho*), and Επιθυμία (*Epithumia*).

Φρεναπάτης (*Phrenapates*)¹⁶³

Coming from two root words meaning *mind* and *deceive*, *phrenapates* means *to seduce*, or to be a *mind deceiver*. The implication of this word is that lust begins not so much in the hormones or even the beauty seen by the eyes, but in the deception of the mind. It begins with faulty reason.¹⁶⁴

As a pastor who has counseled many people who became addicted to pornography, one of the more difficult aspects of treating and overcoming this addiction is that the mind keeps a rolodex of lustful images that can be accessed at any time.¹⁶⁵ Reviewing pictures, movies or literature is not needed once the eyes have seen or imagined sexual images and lust has been activated.

However, it is important to note that some people have what could be called an over-active guilt¹⁶⁶ that turns their attraction to beauty into the guilt of immorality. The problem is that once the mind is deceived into thinking that just noticing that a woman is beautiful or a man is handsome is a sin, then the mind can continue

the deception and say, “well, you’ve already lusted so you might as well put your thoughts into action or make your action match your guilt.” One helpful rule of thumb is that when you notice a beautiful or handsome person walking down a sidewalk, enjoy this attractive person created in the image of God and give God the praise. But do not go around the block to look at them again. It is that second step of taking the notice of beauty into desire and desire into lust that describes *phrenapates*.

Another interesting aspect of *phrenapates* is that it means to *seduce*, but this seduction is not from someone else who is purposefully pursuing us as much as it is our own mind *seducing* us into deceptive thinking. As noted, lust begins in our own mind. However, it is very clear that the sex industry purposefully *seduces* us: from placing pictures on our computer screens that are simply suggestive to enticing us to click on them, to spending time looking and then lusting, with the desire growing to an imaginative or physical lust of the flesh.

Phrenapates is found in Scripture:

*“For there are many unruly and vain talkers
and deceivers (phrenapates), especially those of the
circumcision.” (Titus 1:10)*

Aισχρος (Aischros)¹⁶⁷

Coming from the root word meaning to *disfigure*, *dishonor*, to *put to shame*, *aischros* takes the seduction of lust to the next level where our thoughts are *sordid*, *improper*, *disgraceful* and *filthy*.

Taking notice of beauty and being *seduced* into taking a second look can quickly move us to thinking *improper* or *disgraceful* thoughts that remove the dignity of the other person’s humanity and make them simply an object of our lust. Pope John Paul II gave an example of this step in the process of lust when he wrote: “In short, the problem with pornography is not that it shows too much of the person, but that it

shows far too little.”¹⁶⁸ Anything that takes the grandeur of a human being created in the image of God and reduces that being to an object of sexual desire is a deadly sin, for if we consider them no longer as human, then we can express our selfish ambition without guilt. Our thinking has become *sordid* and *disgraceful*.

It is also true, as in all sin, that the progression proceeds from the seduction or deception of the mind and quickly and inexorably moves into some form of action, from private self-gratification while viewing or thinking of someone’s body to acting out improper behavior toward coworkers, strangers, even children — or anyone who is not our marriage partner.

We are warned about *aischros* several places in Scripture:

“Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. It is shameful (aischros) even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. But everything exposed by the light becomes visible—and everything that is illuminated becomes a light.” (Ephesians 5:11-13)

“...who must be silenced because they are upsetting whole families, teaching things they should not teach for the sake of sordid (aischros) gain.” (Titus 1:11)

Γάστερ (Gaster)¹⁶⁹

We will discuss this root word more in the next chapter, for it literally means *belly, stomach, a glutton, a gormandizer, a man who acts as if he is all stomach*. In this instance, it is a person who is obsessed in satisfying physical sexual pleasure.

As is true in all addictions, lust moves from a momentary *seduction*, to *dishonoring, sordid* thoughts about others which dehumanize them, to a physical compulsion that reduces the person lusting to a person who *is as it were all hormones or all sexual organs*. This reducing us

until we are defined only or primarily by our deadly sin is a powerful though inaccurate statement about identity. Thus, when we answer the question, “Who am I?” we often think or even say, “I am...an alcoholic, or a drug addict, or a sex addict, or a....”

Although *gaster* is not the word used here, Paul describes this process of becoming only a body given over to lust in 1 Corinthians 6:13: “*You say, ‘Food for the stomach and the stomach for food, and God will destroy them both.’ The body, however, is not meant for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.*”

Αποστρεφο (Apostrepho)¹⁷⁰

Coming from two root words meaning *against* and *turn your back on someone*, or *turn away from someone*, *apostrepho* means to *desert*, or *turn someone away from allegiance to someone*, to *tempt* or *defect*.

It is clear that as lust continues to take over a person’s life it will begin to cause increasing destruction. *Turning away from an allegiance* such that a person has an adulterous affair, or *tempting* someone else to turn away from their marriage and *defect* legally, morally, and spiritually is the next step in this deadly sin.

It is also true that once the lustful desire has its way with someone, then that person becomes abhorrent, causing you to turn away or turn your back on the very person with whom you once were fixated and committed the immoral act. In Scripture, the story of Tamar and her half-brother Amnon¹⁷¹ is a prime example of this type of lust and its resulting rejection. As the Bible tells it, Amnon had such a consuming lust for his half-sister Tamar that he got her alone and raped her. As soon as he had done so, Amnon turned his back on Tamar and would have nothing to do with her. Then, as we studied in the chapter on wrath and its desire for vengeance, Tamar’s full brother Absalom was consumed with vengeance and eventually killed Amnon for his lust-driven rape of his sister.

Contrary to the healthy human desire that leads to a life-long commitment of marriage, which includes sexual longing fulfilled as a physical expression of love, lust is a dishonoring, dehumanizing, and finally rejecting consumption that is the opposite of love. The old question of, “But will you still respect me in the morning?” describes the intuitive warning a person has when being seduced by a lustful person.

The toxic soil that grows *apostrepho* is a worshipping of self and a selfish ambition that narcissistically puts one’s own desire at the center of life. The *deception* of the mind such that this is seen as justified or even right reveals the deadly evil that kills everything around it.

In Scripture, *apostrepho* is found in these verses:

“For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own lusts (epithumia), they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away (apostrepho) from the truth and turn aside to myths.” (2 Timothy 4:3-4)

“Not giving heed to Jewish fables, and commandments of men, that turn from (apostrepho) the truth.” (Titus 1:14)

“See that you refuse not him that speaks. For if they escaped not who refused him that spoke on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away (apostrepho) from him that speaks from heaven.” (Hebrews 12:25)

Mιαινο (Miaino)¹⁷²

A primary word meaning to *pollute, contaminate, sully, defile, stain*, *miaino* expresses the reality that this growing lust now *pollutes* or *contaminates* the Lord’s gift of marital sex.

The Scriptures often speak of purity as having no stain, of being *white as snow*.¹⁷³ This truth that lust stains us and we are then in need

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of the purifying work of God is a central message throughout God's Word. The deadly sins do in fact have the power to kill both body and soul, but that is not where God wants us to end up. God is actively pursuing us to take that which was contaminated in our sexual lives and make it pure — to restore us all to purity.¹⁷⁴

As is true in the plant world, the soil will either nourish the healthy plant and fruit or contaminate and poison the plant and fruit. Growth in plants and in people is not possible without the nourishment provided by the soil, but as we've seen, the soil that is toxic and polluted will also pollute us.

In Scripture, we read about *miaino* in these verses:

"To the pure, all things are pure; but to those who are defiled (miaino) and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their mind and their conscience are defiled (miaino)."
(Titus 1:15)

"See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled (miaino)." (Hebrews 12:15)

"Yet in the same way these men, also by dreaming (enupniazomai),¹⁷⁵ defile (miaino) the flesh, and reject authority, and revile angelic majesties." (Jude 1:8)

Εκστρεφο (Ekstrepho)¹⁷⁶

Coming from two root words meaning *to turn* and *out*, *ekstrepho* means *to turn inside out, to invert, to pervert, to change for the worst, to corrupt*.

As is true of all sins, lust is contagious. Like a deadly virus that comes from breathing or conspiring together, the deadly sin of lust perverts the minds, hearts, and bodies of those with whom we share our lust. However, it is not usually mutual. It is more often one person who is obsessed with lust who is a perpetrator *grooming* another person

to get them to do what they want.¹⁷⁷ This grooming is a direct attempt to cross the healthy boundaries and lower the moral standards of the groomed person so that they will join them in a perverted (*ekstrepho*) form of sexual activities.

It is obvious that if the soil of a discipleship relationship, small group, congregation or friendship circle is toxic with the self-centered focus on perverted sexual activity, then the people who become a part of those relationships will be immersed in the toxic soil of a toxic discipleship and will develop the deadly sin of lust.

I knew a pastor who was very successful until he was caught kissing his secretary. As the conference leaders investigated this man, it was discovered that he had a multi-year addiction to sex which included multiple adulteries and other *ekstrepho*. When confronted, he lied, which is part of any addiction. This denial of sin is why we need to pray that the Holy Spirit will break through the lies, denials, deceptions, seductions, contaminations, perversions, and help us — and any person caught in the web of sin — come to an honest confession to Almighty God and ask for His help to stop sinning and turn our life around to serve God.

In the Scriptures, this contaminating effect of lust is found in this verse:

*“Warn a divisive person once, and then warn them a second time. After that, have nothing to do with them. You may be sure that such people are warped (*ekstrepho*) and sinful; they are self-condemned.” (Titus 3:11)*

Επιθυμία (*Epithumia*)¹⁷⁸

Coming from a root word meaning *passion*, *epithumia* means to *lust after, covet, to seek things forbidden, to have a desire for, to long for*.

As we have learned from these Greek words the process of becoming fully enflamed with the deadly sin of lust, we now come to

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the word describing a fully developed lust in Scripture. It is interesting that the root of the word connotes not so much a sexual passion as a consuming passion, a consuming desire, a *willingness to surrender everything else* in order to satisfy this specific *passion* of the moment. Though we know that adultery is wrong, destructive, and a betrayal of trust and commitment, lust convinces us that it is not all those things *in this instance*. Though we know that pornography and prostitution dehumanizes us and sins against our own body by greatly harming our own sexual pleasure long-term, our lust nevertheless convinces us that *in this moment* the fact that it will harm us is not true and instead promises great pleasure. And when we are planted in the toxic soil of willful ignorance, we reject what we *know to be true*.

C.S. Lewis writes on this in his short essay “*The Right To Happiness*.”¹⁷⁹ The core of his argument relates directly to the deadly sin of lust. He states: “If we establish a ‘right to (sexual) happiness’ which supersedes all the ordinary rules of behavior, we do so not because of what our passion shows itself to be in experience, but because of what it professes to be while we are in the grip of it. Hence, while the bad behavior is real and works miseries and degradations, the happiness which was the object of the behavior turns out again and again to be illusory.”

Another component in the word *epithumia* is that it is a desire for something forbidden. Like the forbidden fruit in the garden that suddenly, in the moment, became exceedingly beautiful and desirable, any forbidden sexual desire is based on an additional *moral insanity*, a willful ignorance.

In a church where the toxic soil nourishes the ideas that “*Everyone sins*” and “*We’re only human,*” and “*Most people have affairs,*” and “*You don’t know what you are missing,*” or any such rationalizing temptations, then we would expect to see an increasing outbreak of lust. The toxic discipleship in that congregation will excuse those who lose their

moral footing and support one another in justifying their falls. Lust is a deeply deadly, spiritual, social, physical, and mental sin.

Throughout Scripture, we see *epithumia* warnings like these:

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully (epithumia) has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” (Matthew 5:27-28)

“What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust (epithumia), except the law had said, ‘Thou shalt not covet.’” (Romans 7:7)

“Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved (epithumia).” (1 Corinthians 10:6)

“For the flesh sets its desire (epithumia) against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please.” (Galatians 5:17)

“You lust (epithumia) and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask.” (James 4:2)

MISUSE OF GIFTS

It is difficult to imagine a spiritual gift that lust would not pervert. The primary reason is not just the dehumanizing and sexualizing of others, but the *deception* and *contagion* not easily recognized but nevertheless inherent within all lust. Substituting healthy community with toxic soil would be to say that all relationships have become deadly: from destructive friendships throughout the congregation, to toxic discipleship in leadership development, to predatory grooming

in counseling.

But why would lust be seen then as the number five most deadly sin? Why would Dante put it at only the second level of hell? Is it that it is so pervasive that we have a mutual modulating of its toxic impact? Or are we more willing to excuse those whose sin is similar to our own? Are we, as Jesus warned us, more inclined to notice the speck of immorality in the life of another while ignoring the beam of lust in our own?¹⁸⁰

This dual danger of accusing and excusing lust in ourselves and others is part of the problem in identifying and protecting ourselves from this toxic soil. As we explore each of the misuses of our spiritual gifts, take notice of this complex duality.

GIFT of COUNSEL

As noted in the misuse of the gift of counsel with the other deadly sins, the assumed trustworthiness of the counselor puts a client or parishioner in a place of unusual susceptibility. Although this vulnerability can develop both ways, as a client or parishioner can also seduce and deceive a counselor, the training that pastoral and professional counselors receive helps them be on guard from that vulnerability as well as helps them identify the grooming that might be attempted.¹⁸¹ However, many persons with the gift of counseling volunteer and serve in various ways in churches without receiving the training they need to identify deception, seduction or other toxic behaviors.

In the course titled *Confronting Risky Temptations in Professional Practice*, Drs. Koocher and Keith-Spiegel identify a variety of temptations.¹⁸² In the sections on sexual temptations precipitated by the counselor or the client (or parishioner), they identify three areas of concern: touch, sexual attraction by the counselor, and sexual attraction by the client (or parishioner).

Touch: “Touch is an intensely intimate, complex mode of communication that can convey support, consolation, empathy, caring, and sincere concern. Yet, touch has several faces. It can also signal sexuality, anxiety, aggression, and even fear. The relationship between the toucher and the one being touched, and how each party experiences the other’s touch, can create complicated ethical dilemmas between client and therapist. The context in which touching occurs is also a significant factor in deciding its appropriateness or lack thereof.”

Sexual Attraction by the Counselor: “As with most typical human courtship rituals, sexual relationships between therapists and their clients often reveal similar progressive phases — feelings of attraction, mild flirtation, some friendly touching on “safe” body areas, a cup of coffee at the cafe across the street from the office, a switch in the client’s schedule to the last appointment of the day, hanging around afterward to talk about things in general, and hugging good-bye. Any sexual act often seems the culmination of a process occurring over time, starting with vague, uneasy feelings of excitement, but progressing in tidy, rationalized steps.”

In my own training as a pastoral counselor, the red flag I’ve found most helpful to identify is beginning to look forward to a counseling appointment with a specific person. If so, then a referral is made to another counselor to protect both myself and the parishioner from the deadly progression of lust.

Sexual Attraction by the Client/Parishioner: “At first blush, client sexual attraction to therapists does not seem to belong in a high-risk category. However, as we shall illustrate, unless such client feelings are handled carefully, the result can be damaging to all concerned. That clients would be sexually attracted to their therapists comes as no surprise, given the emotionally intimate nature of counseling and psychotherapy.... Rather than use the term *transference*, Parish and Eagle prefer the term *attachment* which manifests itself in clients

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perceiving therapists as emotionally responsive, admirable, a secure base, unique, and irreplaceable. Such powerful feelings can readily cause love — or something like it — to surface.”

As can be seen in each of these areas where temptation presents itself, a professional, pastoral, or volunteer counselor within the grip of the deadly sin of lust is dangerous. In fact, it could be said that a trained counselor is the most dangerous because of their misuse of their training to manipulate, groom, and control others for their own pleasure — especially a sexual pleasure that is based on lust, which, by definition, cares nothing for the impact their sin has on the wellbeing of others.

GIFT of MISSIONS

As is the case in the many other opportunities we have discussed for counselors to please themselves at the expense of others, the same is true for those who misuse their gift of missions. Often arriving at their place of service with a financial and educational advantage, the deadly sin of lust has a playground for selfish ambition within a mission field. This toxic soil of putting themselves in the place of God and selfishly using others for sexual pleasure and willfully, arrogantly deceiving others, these behaviors produce a church that is as toxic in its own discipleship as is the deadly sin it nourishes across generations of both missionaries and indigenous believers.

Similarly, cultural differences in such places as Africa where sin can be seen more as a transgression against society than against God, anything that is toxic to the community as a whole has more weight placed on it.¹⁸³ Thus, the deadly sin of wrath which destroys the unity and peace of a community can be seen as more dangerous than the deadly sin of lust. As it has been said, a Ministerial Education and Guidance Board in the United States sends a pastor to counseling for an episode of anger and removes a person from ministry for a sexual

transgression, but the same disciplinary board in Africa would send a pastor to counseling for a sexual transgression and remove a person from ministry who raged at another person.

GIFT of HOSPITALITY

The temptation to use sexual attraction as a way of making a person feel wanted is far more common than we might think. Thinking there is no danger in using flirting to attract new members into a church, this rationalization was taken to extremes by the cultic *Children of God* who called it “*Flirty Fishing*.” The result was the creation of a toxic soil that destroyed not only many lives but also the cult itself.¹⁸⁴ This occurred when this toxic church started using the church women for the sex trade: “The financial benefit of *Flirty Fishing* soon led to a further degeneration of the practice from mere flirting to loving sexually to escort services... in which female cult members would work as regular call girls either freelance or for escort agencies and merely witness...to their clients when the occasion offered itself.”¹⁸⁵

But it doesn’t take going to this extreme for lust to compel a person with the gift of hospitality to misuse it in their church ministry. Similar to the danger of having sexual predators in small groups and singles ministries,¹⁸⁶ the friendly, engaging greeter can also cultivate this toxic soil and use sexual charm with people in the church for the fulfillment of their lust.

GIFT of LEADERSHIP

Attraction to power has often been linked to sexual attraction.¹⁸⁷ Thus, a person with the God-given responsibility and gifting of leadership will have more opportunity than is normal to use their position and power for sexual pleasure. Though this in itself is a problem and can undo a person who is not addicted to sex or obsessed with the deadly sin of lust, it is not difficult to see how a person caught

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up in that deadly sin could and would misuse their position and gifting for selfish sexual pleasure.

The movie *Bombshell*, based on the true story of Roger Ailes who used his leadership position at Fox News for sexual abuse of his employees,¹⁸⁸ is only one example in a long line of leaders whose lust destroyed not only the lives of others, but their own lives as well. From the biblical examples of David and Bathsheba,¹⁸⁹ his son Amnon and daughter Tamar,¹⁹⁰ Samson and Delilah,¹⁹¹ and countless leaders throughout history up until today, we are not lacking devastating examples.

But as we discussed regarding the toxic use of sexual flirting to attract new members, the presence of the deadly sin of lust in the leaders of a congregation creates a toxic soil that turns many normal preaching, teaching, and discipling practices into a perverted form of Christian ministry and life. The necessity of accountability and stopping even the smallest examples of *conduct unbecoming of a minister* is why a connectional church with overseeing superintendents and bishops is far more likely to be healthy than an independent ministry without accountability for its leaders to their overseeing supervisors.¹⁹² However, even with supervision, the accusing and excusing toxic soil of a congregation caught up in the deadly sin of lust can expand to a conference and a denomination, as we have seen in the horrifying sexual abuse cases that have come to light after decades of being covered.

GIFT of PROCLAMATION

When I was a homiletics student, our professor made the statement, “If you want to know a preacher’s sins and temptations, see how often he or she preaches on what topics.”¹⁹³ Though the professor was trying to help us understand why we should preach expositionally rather than topically, his point has stayed with me and

enlightens our study as we identify our own fascinations, obsessions, and temptations. The person gifted with proclaiming the Word of God who is captured by lust will naturally gravitate toward giving sermons that speak more to themselves than to others. They will deliver these sermons with a passion that reveals their obsession, or they will see the speck in their parishioners' lives due to the beam in their own. This "projection" of what we don't like about ourselves onto the lives of others is an easy and common deception since our own deadly sin jades our view of humanity.

In a different way, it is also a symptom of this deadly sin of lust when a preacher never addresses immorality, adultery, pornography or sexual trafficking. Avoiding the thoughts that will go through both the congregants' minds as well as through their own mind, proclaimers can justify it as a positive thing to not bring up such sordid images. There is some truth in that, but a fine line exists between avoiding dangerous topics in order to help others and avoiding dangerous topics in order to not make anyone uncomfortable, including oneself. The language, style, comfort of the proclaimer, and even the age of the preacher all matter in such a moment. By taking and keeping off our mask and being vulnerable ourselves, the proclaimer can confront all sins and our need for God's forgiveness in humble obedience to God's Word.

GIFT of WORSHIP

Sensuality has always been a problem for worship leaders. From the *sacred dance before the altar* by David wearing only his linen ephod,¹⁹⁴ to the interpretive, liturgical praise dances of young women, to the twirling banners of women in long dresses, to the beautiful and handsome singers moving to the worship music, to the majestic organs and harmonies and choirs that raise the hair on the back of our necks, worship has always been experienced by our senses.

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However, it is easy to see that this normal experience of having our senses heightened in worship can easily be perverted by a person caught up in lust. This is true not only for those who lead worship and step over the line in their dress or movements, but also for those who participate or even sit back and watch worship leaders with impure thoughts. As was already discussed, appreciating beauty is not lust. But even at the altar of God, a lustful person can take anything they see, hear, feel, smell, or touch and twist it into their mind's imagination as a sexualized lust.

The fact that a worship leader can create an experience that is overly eroticized with a toxic danger is true because worship is the primary moment when most of us connect with God. Surrounded by others who also know and love Him, the music, art, silence, and movements of other worshippers helps us create a healthy connection with Him as well. But when worship is highjacked by lust, then the very soil meant to develop the fruit of the Spirit becomes toxic and the poison of worshipping the self in a selfish ambition for our own pleasure develops.

REFLECTION/DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

In each chapter these questions are divided into those by which we evaluate ourselves and those by which we evaluate our church. Both can be answered individually or discussed in a group.

Self-Evaluation:

1. When God created humanity as male and female and commanded us to be fruitful and multiply,¹⁹⁵ it is clear that sexual pleasure was part of His plan. Since we were created for relational and sexual love, it is important that we not throw out the proverbial baby with the bath water by extinguishing our sexuality. How do you keep your sexual desires healthy

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while not becoming consumed with *lust*? How do you focus on marital sex such that it is more about your partner's pleasure than your own? How do you keep your thoughts pure and committed when making love with your spouse?

2. How do you protect yourself from the people who want to use your sexual pleasure for their financial gain by selling you to the creators of pornography or sexualized video games? How do you keep sexual toxicity from polluting your family? How do you protect the minds of your developing children?
3. How do you keep your sexuality from becoming the focal point of your life?
4. The perversion of sexual pleasure as intended by God is the very definition of *lust*. It is deceptive, seductive, contagious, and eventually all-consuming. When *lust* has gotten a foothold in your life or the life of someone you love, the saving work of Jesus Christ requires the same as with any sin, whether considered *deadly* or not: 1. *Confession*: say the truth about everything; 2. *Receive forgiveness* by God and by ourselves so that we are no longer defined by our sin, either by God or by ourselves; 3. *Repentance*, meaning to turn away from *lust* and sin and turn toward healthy sexual lives by all the choices we make; and 4. *Sanctification*, meaning to turn our entire lives, not just our sexual lives, over to God to make us full of His holy love. Have you experienced this truthful confession and life-changing forgiveness and are you becoming increasingly transformed, day by day, into God's loving child? If the answer is yes, then how are you helping others experience this freedom in Christ? If not, then who could you talk to who

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could help you take the first step in experiencing this life-giving freedom from the *deadly sin of lust*?

Church Evaluation

1. In a world that is sexually toxic, it is easy to bring that contamination into our homes and churches. How do you decide what is toxic to you and keep it out of your home and church? How do you protect yourself and the congregation from the people who want to use your sexual pleasure for their financial gain by selling you to the creators of pornography or sexualized video games? How do you protect the minds of your children and youth? And how do you keep sexual toxicity from polluting your church?
2. The nature of sexual pleasure as God created us to experience it is to bring that unique bonding to marriage that not only fulfills our desire for intimacy and fruitful procreation but is also celibate from all other sexual relationships to be faithful to the marriage. For those who are single, it is to focus one's entire life and energy on service to God and to be bonded only to Him. Both choices are honored within Scripture: for those who are married and those who are single, for those who are parents and those who are celibate. This demonstrates that true, mature spirituality does not center on nor is it defined by our sexuality. How do you keep sexuality from becoming the focal point of your church's definition of our lives as Christians instead of the message of the Gospel?
3. As noted above, the saving work of Jesus Christ is the same whatever the *deadly sin* may be. As a disciple of Jesus Christ, how do you remove the *toxic soil* that produces *lust*? The biblical

model is this: 1. *Confession*: say the truth about everything; 2. *Receive forgiveness* by God and by ourselves so that we are no longer defined by our sin either by God or by ourselves;¹⁹⁶ 3. *Repentance*, meaning to turn away from *lust* and sin and turn toward healthy sexual lives by all the choices we make; and 4. *Sanctification*, meaning to turn our entire lives, not just our sexual lives, over to God to make us full of His holy love. As a person who is discipling others, do you ask questions such as these: Have you experienced this truthful confession and life-changing forgiveness and are you becoming increasingly transformed, day by day, into God's loving child? If the answer is yes, then how are you helping others experience this freedom in Christ? If not, then who could you talk to who could help you take the first step in experiencing this life-giving freedom from the *deadly sin of lust*?

CHAPTER 7

DEADLY SIN OF GLUTTONY

“Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things.”

— Philippians 3:19

“A glutton is one who raids the ice box in search of a cure for spiritual malnutrition.”

— Frederick Buechner

During my undergraduate degree in psychology, I learned that to reward one’s self for doing something hard was an important part of creating a positive disposition toward accomplishment.¹⁹⁷ The only problem was that my chosen method for rewarding myself was to consume something sweet: a Dr. Pepper, a Snickers, an extra piece of dessert. As you can imagine, this *operant conditioning* worked, and I became a high achiever, with achievement being number one in my Strength Finder¹⁹⁸ scores. It also gave me borderline diabetes and a gluttonous approach toward food.

I would like to think that my eating disorder was not like that of my anorexic friends, but for both of us, food had become something different than pleasurable sustenance. It had become an addiction. And, like all addictions, my brain had become broken such that if I had *one shot of sugar*, my brain's frontal lobe, where decisions are made, was taken off-line exactly like someone addicted to alcohol, gambling, pornography, drugs, anger, or wealth.¹⁹⁹ Thus, in psychological and physical terms, the deadly sin of gluttony is an addiction.

However, sin is never limited to its psychological and physical components. Sin is a replacement of the worship of God with the toxic worship of self. The resulting selfishness from indulging in sin is willing to sacrifice the mind, body, and soul in service to selfish ambition.²⁰⁰ And like anything we worship, the deadly sin of gluttony insistently permeates our lives so that we are obsessed not only with food but also with anything that serves us.

Gluttony has been defined this way, both in social justice and theological terms, by Ryan Andrews: "Gluttony is the excessive consumption that deprives another being of a life-giving necessity. Gluttons devour more, leaving others with less. It's immoderation. Beyond consumption, gluttony describes *worship of food* and deriving excessive pleasure from it."²⁰¹ This acknowledgment of the dual damage of gluttony is helpful in understanding why it is a deadly sin. Rooted in the toxic soil of the worship of self, gluttony puts our pleasure before others' needs in a primitive form of selfish ambition. The obsession with my *excessive pleasure* from food not only sacrifices my own health but also the health of the global community of which I am a part.

Therefore, gluttony is a sin against God as we *worship another "god,"* against my own *body* as I destroy its health, and against the *community* as I take more than my needed sustenance and thus deprive others of their equally important needs.

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At its simplest level, gluttony exposes our expectation that food will provide us with fulfillment and purpose, that it will comfort and make us feel better, reward us and provide joy in our lives. Our inevitable disappointment when this doesn't happen is the consequence of placing anything or anyone in the place of God. Created to revolve around God in His divine solar system, we are still surprised when food, wealth, or even family — if placed at the center of our universe — is not able to hold our spiritual solar system together. Additionally, the pressure we put on whatever counterfeit sun we place at our center makes it unable to withstand the centrifugal forces that continually work to pull apart the system. Though this idea of a divine solar system uses a different analogy than that of soil, it is another way of thinking about our exploration of how healthy soil produces and nurtures our Christian life while toxic soil contaminates our wholistic love and worship of God with our own selfish, self-centered lives.

Identifying the toxic discipleship that creates gluttony is not difficult. Any church that puts the individual in first place, catering to the whims and demands of individuals rather than keeping God first by worshipping and serving Him and caring for others will create gluttonous disciples. Similarly, any church that puts the church institution in first place caters to the soulless demands of an organization rather than keeping the church on the mission given to us by God. Such a toxic church will use the time and resources meant to accomplish God's mission for its own benefit, with the niceties and spiritual gluttony of *church first* rather than God and His saving work first. Such a toxic church is often contaminated by an institutional pride that adulterates its ministries creating toxic disciples who serve their individual church in prideful superiority toward other Christians and their churches.

What is perhaps confusing about sin is that it can define success

in a toxic church as well as in the world. To use another analogy in this time of a global pandemic, in a world where the worship of self and selfish ambition are the two sides of one pathogen, then anything that is compatible with the DNA of such a virus will flourish, until of course it kills the life of the host. That is perhaps the reason that sin finds connecting points in a toxic church or community, and why a church can flourish momentarily as it appeals to the pride, greed, envy, and gluttony waiting to be called upon for use. As a pastor, I witnessed a prideful pastoral team in our city create a church that it considered *better* than other churches, causing the individual parishioners to then have a superior attitude toward other Christians. That superiority can come in many forms as toxic disciples believe they are a wealthier church, are a more educated congregation, offer a better worship experience, exhibit more powerful spiritual gifts, have a better denomination or organization, and the list goes on to elevate almost any distinctive that can be made. The toxic appeal to prideful superiority doesn't just create the deadly sin of pride, but of gluttony as well, which says: "I'm not satisfied until I have more . . . (than anyone else)."

BIBLICAL EXPLANATIONS

A study of the deadly sin of gluttony in Scripture reveals quickly that the spiritual concern is not only, or even primarily, a concern about food. As we've seen, this is only a part of the toxic soil as the body and its desires replace God and His will. To be a *glutton for power* or *fame* or *prestige*, or a host of other desires that we *cannot get enough of* reveals the deadly sin of gluttony as coming from a pervasive toxin.

As we've seen from studying the deadly sin of lust, one word focuses directly on food: *Gaster* (*Gaster*), from which we get the culinary term *gastronomic*, which can be applied to anything from simply cooking to gourmet cuisine. *Gaster* is also the root for the

medical term *gastrointestinal*, which describes the care of the digestive system. But Scripture has far more to say about this than just how and how much we eat.

Several words inform us: the Greek Γάστερ (*Gaster*) and Αδοκιμος (*Adokimos*), the Hebrew word *Zalzal*, and the Greek Εξουσιάζω (*Exousiazō*).

Γάστερ (*Gaster*)²⁰²

As we've seen, this primary word means *belly, stomach, womb, a glutton, a gormandizer, a man who is (as it were) all stomach*; a person who is obsessed in satisfying his or her physical pleasure of food.

There is a fine line between a *foodie*²⁰³ and a glutton. The distinction is made that a foodie is more discriminating than a glutton. But as in all addictions and sins, denial is a part of the problem. That is why *confession* — telling the truth — is the first step in both treating an addiction and receiving forgiveness and cleansing from sin. But just as lust takes something beautiful — sexual intimacy — and obsesses on it to the point of making it ugly, so the pleasure of food becomes gluttony when obsession takes on a sense of worship or devotion. It is not a worship of food per se, but rather a worship of our own bodily pleasure received from the consumption of food.

In addition to this focus on pleasure, the obsession on food can also come from anxiety, depression, loneliness or other emotional emptiness, which causes us to try to fill the soul by filling the stomach. Though this has psychological components, sin goes deeper into the root toxins of our lives and relates directly to our relationship with God and with others. As seen on the diagram of the tree planted in toxic soil, the toxins begin with our intended relationship with God being poisoned; and then our relationship with others become noxious.

“One of Crete’s own prophets has said it: “Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons (gaster).” (Titus 1:12)

Αδοκιμος (Adokimos)²⁰⁴

Coming from the negation of the root word meaning *accepted, pleasing, acceptable*, *adokimos* means *unacceptable, spurious, unfit, reprobate* and *not standing the test*.

As seen in one of the verses cited below from the book of Hebrews, the contrast between land that produces a fruitful harvest and land that produces thorns and thistles, referring to the fall²⁰⁵, is *adokimos*. Thus, the toxic soil of a fallen world takes what God intended and uses it for worthless, reprobate purposes. It is therefore in danger of the curse of sin and its deadly destruction. This refers not only to the fruit of Eden being intended to nourish us as a gift from our Creator, but it also reveals the deadly consequences of disobeying God, the end result of developing the deadly sin of gluttony.

It is easy to see that anything that *does not stand the test* of healthy nourishment of the body, mind and soul is *adokimos*. It can be a misuse of food, but also a misuse of anything God gives us for our flourishing — anything we use for *spurious* or illegitimate purposes. *Adokimos* occurs when the body is master of the mind and soul rather than being the servant of both. When this occurs, we *fail the test*.

Several examples of this reality are found in God's Word:

"But land that produces thorns and thistles is worthless (adokimos) and is in danger of being cursed. In the end it will be burned." (Hebrews 6:8)

"Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air. No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified (adokimos) for the prize." (1 Corinthians 9:26-27)

"Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test (adokimos)?

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And I trust that you will discover that we have not failed the test (adokimos).” (2 Corinthians 13:5-6)

“They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate (adokimos).” (Titus 1:16)

Zalzal²⁰⁶

The root Hebrew word means *worthless, vile, gluttonous, riotous eaters, and riotous*.

Taking the understanding of *adokimos* to the next level, *zalzal* implies a *riotous, rebellious, disorderly* approach to life that is willfully ignorant of how food is meant to be eaten or how the sharing of foodstuff is meant to be accomplished. The toxic soil of a consumeristic and individualistic culture that cares little for others within our own community, let alone the poor throughout the world who don't have the food they need, is *zalzal*. This is made all the more difficult as the standard of living in nations like the United States becomes normalized and justified, regardless of what Scripture teaches us about our responsibility to the poor.²⁰⁷ The fact that this inequity is of little concern represents the deadly nature of the sin of gluttony.

In denominations such as my own, a movement now exists to take the largest and wealthiest churches out of their geographic conferences where their resources have helped smaller churches for decades and instead put them together in their own conference. Many reasons are given for this, including that these largest churches and staffs have more in common with one another and can be of more support to one another. But this isolation with similar large churches and away from dissimilar smaller ones will present other problems, including the danger that it will strengthen the temptation to *zalzal* their resources for their own consumption.²⁰⁸

Here is the specific counsel of Scripture:

“And they shall say unto the elders of his city, this our son is stubborn and rebellious, he will not obey our voice; he is a glutton (zalzal) and a drunkard.” (Deuteronomy 21:20)

“Be not among winebibbers; among riotous eaters of flesh: For the drunkard and the glutton (zalzal) shall come to poverty: and drowsiness shall clothe a man with rags.” (Proverbs 23:20-21)

“Whoso keeps the law is a wise son: but he that is a companion of riotous (zalzal) men shames his father.” (Proverbs 28:7)

“Therefore this is what the LORD says: ‘If you repent, I will restore you that you may serve me; if you utter worthy, not worthless (zalzal), words, you will be my spokesman. Let this people turn to you, but you must not turn to them.’” (Jeremiah 15:19)

Εξουσιάζω (Exousiazō)²⁰⁹

Coming from the root word meaning *power, authority, liberty to choose*, with *exousiazō* meaning *to have power, authority, master over, specifically to have mastery over one’s body*.

As is true of all sin, the deceit begins with ourselves. We think we are choosing, but it is the sin that has *exousiazō*. We use the modern word *addiction* to describe the moment when the brain “breaks” and the choice is no longer *ours*, but the *reptilian* or *primitive* brain deep within that gets what it wants with no regard for others.²¹⁰ As I mentioned earlier, the parts of the brain that truly have the *power* to choose, with responsibility to God and for others in how we choose, these are what “get broken” in the addicted brain. Persons who are fighting for recovery from an addiction often speak as though they are two persons, the person seeking sobriety and the *addict*. Or as F.

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Scott Fitzgerald explains, “First you take a drink, then the drink takes a drink, then the drink takes you.”²¹¹

This growth in sin, as we’ve seen with all the deadly sins, takes us to the moment when, as Paul explains in his own life, “I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me.”²¹²

When we lose the authority or mastery over our own body and the *desires of the body* are making the decisions, then deadly consequences occur. In the case of gluttony, we destroy body and soul as we become a slave to sin. The further consequence is that we then misuse our gifts and create toxic soil in the family, church, and community that caters to selfish desires rather than to the call of God.

The development of the deadly sin of gluttony proceeds through these categories of reprobate, rebellious, riotous and finally reptilian lives that not only degrade ourselves before God and others, but also enslave ourselves into a deadly life that gives our bodies as *deadly sacrifices* rather than living ones. Paul states it clearly in Romans 12:1-2: “*Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.* ² *Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.*”

MISUSE OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS

As we’ve seen with the other deadly sins growing from toxic soil, it is the misuse of God’s gifts that contaminates good soil. This is true of all the misused gifts as they pervert the intended will of God. When a person places a false “god” first and worships not the living God and does not present themselves as a living sacrifice, which is true and

proper worship, then the resultant life is one of self-worship, selfish ambition, and willful ignorance. This toxicity within them then permeates all aspects of their ministry to family, church and culture. That toxic discipleship then creates toxic disciples. These are the ways gluttony harms us and the church.

GIFT of COUNSEL

When my wife Cheryl and I were in our internship with the Mental Health Department for the City of Chicago, we were given many wise words of counsel. One of those came from a licensed therapist who explained how important it is to be a healthy person ourselves in order to provide wise and healthy counsel. The therapist said something like, “Your own response to another person is your Geiger-counter measuring the toxicity they are radiating. However,” he went on to say, “if you yourself are toxic in some way, then your measurement of anyone else will be off because you are contaminating the reading.” He then explained that part of becoming a trained counselor is to look closely, own completely, and seek healing for any toxicity within ourselves. This is why licensed therapists and pastoral counselors not only go to see a counselor during their training, but continue to do so throughout their life for supervision or consultation as well.

Thus, providing wisdom about how to live a life pleasing to God is possible only as a person with the spiritual gift of counsel has a closely-examined and daily-implemented practice of living a holy life.²¹³ One of the spiritual disciplines in holy living is fasting. Fasting from anything that has taken over our lives is important, and fasting from food is helpful in other areas of life. Due to the nature of food as both a healthy nutrient and a pleasurable experience, Christians have noted that we cannot just completely abstain from food like we can from other addictions, but we can exert authority over the body and face the temptation to make food or, more accurately, our stomach

and appetites our god.

Therefore, it doesn't take much imagination to recognize that a person who misuses their counseling gift by being an example of a gluttonous life can easily become a person whose very counsel harms their clients and parishioners in that same way or in other areas where moderation is required but ignored. Rather than seeing the danger of their gluttonous lives, such a compromised counselor's eyes have been contaminated in ways that cause them to participate in, excuse or even approve of the deadly sin of gluttony.

GIFT of MISSIONS

Due mostly to the exchange rate between United States-supported missionaries and local economic realities, missionaries often live at a higher standard of living than the people they came to serve. However, imagine taking this to the next level and what the deadly sin of gluttony would do in a person with the gift of missions. Focusing on the self and worshipping their own desires, such a missionary could take food and other resources away from indigenous people while over-indulging their own physical appetites in a way that could not only betray the gospel but also destroy their own ministry.

I actually found this to be true when invited as a visiting professor to teach on the mission field. Wanting to provide hospitality and to show honor, these dear people would take what would be days of income to provide a feast. Some of that incentive to extravagantly provide for a guest comes from various cultural practices and values, but some, perhaps, comes from former missionaries who lived a life of gluttony so that this practice became a sacrificial expectation *required* of the indigenous leaders. This creates a toxic discipleship in these missions, people, and churches so formed.

GIFT of HOSPITALITY

Hospitality almost always involves a celebratory feasting of some sort. These events of offering a shared pleasure in order to express our unity, identity, and mutual love for one another are called *Feast Days* within Scripture.²¹⁴ Just as we enjoy a shared Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Easter family meal, feasting is a wonderful way to express our belonging. But several dangers must be navigated. The first is leaving out some people, so we must make sure that everyone is invited to the feast. This is not a day of exclusion but of inclusion. The second is treating some people better than others, so we must make sure that everything is shared. This was a problem in the Corinthian church where divisions were exposed not only by their seating, but also by some people coming with an over-abundance of food and drink that they did not share with others who had less.²¹⁵ The third danger is in putting the physical pleasure of eating and drinking before the spiritual purpose of fellowship and giving thanks to God for His abundant provision, and thus replacing the worship of God with the worship of the body.

As a young pastor, I received complaints from some parishioners who expressed their concerns about church potlucks — that they were not healthy and people overate. Although I was naïve and saw these complaints mostly as a cultural/class superiority and disapproval of the traditional Methodist practice of having church potlucks, I have grown over the years to understand the importance of modeling good eating habits just as in modeling abstinence from alcohol. One way we solved this was to have the church provide a nutritious main dish, and later we hired a cook to prepare a nutritious meal for everyone. We transformed the *potluck*, but we did not remove the fellowship of *feasting* from the life of the church.

However, imagine a glutton in charge of the church or family feasts. How would their self-deception and mistaken emphasis on

food and drink create a toxic event that didn't really care if there were divisions or over-consumption or keeping God first? This would create a toxic replacement of God-given celebrations of unity and identity with events that would further divide, isolate, and impoverish those most in need.

GIFT of LEADERSHIP

Leaders lead. This simple truth makes it clear that any misuse of position, authority or responsibility for gluttonous personal pleasure and selfish gain creates a toxic family, church, community, and nation.

In Isaac Asimov's *Foundation* science fiction series,²¹⁶ he imagines a galactic empire in which the leaders have created policies that all benefit the home planet of Trantor. Based on the analysis presented in *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*,²¹⁷ Asimov notes that when all the resources of an empire are used for the benefit of the capital, then this deadly, gluttonous arrangement undermines not only equity and justice, but also destroys people's lives when a small privileged few live in opulence in the capital while most of the nation's citizens subsist in poverty. This same scenario is more recently and graphically seen in Suzanne Collins' *Hunger Games*.²¹⁸ These examples illustrate how the toxic soil of this deadly sin of gluttony destroys lives, leaders, and nations, let alone parishioners, pastors, and churches.

To a lesser extent, leadership perks which take the resources of churches to benefit a select group of leaders also create a toxicity that permeates a church, conference, or denomination. In my years of ministry, I observed the destruction of a conference and loss of churches caused by a gluttony for power in a person who wanted to be superintendent but did not have the gift of leadership. It took years for the full extent of his damage to be realized as he removed pastors and leaders who would have voted against him, but his misuse of his gift and position eventually destroyed him morally, destroyed his

marriage, and destroyed the conference until there was only a fraction of churches left. Part of the reason for this tragic demise was that not only did his toxicity create a toxic conference, but true leaders left the conference and denomination to find health elsewhere.

Toxic leadership development and toxic discipleship are virtually guaranteed to produce toxic leaders. These unhealthy leaders' influence and power becomes increasingly evident in toxic churches as those churches' values and interpersonal dynamics deteriorate into toxic soil which causes the healthy clergy and lay leaders to leave in search of a healthy church.

GIFT of PROCLAMATION

Proclamation is a two-person process that involves the person speaking and the person listening. Over the years as I've spoken thousands of times, I discovered that both speakers and listeners matter in this process if a true and healthy message is to be proclaimed. As pastors, we build trust over time and people listen with hearts and minds that become more open and receptive as trust is built. As superintendents, we often come into a congregation with only a beginning level of trust placed in us accompanied by only *modest trust* or even *distrust* in the conference that sent us. Thus, our proclamation is as much a time for a *testing of the waters* as it is an experience with God. But in spite of this complexity, it is not difficult for a congregation to discern the motives of the speaker, especially if there is a deadly sin of gluttony that has captured them. From the apparent spiritual and physical health of the proclaimer to the attitudes of humility or arrogance they communicate, to the servant's heart or autocratic expectations they display, all of these are most often quickly obvious. It is true that a deceptive person who is putting on a mask may confuse the congregation for a time, but spiritual health becomes known far more quickly than anyone is even consciously aware as the Holy Spirit

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reveals the truth about a person. Thus, if that person is enslaved by the deadly sin of gluttony, their toxicity becomes palpable long before they sit to eat a meal or take a drink, and it is often confirmed in that moment for those with the spiritual gift of discernment as well.

The only exception is if the congregation has become used to this sin due to its own toxic soil and so no longer smells or notices it. Those who aspire to the office of proclaimer in a congregation or a church that follows a gluttonous preacher will become like them. As people absorb more by what is lived than by what is taught, toxic discipleship becomes the means by which the deadly sin of gluttony becomes virtually inescapable in this toxic soil.

GIFT of WORSHIP

A glutton for fame, prestige, attention, admiration or recognition will undermine a worship leader's ability to lead a healthy worship team. From taking praise that belongs to God to taking credit that belongs to someone else to expressing superiority in talent, ability, and worth, a gluttonous person will misuse their gift and destroy the unity and humility necessary for healthy worship.

As has been seen with the other deadly sins, the worship of self and selfish ambition make up the primary toxic soil that not only grows a gluttonous worship leader but also reproduces the deadly sin of gluttony in others. One of the overarching dangers of this gift is how public it is. That makes it difficult to hide one's true motives but, conversely, easier to hide behind a false persona. This paradoxical reality of all the public gifts is why they are more dangerous when such sins as gluttony, pride, envy, and lust are present. People often feel they actually know public figures personally when there is really little to no substance or mutuality to the "relationship." This deceptive feeling of intimacy can also be misused just as we saw done by a person in the more powerful position if they have the deadly sin of lust.

REFLECTION/DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

In each chapter, these questions are divided into those by which we evaluate ourselves and those by which we evaluate our church. Both can be answered individually or discussed in a group.

Self-Evaluation:

1. As I explained at the beginning of this chapter, my decision to reward myself for hard work with food created an unhealthy mindset which became a *toxic soil* that grew the *deadly sin of gluttony*. I still find that I can become so focused on my appetite for what I am eating that I can put the people who share my table in second place. I have worked on this for years and find that prayer helps me keep my focus off of myself and on God and others. Fasting has also helped break the power of *gluttony* and control my appetite. How have you protected yourself from the temptation or practice of *gluttony*? When you fall, how do you bring health back into your life? How do you keep your focus on God and others rather than on your own appetites for food and drink? How do you help those you know who are more interested in what they eat or drink than in you when you share a meal? How do you avoid having *willful ignorance* about *gluttony* that keeps you in denial and makes you not want to deal with confronting this or another *deadly sin*?
2. Being a *glutton* for power or fame or prestige or position is just another form of this *deadly sin*. Which of these tempt you most and how do you protect yourself from becoming enslaved to these deadly taskmasters? How has your desire for power, for example, made you a slave to those with power? How has your desire for fame made you a slave to the

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opinions of others? How has your desire for a specific position made you vulnerable to those who misuse their positions in the decision-making process? How has the *spiritual discipline of fasting* helped you master your appetites and *gluttonous* drives? Fasting physically helps break all obsessions, and fasting specifically in your area of vulnerability can be the most effective way for you to find freedom. How have you fasted in the past? What were the results in your own life?

3. The *deadly sin of gluttony* develops as we progress through the four stages of being reprobate, then rebellious, then riotous, and finally reptilian. This helps us identify where we are in this enslaving process. An addiction to a substance is by definition a *deadly sin of gluttony*, but an addiction to a practice, such as gambling, pornography, workaholism, etc., is also deadly. Where are you in these and other temptations, and how can you stop this deadly progression? Is there a trusted counselor or sponsor who can join you to help you stand firm against yielding to the temptation as well as help you work on your recovery? Are there organizations that can help you? The truth that we will become mastered by our body's desires and habits if we don't get help from God and others is indisputable. The most successful treatment results for addiction are those based on 12-step recovery methods with a sponsor, as is used in Alcoholics Anonymous.

Church Evaluation

1. Does your church have a clear message about the danger of *gluttony*? Is it focused on all levels of the danger, from physical, to spiritual, to community? Is injustice a part of that teaching? If your church is silent on this, then what *toxic soil* do you

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believe is nourishing the roots of your leaders and people? How can those toxins be removed? What part can you fill in bringing healing to your church? How do you do so without being pridefully judgmental?

2. *Willful ignorance* can mask itself in a variety of ways: denial, justification, spiritualizing, rebellion. Do you see your church as being *willfully ignorant* about the dangers of the *deadly sin of gluttony*? How can you help bring a biblical view into the minds and lives of your brothers and sisters?
3. Does your church have persons who are *gluttons* for power, fame, position or control over other areas of church life? Have you respectfully talked with them about this *sin* and how it will not only harm the church but also destroy them? How can you work within the decision-making process of your church, conference, and denomination to ensure that healthy persons fill the positions of responsibility? As we will see in the final *sin of sloth*, we often do not exert the energy required to heal and change the church. How do you actively work to bring healing into your church?
4. How does your church provide the godly counsel needed to heal a person from the addictions that define *gluttony*? Do you have pastors trained in this or counselors to whom they can refer who are both mature Christians and professionally licensed? How do you personally support those who are in recovery so that they don't have to walk this difficult path alone?

CHAPTER 8

DEADLY SIN OF SLOTH

“The sluggard is wiser in his own eyes than seven men who can answer sensibly.”

— Proverbs 26:16

“We excuse our sloth under the pretext of difficulty.”

— Quintilian

As is true of all the deadly sins, sloth has a physical, earthly dimension as well as a spiritual, eternal one. The physical could best be described as lazy, whereas the sin of sloth describes a lack of passion for the things of God. Having an aversion to work is laziness leading to poverty while having a boredom of the soul is sloth leading to a deadly despair.

In psychological terms, *boredom* is something far different from laziness and can in fact be caused by an energy that has no place to focus, when nothing is felt worthy of the effort. It is a pervasive emptiness that becomes a dark hole of the soul, sucking all light and

meaning out of life. What is even more deadly is becoming convinced by the toxic soil in which we are rooted that the spiritual, eternal realm either does not exist, does not matter, or is empty of providing meaning. This toxic inversion of biblical truth does not so much provide an alternative passion for something else as it does a spiritual disinterest rightly called the deadly sin of sloth.

Students of culture have long described the differences between the historic and still globally predominant view that there are three tiers to human existence while the modern, first-world view says that there are only two tiers. Simply put, in the historic view, there is a physical, a mysterious, and a religious aspect to life. The mysterious middle tier describes the interaction of the supernatural with the physical in such experiences as blessings and curses, charms and amulets, demons and spirits. But in the modern view, these mysterious experiences are seen as superstitions and mostly dismissed as false.²¹⁹

However, this two-tiered view of the spiritual and the physical realms is now being increasingly challenged with the view that there is only one tier in life, that of the physical. Sociologist Philip Rieff describes this shift from a permeating spiritual worldview in which there are three tiers, to a divided duality of two tiers, to now just one tier. He notes that all religious and spiritual experiences are increasingly proclaimed to be false superstitions.²²⁰ The conclusion Rieff makes is this: “We are facing an age of barbarism, and must embrace ‘inactivism.’”²²¹ Implying that sloth will be the dominant theme of this emerging third culture, Rieff predicts that we will become increasingly persuaded that there is nothing needing to be done because there is nothing beyond this physical world with its inevitable death.

Although Scripture clearly represents a world in which there are three tiers, and almost all churches would enthusiastically accept at least the two-tiered worldview, the toxic soil of believing that there

is *only the physical world* is nourishing the deadly sin of sloth. Even within the church, some think that we need to feed the hungry without ever referencing Jesus Christ as being the *Bread of Life* who will forever fill us.²²² This removal of hope in Christ and His eternal, transcendent life is representative of the deadly sin of sloth. That there are churches of Jesus Christ who would make this shift to focus only upon the physical world in order to accommodate a toxic culture averse to anything considered spiritual is indicative of the temptation that sloth presents to us individually and as a church.

But being lazy in this world is intricately linked to a lack of passion in life itself and the purposes of God in caring for His world. Within Scripture, the covenant God formed with His people taught that *living long and prospering* is the result of the hard work of keeping God's commands.²²³ In more recent times, the Protestant work ethic is described "in sociological theory" as "the value attached to hard work, thrift, and efficiency in one's worldly calling."²²⁴ Today, the recognition that this world is not our home and we're only here for a short time of our existence has caused many to think that we do not have responsibility to work to *save our planet*. This belief has devolved into a lazy disregard for the physical world, but has been countered in such calls to responsible action as in Howard Snyder's *Salvation Means Creation Healed*.²²⁵

Another way of approaching the deadly sin of sloth is to recognize that it is a sin of omission,²²⁶ or the failure to do what we should have done. The primary Scripture we turn to for instruction on this sin is the powerful teaching given by Jesus in Matthew 25:31-46. In His explanation of how people will be separated on the Day of His Coming, He says that the sheep will be separated from the goats *not by the sins they committed, but by the acts of love they omitted*. Choosing not to give a drink of water to the thirsty, not to visit the sick or the prisoner in their time of need, not to give food to the hungry or

clothing to the naked, in each instance, it was what loving action was omitted that was the dividing line that made the determination. This *indifference* or *apathy* toward others is another ingredient of the deadly sin of sloth. Not wanting to be bothered with another person's physical need shows both our laziness and our sloth joined together in deadly unresponsiveness. In a world where we do not care for others and do not see ourselves as our *brother's keeper*,²²⁷ the toxic soil of our generation develops future generations of toxic disciples. It should alarm us that the individualistic worship of self in which we are only concerned with me and mine creates disciples that are not going to be chosen by Jesus to be with Him upon His return. That is a deadly consequence.

The sin of sloth is deadly not only to those we are supposed to help but also to ourselves and our churches. When we do not care to expend the energy required to even worship, pray or study, let alone use our spiritual gifts to care for others and build up His church, then spiritual *anemia* defines both ourselves and our churches. Literally meaning "*weakness from a lack of blood*," modern medicine describes anemia as a physical condition in which a tired weakness results from the lack of red blood cells.²²⁸ The treatment for anemia is to assure that we eat iron-rich food and increase specific vitamins. The same is true for spiritual anemia. When we are apathetic about prayer, worship, study, service and the other spiritual disciplines meant to nourish our healthy, fruitful lives, then we become increasingly weak and our churches become increasingly weak as well.

The fact that 20 percent of those who attend a church do 80 percent of the ministry is well known.²²⁹ Leaders suggest that sloth may be the biggest sin in the church. I do not believe that to be true as we've looked at the pervasiveness of the deadly sins and how the misuse of spiritual gifts creates toxic soil. But it is certainly true that if only a small percentage of the congregation have passion enough to

do the ministry of their church, then it will be anemic and impaired, which can create as much barrenness as toxicity. Every person is gifted by God to use their gift to make an eternal difference, both in this world and the world to come. If any person therefore chooses to not use their gift, for whatever reason but especially due to sloth, then their church will limp along in weakness, if not actually die.

It has also been suggested that two lesser symptoms of sloth are *discouragement in the face of adversity* causing a person to give up and *only giving a half-hearted effort* rather than one's whole heart, soul, strength and mind. These are undoubtedly symptoms of sloth, but difficult to ascertain even within one's self. *Discouragement* is a universal experience, even for the most resilient among us; but where a clear assessment could be made is whether we *give up*. A sign of a true disciple is that they do not let anything stop them from fulfilling God's mission. As noted earlier, Collins' *level five leaders* have "a powerful mixture of personal humility and indomitable will" to move their organization forward.²³⁰

Similarly, recognizing a half-hearted effort is just as elusive. Differences in personality and style cause people to work in unique ways. What may be seen as half-hearted by one could be seen as making a wise assessment or cautious resistance by another. What can be seen as a dogged determination to "get the job done" could also be seen as a toxic need to control. Where I have seen this to be a form of sloth is when a person just wants to "suit up and be a part of the team," but will not expend the effort in training and skill-building to achieve true greatness, either on the team or as defined by God's call on their life. Avoiding education, training, and mentoring because of a lazy or dispassionate body, mind, or soul is certainly a form of sloth. On the other hand, it has been noted that a person just keeping busy with trivial things can be camouflaging their sloth when it comes to having passion for God and actually following His call on their life.

The question that then arises is whether *apathy*, or *acedia*²³¹ that has no feelings for God and His work, is the toxic soil that develops sloth, or whether sloth as the deadly sin is what destroys all passion and desire for God's life? Another way of asking it would be: does the emptiness of soul create sloth, or does sloth empty the soul? The answer seems to be that the toxic ecosystem that grows this deadly sin is a mutually regenerative process, with toxicity creating and being created by sloth.

BIBLICAL EXPLANATIONS

The Old Testament wisdom literature speaks often of the result of being slothful. More than 31 unique Proverbs are included in the book of Proverbs with these types of admonitions: *"I passed by the field of a sluggard, by the vineyard of a man lacking sense, and behold, it was all overgrown with thorns; the ground was covered with nettles, and its stone wall was broken down."*²³² The obvious outcome of a lazy sluggard's lack of sense and hard work is that their home and business will fall into disrepair and ruin. Observed originally as a law of thermodynamics, *entropy* is now recognized throughout the human experience.²³³ Without diligent attention and consistent work, everything falls into ruin. But sloth doesn't care. The desire to *make something* of our lives is not only absent but even caring that it is absent is absent.

However, it is not just a lack of sense that creates sloth. Scripture also speaks of a refusal to even try to make sense. Suspecting that it is God's will for us to do something of value to God and others with our time here on earth, those with the deadly sin of sloth simply don't try to discover what that activity might be. Of those in a deadly state of willful ignorance, Scripture speaks of a denial that empties one of the desire to know God's will and a refusal to consider the fact that there is a God who loves and cares for us and has gifted us to care for Him and others. This refusal and denial reveals a deadly avoidance of

anyone or anything that may require something of us, even in a loving relationship.

Several biblical words that can describe the toxic nature of a slothful life include: Μάταιος (*Mataios*), Αρνεομαι (*Arneomai*), Ὀκνηρός (*Okneros*), and Νωθρός (*Nothros*).

Μάταιος (*Mataios*)²³⁴

Coming from the root word meaning *vain, useless*, *mataios* means *being useless, of no purpose, devoid of force, truth, success, result*.

Suggesting that sloth begins simply by having or doing *useless* things explains its danger. It is not that this deadly sin sets out to destroy so much as it removes any desire to stop what is already under condemnation. The spiritual situation of our world is that if we do nothing, then we die. Like a boat heading for a deadly waterfall, it is not the waterfall that is the danger as much as it is the captain's sloth in not changing direction. *Devoid of force*, the weakness of sloth has taken over body, mind, and soul such that *resignation* is now in charge.

Similarly, the *usefulness* that God intends for each of us is lost because of sloth. Where the world could be healed through the saving work of Jesus Christ, we instead have a world that is willfully ignorant of the collision course we're all on. Just one example of this is the culture's denial that there is a spiritual realm beyond this physical world which then boxes in our mental structures, making our "*senseless minds darkened*"²³⁵ and *devoid of truth*. The call of Paul is to "*turn from these worthless (mataios) things to the living God, who made the heavens and the earth and the sea and everything in them.*"²³⁶

Surprisingly, it is also true that a religious life can be *mataios* if we do not work at becoming a healthy person. As James explains, this includes keeping a "*tight rein on our tongues.*"²³⁷ Many people think that being religious — going to church, for example — is all they need to do in order to keep from falling into the deceptive temptation of sloth;

but there is much work that we need to do to follow Christ as disciples and become more Christlike in our actions.

These verses help us understand *mataios*:

“Friends, why are you doing this? We too are only human, like you. We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless (mataios) things to the living God, who made the heavens and the earth and the sea and everything in them.” (Acts 14:15)

“But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments and quarrels about the law, because these are unprofitable and useless (mataios).” (Titus 3:9)

“Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless (mataios). Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.” (James 1:26)

“For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty (mataios) way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.” (1 Peter 1:18-19)

Ἀρνεομαι (*Arneomai*)²³⁸

Negating a root word meaning to *easily, flowingly speak*, *arneomai* means to *deny, disown, refuse, abnegate, abjure*.

Willful ignorance of the truth is a primary toxin in generating sloth. Moving on from simple, empty, *worthless* talk and acts, *arneomai* takes a person to a willful *denial* and *abnegation*. John Hardon quotes the Catholic Catechism: “Sloth is the desire for ease, even at the expense of doing the known will of God.”²³⁹ It is the ignoring of the

known will of God that is so dangerous. It is one thing to seek to know God's will and innocently be confused. It is a whole different thing to know but ignore or actively deny God's will — His *known* will. Sloth doesn't care if it is God's will and does not work to understand, trust, or obey Him. It is too tiring.

Similarly, the refusal to do the work of knowing God at all is deadly. The practices which connect us with God are called spiritual disciplines for a reason. It takes a disciplined approach to connect with God. It doesn't just happen; we have to choose to spend time with God even when we are tired, busy or confused.

As a pastoral counselor, I often have couples come into my office for counseling who complain that they are not as close as they once were. In fact, they say, their love has slowly seeped out of their relationship, leaving their marriage empty. I explain that all relationships require nourishment, which occurs in spending time *being together*. I then prescribe 30 minutes of conversation daily about real things, a weekly date night and a monthly day away together. What is amazing is that very few couples are willing to put that much time into their relationship at that point. Knowing the truth that they need to spend the time and put in the work required to help their marriage heal and thrive, they choose to actively deny their love the time and work it needs to grow strong. Instead, they plant themselves and their relationship in toxic soil that has produced a lazy sloth about their love. This choice is often supported by friends who have made the same choice to give their own marriages a similar lack of effort.

This need for time and effort to thrive and grow in our relationships is also true in our relationship with God. It takes *daily* time in prayer and study, *weekly* time in worship and service, and *monthly* time in solitude, fasting, and the other spiritual disciplines. There is no substitute. But the deadly sin of sloth steals desire and motivation, leading many people to deny God and refuse to do the work necessary

to grow in their relationship with the living God.

These biblical examples use *arneomai*:

“But whoever denies (arneomai) Me before men, I will also deny (arneomai) him before My Father who is in heaven.” (Matthew 10:32)

“The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified His servant Jesus, the one whom you delivered and disowned (arneomai) in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release Him. But you disowned (arneomai) the Holy and Righteous One and asked for a murderer to be granted to you...” (Acts 3:13-14)

“But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied (arneomai) the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.” (1 Timothy 5:8)

“But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God — having a form of godliness but denying (arneomai) its power. Have nothing to do with such people.” (2 Timothy 3:1-3)

“They profess to know God, but by their deeds they deny (arneomai) Him, being detestable and disobedient and worthless for any good deed.” (Titus 1:16)

“For certain individuals whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny (arneomai)

Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord.” (Jude 1:4)

Ὁκνηρός (Okneros)²⁴⁰

Coming from the root word meaning *to hesitate, delay, to feel loath, to be slow*, *okneros* means *sluggish, slothful, backward*.

Unlike *arneomai* which denies the very will of God through a willful ignorance, *okneros* accepts that there is a God whose will leads to life, but rather than full-heartedly engaging in the work of God, this form of sloth chooses to *delay, hesitate, be slow* and even take a step *backward* from God and His purposes.

In my own faith tradition, I am both thankful for and irritated with the methodical way with which we do ministry. I am thankful that we have checks and balances, supervision and accountability, unity and cooperation which makes us far more healthy and effective than if we were on our own. But the methodical nature of our work also builds bureaucratic systems with sluggish decision-making and hesitating boards. Though an institution has no soul, those with *okneros* use their positions within the institution to *delay* ministry, *slow down* progress and even *step back* from opportunity. When a pastor, superintendent or bishop identifies such *okneros* behaviors, then they are responsible to remove such a person from their place within the decision-making process. Similarly, if a person recognizes such behavior in themselves, then confessing it and removing one's self from a place of decision-making leadership is the beginning of freedom from this insidious and deadly sin.

But it isn't just our impact on the ministry of the church that is at stake. The eternal health and wellbeing of the disciple is our focus. When a toxic soil has produced a delaying hesitancy, it could be that a *trust trauma* has occurred in this person's life, and healing needs to be provided by professional and pastoral counselors.²⁴¹ Good therapy provides a list of symptoms that indicate such healing is needed:

TOXIC DISCIPLESHIP

1. Lack of intimacy or friendships
2. Mistrust that interferes with a relationship
3. Dramatic and stormy relationships
4. Suspicion or anxiety about friends and family
5. Terror during physical intimacy
6. Belief that others are deceptive or malevolent without evidence²⁴²

It is difficult to know all the reasons a disciple may enter into an *okneros*, but the slothful hesitancy to act on what we know to be God's will is deadly.

"His master replied, 'You wicked, lazy (okneros) servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest.'" (Matthew 25:26-27)

"Not slothful (okneros) in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord." (Romans 12:11)

"Further, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord! It is no trouble (okneros) for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you." (Philippians 3:1)

Νωθρός (Nothros)²⁴³

Coming from the word meaning *illegitimate, bastard, born of a concubine*, *nothros* means to be *slow, sluggish, indolent, dull, languid* implying a lack of desire for physical exercise, focusing instead on physical pleasure.

As can be imagined, this version of the deadly sin of sloth is the temptation to turn idleness into physical pleasure which, as we've seen, can become the deadly sin of lust. These two sins are often tied together in Scripture, as idleness opens space for immorality.²⁴⁴

Unlike the spiritual discipline of solitude/silence which helps focus our attention on God, sloth is empty and complacent about stopping anything that would like to come in and make its home within. That is one of the main doors to danger. Lacking the energy or will to serve God means that the slothful person also lacks the energy or will to fight evil for, unlike God, evil does not wait for an invitation but simply moves in where God isn't. The emptiness itself is an invitation for evil to enter.²⁴⁵

Similarly, *nothros* carries with it a spiritual dullness that is not due to a lack of intelligence, but due to a laziness toward knowing the truth. This apathy doesn't have the energy to read or study or attend Bible study or worship. It is like a person who doesn't have the energy to protect their bank account from online thieves through any protection program. Not willing to expend the energy to protect themselves from risk, their eventual loss is inevitable in both bank account and soul due to this willful ignorance.

Not used often within Scripture, the writer of Hebrews uses it twice:

"We have much to say about this, but it is hard to make it clear to you because you no longer try (nothros) to understand. In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil."
(Hebrews 5:11-14)

"We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, so that what you hope for may be fully realized. We do not want you to become lazy (nothros), but

to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised.” (Hebrews 6:10-11)

MISUSE OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS

Coming to our last deadly sin, we’ve seen the ecosystem of toxic soil that produces seven deadly sins that cause people to misuse their spiritual gifts, which creates toxic churches that produce toxic disciples who misuse opportunities to increase their own toxicity; and the deadly nature of their sins causes poisonous ministries, and the toxic cycle continues as through the generations the damage goes.

It would be tempting for us to reduce all of this complexity and interactive reality down to an individual and their own sin, but toxic discipleship is not about any one person. It is about all of us and the practical *apathy* we have toward the danger. This is perhaps why the list of deadly sins ends with sloth. Perhaps it is not that it is least important, but rather that it is the final danger. If not for *apathy* and *lack of desire* to end this deadly ecosystem, then good, healthy Christians would stop this continuing cycle from the fall of Adam to the fall of us to the fall of all to be born. As Edmund Burke wrote in 1770:

“The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good [people] to do nothing.” He was not speaking about individual people but rather the banding together of all of us to stop the destruction: “Whilst [people] are linked together, they easily and speedily communicate the alarm of any evil design. They are enabled to fathom it with common counsel, and to oppose it with united strength. Whereas, when they lie dispersed, without concert, order, or discipline, communication is uncertain, counsel difficult, and resistance impracticable.”²⁴⁶

The truth that the spiritual gifts are given by God for the common

good in the building up of the church informs us that when we do not come together in mutual worship and service to God, but rather separate into individualistic lives made toxic by our worship of self, selfish ambition, and willful ignorance, it is then that evil triumphs. It is not enough for us to lay the blame for all toxic discipleship on the sin of sloth, but sloth's apathy is a significant reason that all the deadly sins can proceed in taking us on this diabolical march toward death and destruction.

GIFT of COUNSEL

Counseling is hard work. It is not the setting up of appointments or even sitting in the same room and listening to someone talk. It is the shared struggles of dealing together with hard experiences. A loving, healthy person with the gift of counseling actually enters into the pain, fear, confusion, and grief as we walk together through the valley of the shadow of death.²⁴⁷ It is so traumatic that I struggle now to walk into our local hospital and the courthouse where I walked for over 40 years with people through surgeries and difficult diagnoses and death, legal trials, custody hearings, and a murder conviction.²⁴⁸

So it is easy to understand why some people with counseling gifts may choose either to not care about their clients or parishioners and keep a wall around their hearts, or simply not do the hard work necessary to facilitate God's healing in each situation. For me, some of the most draining moments in counseling are when I go with people into deep healing prayers of past traumas. I am exhausted when this is over and find myself not wanting to even suggest this powerful spiritual intervention. But to not do so would be the deadly sin of sloth, which would be damaging to both me and the person God has brought to me whom He wants to heal.

Just as a congregation needs many people all working hard using their gifts for His Kingdom's advancement, so there are many people

in a congregation who are able to come alongside people in pain and bring God's healing counsel into the lives of family, friends and fellow parishioners. But if sloth has captured their hearts, then the problem is not that they will misuse their gift as much as that they don't use it at all.

GIFT of MISSIONS

As would be true with virtually all the gifts, a person with the deadly sin of sloth would be unlikely to give up their own comfort in order to go to the mission field. However, it would also be true that the exchange rate could cause a person to live in comparative luxury in a less developed country with the ability to have servants attending to them. Additionally, the great distance from any supervision could conceal a lazy life. This is especially true if the missionaries raise their own support so their ministry is not costing the mission agency money, but rather increasing the agency's income as they take a portion for their own overhead.

As a young pastor, I was at a national meeting in which a long-term, renowned missionary claimed that missionaries were the *royalty* of the denomination. I suspect that he meant this in a respectful way as we honor those who sacrifice their lives in service to God away from home and country. However, it is obvious that the term could also refer to the pampered life of a royal as well as the toxicity of a selfish ambition or worship of self to ascribe a royal title of king to themselves rather than use it only to describe the King of kings. This melding of the deadly sins of pride and sloth could be a destructive combination on the missions' efforts as the gift of missions is misused.²⁴⁹

GIFT of HOSPITALITY

I have observed that persons with the gift of hospitality

are endlessly involved in providing welcoming opportunities. Recognizing that even the slightest interaction can cause a person to feel valued, a person with the passion for helping people feel at home is always *on the job*. However, if a person is captured by the *apathy* of sloth, there is little concern for others or for building up the family of God. The result of this can be seen in two ways: first, their God-given responsibility to provide a hospitable welcome into the church is missing; and second, their lethargy is communicated in ways that make a new person feel that they are not welcomed because they are not wanted. This double damage to the future of these individuals and the church cannot be overestimated.

One of the common responses I've received when inviting people in the community to church is: "I didn't know I was welcome!" In a day when people have little to no experience with any church, the church is considered to be a club where you have to be invited. However, rather than leading the church in providing hospitality, those with the deadly sin of sloth are apathetic about the world and do not actively step up to use their gift of hospitality. It is an omission that has eternal consequences.

GIFT of LEADERSHIP

All organizations need leadership. But again, the result of the misuse of the gift of leadership due to the deadly sin of sloth is twofold: first, the individual is emptied of the fulfillment that comes from using their gifts; and second, the church is leaderless due to the apathetic sloth of those people with leadership gifts. This leaderless void can happen whether a person doesn't step up and take on the responsibilities of leader or does step up and takes the position but doesn't do any work. Both of these results are devastating to the church. No leaders or leaders who don't do the hard work of leading have the same impact. Both create a void where a leader should be.

However, it could be argued that a slothful person who accepts the position but does not do the work is more damaging than not taking the position at all, because others who could lead more effectively do not want to overstep or step on the toes of a person who already has the position, even if it is in name only. It can also be argued that a slothful person in a position of leadership will not do the work to become a good leader by getting education and training, taking seminars, getting mentoring, or participating in ways that will help them properly use their gift.

GIFT of PROCLAMATION

As is true of all public positions held by a person with the deadly sin of sloth, the apathy applied to the gift of proclamation is devastating because the preparatory work necessary to provide an effective sermon or teaching is not done. Relying usually on a natural ability to speak in public but having nothing very helpful or meaningful to say due to a lack of study or preparation misuses this gift, and the church is impaired. Not only is growth in the proclaimer stifled, but the spiritual nourishment, growth, and maturity of the congregants are hindered as well.

When my son was in high school, his friends were excited to invite him to hear a new youth pastor preach at another church in town. After going to hear him preach, my son reported that his sermon was the best he had ever heard. But after returning to hear him the second week, he reported that this young pastor gave the very same sermon. Confused, my son went a third time and heard the same sermon again and reported that this young pastor had nothing more to say. I suspect that this naturally gifted proclaimer had the sin of sloth. Creating and perfecting one talk, he had developed a compelling sermon, but his lack of training and work to build on that sermon to further teach his listeners the depth of Scripture left him and his students thwarted in

their growth.

Similarly, a successful professional told me he wanted to be a pastor. I encouraged him and said he would need to start working on gaining the education necessary to lead a church. The man said he wasn't interested in going to school. I responded, "Then let's get you started on reading some theological books." Again, he responded that he was not willing to do even that basic work of preparation. He seemed to think that the proclamation of the Word did not require the acquiring of the knowledge necessary to help others grow spiritually. His unwillingness to do the work to prepare to use a gift was a symptom of a toxic selfish ambition that had grown his sin of sloth.

GIFT of WORSHIP

In all three of these public positions of leadership, proclamation, and worship, a misunderstanding often exists about how much work it takes before one gets up front. In fact, the shorter and more extemporaneous the style of presentation, the more preparation is required.

Known for his nation-changing extemporaneous speeches to Parliament, Winston Churchill's biographer noted that: "Winston has spent the best years of his life composing his impromptu speeches." Churchill himself was later to write that at the height of the great crises of the war, "I did not begrudge 12 hours preparing a speech to the House of Commons."²⁵⁰

A good worship leader is unceasing in prayer, practice, and preparation. But a person caught in the *dulling emptiness* of sloth does not expend the energy for prayer or practice or preparation. The result is obvious to all and excruciating to those who value excellence in music and worship as a gift of praise to the One worthy of all worship.

REFLECTION/DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

In each chapter, these questions are divided into those by which we evaluate ourselves and those by which we evaluate our church. Both can be answered individually or discussed in a group.

Self-Evaluation:

1. One of the difficulties in finding the *middle way* between over-functioning, workaholic achievement on the one side and *lazy, apathetic, slothful emptiness* on the other is that every person needs to find their own balance. God Himself rested on the seventh day after creating everything in six days.²⁵¹ To which side of this continuum do you naturally slide, and how do you bring your life back into balance? What happens if you work without resting? What happens if you rest without working? How do you discover your own work/rest balance? How do you keep your rest from sliding into laziness? How do you keep your spiritual passions vital and not slide into *sloth*?

2. It is not easy to imagine how a person would choose to live a useless, meaningless life when we are all created for eternal, purposeful fulfillment. How do you think *sloth* tempts us to do so? Does it slip in through the misunderstanding of Buddhism, which suggests in its Third Noble Truth²⁵² that we must empty ourselves of craving or caring about everything if we are to overcome the suffering of this world? Have you found it tempting to stop caring in order to stop feeling pain? Perhaps *sloth* tempts us to define the good life as doing nothing and “being taken care of” by others. Have you found doing nothing to be fulfilling or to be empty? Is life about having others serve you or you having God’s love to serve others?

3. The sin of omission is stated in our confession of the sacrament when we ask forgiveness for “not doing the things we should have done.”²⁵³ Are you aware of those moments when you did not do what you should have done? What have you discovered? Why didn’t you do what you knew to be God’s will? Was it apathy toward others’ pain, sorrow, or injustice, or was it *willful ignorance* convincing yourself that you didn’t or don’t know what to do? How do you confess, repent and become a person who does not let *sloth* stop you from following God’s call?
4. The importance of working hard in the use of your *spiritual gift* is clear in our study. Has it also been true of you in your service to Christ? Do you serve God with a passion for doing His will and helping His kingdom come to earth, or do you apathetically live life with the least amount of effort necessary? If you need to change direction, how will you do that? Who can help you by providing support, prayer, encouragement, counsel, and healthy discipleship?

Church Evaluation

1. Often we will find a person whose needs cause them to overwork at the church and neglect their own health and family. Though we might think that this is the opposite of *sloth*, it is in fact a form of the sin that uses one thing to neglect another. How does your church help people find a healthy balance of caring for the needs of ministry, family, community, and self? How does *loving others as we love ourselves* inform this? Is the lack of energy by others in the church a part of this problem when it “calls” an obsessive or

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passionate or over-functioning person to fill in all the gaps?

2. Some of us come to the church to be served rather than to serve. Does your church encourage this and, if so, where is that *toxin* found in the ecosystem of your congregation? What would be helpful for people in our churches to know that would help them realize that we are not to be served but to serve and give ourselves for others?
3. Every time we partake of the sacrament of communion, we confess our “failure to do the things we should” and that it grieves us. Does your church explore what that phrase means and why it should grieve us? A person who is apathetic about doing the will of God will not grieve. Do you see that in your congregation? How can you, without being prideful or judgmental, help bring awareness of the importance of doing the will of God and change apathy to action in your church?
4. Each of us, by using our *spiritual gift*, fulfills our purpose and call by God, as well as helps us be a vital part of fulfilling God’s Great Commission. Does your church help each person identify and use their *spiritual gifts* in the appropriate areas of service? If not, how can you help provide that leadership?

CHAPTER 9

PURIFYING TOXIC SOIL

“A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, it was trampled on, and the birds ate it up. Some fell on rocky ground, and when it came up, the plants withered because they had no moisture. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up with it and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up and yielded a crop, a hundred times more than was sown.”

— Luke 8:5-8

“A solution to the problem of soil contamination is soil remediation. Soil remediation is a way of purifying and revitalizing the soil. It is the process of removing contaminants in order to protect both the health of the population and the environment. In short, the goal of the process is to restore the soil to its natural, pollution-free state.”

— Savannah Cooper

TOXIC DISCIPLESHIP

Where toxic soil is found in the natural world, the solution is to purify it. The short-sighted view that it can be contained in toxic waste dumps has been proven to be untrue since all of nature is one ecosystem; and where there is contamination anywhere, there is eventually contamination everywhere.

The same is true of Christians and their churches. Where there is toxic discipleship due to the contamination of the church with a deadly sin, it is not enough to simply say that we have a problem with one person or in one area of the church or even in a specific church. The discipleship ecosystem is one interrelated whole, and the presence of one deadly sin in one disciple will create a toxic soil for all disciples.

This reality is called the *butterfly effect*.²⁵⁴ In the natural world, the slightest variance in some part of the world can not only magnify but also permeate the world as a whole. The phenomenon is often expressed by the question: *“Does the flap of a butterfly’s wings in Brazil set off a tornado in Texas?”*²⁵⁵ Translated into discipleship terms, the question becomes: *“Does any sin in any disciple create toxic soil in the church?”* or *“Does toxicity in any discipleship create a deadly sin?”* The answer, if we consider the inter-related manner in which God creates the natural world and human relationships, is “Yes.”

So the only solution is for Someone to come and purify us from all sin. It must be Someone who has the ability, knowledge, and will to do so, and it must be Someone who has no sin of their own but is willing to enter this toxic system and do what is needed to cleanse it of all iniquity and of all willful deadly sin.

After a lifetime of seeing the change Jesus made in our world, John said: *“But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”*²⁵⁶ The only solution to toxic soil is

complete and lasting purification, which creates a purity able to bear healthy fruit eternally in the presence of a pure and holy God.

PURIFICATION

As we've seen throughout our study, the deadly sins grow like weeds in the toxic soil of worship of self, selfish ambition, and willful ignorance. Though other toxic elements are at work to produce specific sins, these three seem to be the *heavy metals* of toxic soil.

In the natural world, scientists explain: "Soil pollution occurs when the presence of toxic chemicals, pollutants, or contaminants in the soil is in high enough concentrations to be of risk to plants, wildlife, humans, and of course, the soil itself."²⁵⁷ The greatest risk comes from an "ill-defined group of inorganic chemical hazards, and those most commonly found at contaminated sites are lead (Pb), chromium (Cr), arsenic (As), zinc (Zn), cadmium (Cd), copper (Cu), mercury (Hg), and nickel (Ni)."²⁵⁸ Once the soil has been contaminated, the heavy "metals do not undergo microbial or chemical degradation"²⁵⁹ but must be purified. Similarly, the three spiritual heavy metals that contaminate the soil from which disciples develop need active purification to remediate toxic soil into healthy soil that can grow and sustain healthy spiritual life.

Using the experience gained from purifying toxic soil in the natural world, we can apply these successful interventions to our efforts to purify spiritually toxic soil. There seem to be four primary methods for treating contaminated soil:

1. Biological treatment/bioremediation uses bacteria and plants to break down substances in the soil or remove them.
2. Chemical oxidation converts contaminated soils into non-hazardous soils.
3. Soil stabilization involves the addition of immobilizing agents to reduce a contaminant's leachability.
4. Physical methods, like soil washing, use water to separate or

remove contaminants.²⁶⁰

BIOLOGICAL TREATMENT/BIOREMEDIATION

As revealed by the title, biological treatment, or bioremediation, uses life (*bios*)²⁶¹ to defeat the deadly toxins. The analogy is clear: we need life to defeat death — a life that is stronger, eternal, and willing to engage the deadly toxicity directly. As we've already seen, this describes our Lord who is *the Life*, as well as the Way, and the Truth.²⁶²

In the natural world, *bios* is used in several ways to defeat deadly toxins. The first is through the sacrificing of the life of a plant.²⁶³ Called *phytoremediation*, agricultural researchers have “developed phytoremediation techniques — growing sacrificial plants in contaminated soil to absorb heavy metals, then harvesting these crops and taking them to an extraction and disposal facility.”²⁶⁴ In the natural world, *heavy metals* combine with the soil in ways that make it difficult to separate.²⁶⁵ However, plants that grow in that toxic soil take up into their own life the toxins. In our analogy, this is the nature of the problem with discipleship rooted in toxic soil. The life of the disciples absorbs the heavy metals of deadly sin into their own lives in the toxic discipleship ecosystem.

Additionally, in this first method of life overcoming death, the plants that have taken within themselves the toxins are then sacrificed. It is in fact the life of the plants that are capable of removing the toxins from the soil so as to purify the soil so that future plants can flourish. But in the natural world, it takes killing that plant life as a sacrifice for the wellbeing of all the other and future plants living in the then detoxified soil.

The work of Jesus Christ is the same in our lives. Paul explains: “*For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*”²⁶⁶ This Life that took upon Himself the sins of the whole world was then willing to be sacrificed, descended into hell, or in the analogy, *taken to a disposal facility*,²⁶⁷ and

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rose to life again to forever conquer death and bring life to all. Thus, it was the need to purify the toxic soil that brought the living God into our world to take out the deadly sins so we can live and grow.

Another way to use life to remove toxins in the soil of our natural world is to introduce or encourage existing living microbes to “eat and digest contaminants, usually changing them into small amounts of water and relatively harmless gases such as carbon dioxide (CO₂) and ethylene (CH₂CH₂). If the contaminated ecosystem (such as soil and groundwater) does not have enough of the right microbes, they can be added (bioaugmentation). However, like in any chemical reaction, for the bioremediation process to be effective, the site must be at the appropriate temperature, and nutrients must also be present; otherwise, the microbes grow too slowly or die.”²⁶⁸

Just as God has created the natural world with life that is capable of actually consuming the contaminants and transforming them into harmless elements, so God has created the church to offer the means of grace (confession, repentance, and forgiveness) to transform the deadly elements in spiritually toxic soil into life-giving nourishment so that our spiritual lives can thrive. It is a reasonable goal and expectation of our faith for our churches to be so filled with the life of Christ that in the taking of the sacrament and in the interactions of every disciple sin is confessed, forgiven, and cleansed in a healthy environment where transformation is the outcome rather than toxic temptations or interactions.

But just as in the natural world when we need to take probiotics to augment our digestive health, sometimes there are not enough health-producing “microbes” present in the church, and we need a *spiritual bioaugmentation*. Through the spiritual disciplines of prayer, worship, study, meditation, solitude, celebration, and service, God pours out the Holy Spirit upon His people in a spiritual augmentation of His *life-defeating-death* reality.

One of the ways we can participate in accomplishing spiritual

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augmentation of our churches is through hiring spiritually healthy pastors and support staff as well as by recruiting spiritually healthy lay people to lead small groups and various ministries. Training these paid and volunteer servant-leaders in the congregation must include teaching them how to be *safe* and create a safe environment where people are not harmed but are able to grow and thrive. If a congregation has the toxicity of *unsafe behaviors* among its members, then these toxins must be exposed and stopped through confession, repentance, and forgiveness. Additionally, *safe behaviors* must be taught so that they become the normal life-defeating-death experience. When our churches become safe sanctuaries where *spiritual bioaugmentation* is practiced and we experience it purifying our lives, it spreads this purification process to permeate our families, marriages, relationships, and all of our interactions as life in all its micro-transformations removes toxins from the soil. These permeating *micro-loves* of God is the most basic definition of the transforming love of the church.

However, just as in the natural world, the microbes that transform the toxins do so as a byproduct of living on the nutrients in a healthy environment. The focus of the church is not so much on the toxins as on the love, not on the deadly sins as on the eternal life made possible by Christ's sacrificial death. Though it is important and helpful to be able to identify the toxin in the soil or the sins that produce death in disciples and churches, the life of both requires the loving presence of God as the healthy soil to transform our lives and sustain our growth in Him.

CHEMICAL OXIDATION

In the natural world certain chemicals attract toxins. One author explains: "The researchers started by rinsing contaminated soil with a mixture of water and a chemical that attracts heavy metals. When that mixture percolates through the soil, the chemical pulls heavy metals loose. The team members then collect this toxic brew and run

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it through an electrochemical filter that captures the heavy metals out of the water. In this way, they cleanse the soil of heavy metals and recycle the water and chemical mixture to percolate through more contaminated ground.”²⁶⁹ Used also in medicine to treat mercury and lead poisoning,²⁷⁰ the name of this attractive chemical is *ethylenediaminetetraacetic acid (EDTA)*. One interesting informative aspect of this chemical is that it is toxic.

The process seems straightforward: send a toxin to attract a toxin and through an electrochemical filter remove both from the soil.

To use this natural process as an analogy, it is clear that we would not introduce a toxin into the life of a person or a church. However, we do have many ways to identify toxins and purify us by using the pain and suffering caused by the deadly sins. One example is the *refining fire purifying us from sin*. God Himself introduces the *refiner's fire* to accentuate or separate the presence of sin and to remove it. Another way of saying this is that the suffering experienced because of sin works to draw out the toxins present in our lives so that we can be purified.

The prophet Isaiah speaks for God in that way when he says: “Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction.”²⁷¹ The prophet Daniel further explains: “Many will be purged, purified and refined, but the wicked will act wickedly; and none of the wicked will understand, but those who have insight will understand.”²⁷² Understanding that the toxin must be *purged, purified, and refined* takes place most often in retrospect after having gone through the *furnace of affliction*.

The apostle Paul provides a helpful guide to this in his letter to the Roman church when he describes the process through which our suffering produces sanctification:²⁷³ “We also rejoice in our afflictions, because we know that affliction produces endurance, endurance produces proven character, and proven character produces hope. This hope will not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured out in our hearts through

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the Holy Spirit who was given to us."²⁷⁴ The replacement of the toxins with *God's love* is the very definition of purification.

What is most important about healing that comes from the suffering caused by toxic soil is that we must first identify the problem by pulling it out of hiding and out of our denial. This is what we mean by confession: saying the truth about our sin. Until we know what it is that we need to confess, we can become prisoners of our own foolishness and misunderstanding. As we saw throughout our study of the deadly sins, *denial*, *rationalization*, *self-deception*, and ultimately *willful ignorance* keep us from confession. But the tears of suffering dissolve these deceptions and lay bare the toxic deadly sin that is at the root of much of our suffering.²⁷⁵ Once identified, owned, and brought into the light of *confession*, the toxin can then be purified through repentance, turning away from that sin, receiving Jesus Christ's forgiveness, and the powerful purifying fire and cleansing of the Holy Spirit's sanctifying work in each disciple and in the church as a whole. This is spiritual transformation.

SOIL STABILIZATION

The permeating power of toxic materials is a large part of the problem in both the natural world and the spiritual one. But removing the toxin is not the only solution. Scientists who use soil stabilization explain: "Stabilization reduces the risks from contamination by effectively locking contaminants in the soil. It can be achieved in two ways: firstly, by modifying the contaminant in the ground to a less dangerous form; secondly, through solidification, by reducing the mobility of the contaminant and binding it in place so it can't reach any receptors. Soil stabilization relies on the addition of immobilizing agents which reduce a contaminant's leachability and bioavailability." Other scientists agree, saying: "Because soil contamination by potentially toxic elements (PTEs) is a considerable environmental concern, immobilizing or reducing the mobility and bioavailability of

PTEs in soil ecosystems are crucial.”²⁷⁶

This method of dealing with toxins does not remove them from the soil or even purify the soil, but rather makes the toxin unable to harm the life (*bios*) meant to grow in the soil by reducing the toxin’s *leachability* and *bioavailability* in soil ecosystems. The way this is accomplished is again applicable to the toxic discipleship ecosystem.

Sin will always be present within our lives.²⁷⁷ Though Jesus has sacrificed His own life to make it possible for us to live eternally, it is also necessary that we deal with toxic soil by reducing its toxicity and wrapping it in the protective power of God. In his letter to the Christians in Ephesus, Paul describes it this way: “*You must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, and they are full of greed. That, however, is not the way of life you learned.*”²⁷⁸

The two lessons from the natural world give a good example of how to live as Paul describes. First, we weaken temptations, toxins, and spiritual diseases. That means we introduce the truth of God to every situation. And second, we isolate the toxins from leaching into other areas of our lives. God’s truth reveals the dangerous nature of a temptation by providing the alternative wholeness and goodness of God. For example, the temptation of Jesus to use His miraculous abilities to benefit Himself physically and turn stones into bread gives us the truth that we do not live for our physical appetites and passions, but rather live “*on every word that comes from the mouth of God.*”²⁷⁹ By this manner of living, a toxin is not only weakened in the moment, but this truth keeps it from leaching into other areas of our lives. As we’ve seen in our study, giving in to the passion of the stomach and its deadly sin of gluttony can open us to that permeating, leaching toxin, giving it opportunity to get into our sexual passions and developing

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the sin of lust, or leaching into our angry vengeance and growing the sin of wrath.

As was noted earlier, the spiritual discipline of fasting not only strengthens our self-control over food, but also strengthens our sexual purity and relational health as well. Similarly, the spiritual disciplines of study, worship, and solitude bring God's truth to bear on our moments of temptation and testing in our earthly and spiritual lives. This truth then places a protective hedge around us so that this toxin cannot enter our lives to harm us. Satan explains this in his challenge to God about Job: *"Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands, so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land."*²⁸⁰

One of the problems with toxins that remain in the soil of our lives, families, churches, and nation is that they can at any time infect us. Years ago, when I was a young teen, I remember a friend telling me that he loved to get his mother's Sears catalog and look at the advertisements for women's undergarments. That moment leached a toxic virus into my soul, and I was enticed to join him. Today, of course, the temptations are multiplied many times that of Sears' catalogs. I pray for the hedge of protection around all of us, not only from this toxin of lust, but also from the toxins of all the deadly sins. As a pastoral counselor, I often work with persons to build a protective hedge around the toxin of pornography. In addition to reducing people to dehumanized objects of desire, removing an intimate relationship so that loneliness increases, damaging sexual response so that true intimacy is unsatisfying, pornography leaches throughout a person's life, damaging their spiritual walk, marriage, children and working relationships with others. Knowing this truth and identifying the toxin, this confession then becomes a question of repentance: how do we turn away from it and keep ourselves from this danger?

The answer is specific and general. Specifically, we want to weaken the addiction by not nurturing this specific desire; and generally, we

want to build a hedge of protection so that we keep ourselves safe from possibilities of engaging in illicit sex. This could include getting rid of a smart phone or computer, installing protective software, accessing electronics only in a public room when others are present, requesting social media to not repeat certain ads, stopping certain magazines, comics, video games, and a multitude of other protections. Jesus explained the importance of removing anything that leads to sin when He said: *“If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.”*²⁸¹

Each of the deadly sins have unique specific and general protections to weaken and insulate the toxins within the toxic soil of our discipleship ecosystems.

SOIL WASHING

It is no coincidence that the Bible often uses the image of washing to purify or cleanse us from sin. John speaks as a witness to Jesus’ ministry when he says: *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”*²⁸²

In the natural world, washing toxic soil is used primarily to remove the toxins that adhere to the small, fine soil. One scientist explains: “Soil washing eliminates hazardous contaminants by washing the soil with a liquid wash solution. During this process, fine-grained soils, such as silts and clays, are washed away along with contaminants, which are more prone to bind to fine soils. Thus, contaminated fine soils are separated from cleansed coarse-grained soils, such as sands and gravels, which can be safely re-used.”²⁸³

Recognizing that there are some toxins which are small and best purified from the soil by removing the silt and clay to which it adheres, the analogical lesson for cleansing toxic spiritual soil becomes clear:

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we often don't really notice something is a problem until it becomes big and attaches to large segments of our lives. But just as a virus is small and yet attacks the health of the entire body, small toxins may not be noticed until their growth has reached a lethal level. Attaching themselves to what we would consider to be insignificant fragments of our attitudes, behaviors, thoughts, and actions, it is not until these coalesce into identifiable sins that we then take notice.

In my own life, I have found that this truth is why daily prayer and confession is absolutely necessary. Long before I am aware of the danger of sin invading my life, spending time in God's presence brings to my attention the small words, looks, actions, or thoughts that exhibit something toxic within me. It became almost a joke between us when I would come back from my prayer walks and need to apologize to my wife Cheryl. It happened almost daily for years. But we both realize that this wasn't actually funny but an extremely vital part of my own purification from the toxin of unrighteousness within me. When we allow God's convicting Holy Spirit to point out the small toxins that will lead to deadly sins, then we can proactively seek God's life-giving purification in a daily spiritual cleansing.

As a pastor and superintendent of pastors, I learned the important distinction between a person whose sin was *found out* by someone else which led to them being held accountable, and the person who in spending time with God was compelled by the conviction of the Holy Spirit to *confess* their sin and seek cleansing and accountability. In the first case, the sin was most often causing them to draw back from God and others, hiding their sin and only confessing to what others came to know, while in the second case, the person was drawing close to God and being cleansed daily of what could be considered small and insignificant toxic behavior and about which no one knows, even sometimes the disciple themselves. Their sensitivity to the Holy Spirit's conviction and their sensitive conscience leading them to confession indicated their "heart after God's" and desire to follow

Him in every aspect of their lives.

Similar to the experience of each individual, churches can be plagued with miniscule toxins that are barely noticed and generally tolerated by most of the people. However, God has given the spiritual gift of discernment to protect the church body from such spiritual toxins. If a person will not allow themselves to dismiss the Holy Spirit's conviction or be talked out of it by rationalizing or complicit friends, but instead be open to confess that there is a micro-toxin at work in their life, that *discerning* person will increasingly become aware of and identify such toxins accurately. Like an editor for whom misspellings appear to jump off the page, so a Christian with the gift of discernment will develop a clear vision of micro-toxins. It is then the responsibility of counselors, pastors, leaders, and proclaimers to take appropriate actions to protect the church from even small toxins by identifying them and allowing the hearts and minds of any parishioners affected by them to be washed and cleansed through confession, repentance, and forgiveness.

BIBLICAL CONCLUSION

The biblical promise of God's transformation that changes us from being *toxic* to being *sanctified* is the promise and reality of our lives as disciples of Christ. Paul affirms this when he says to the Christians living in Corinth:

"⁹...do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men ¹⁰ nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹ And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our

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God.” (1 Corinthians 6:9-11)

It is my prayer that each of us will be able to clearly identify what is toxic both within us and within the soil in which we are planted. Then, having seen the truth, that we will no longer be *deceived* either by ourselves or by others, but we will *confess* our sins, *repent* from them, be *forgiven, washed, cleansed, and justified* by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ as well as *sanctified* by His gracious Holy Spirit.

REFLECTION/DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

In each chapter, these questions are divided into those by which we evaluate ourselves and those by which we evaluate our church. Both can be answered individually or discussed in a group.

Self-Evaluation:

1. As we compare the cleansing of toxic soil in the natural world with the process of our personal cleansing from sin and toxicity, what lessons speak to you most in your own experience of cleansing spiritually *toxic soil*? How have you identified *toxic soil* in your own life, family, church, and community? What have you done to remove *toxins* from your life, family, church, and community? What insight have you gained from learning that there are different methods to purify different toxins from natural soil that help you consider the unique methods needed within your own life, family, church, and community? What *toxins* do you identify most often in your experiences with Christians and Christian churches?
2. The nature of the *toxin* in the soil of our discipleship will create different deformities in disciples. Knowing this, as you look at your own discipleship experience, what *toxins* do you think were present in the soil out of which you grew? What

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remedial actions do you need to do to insulate and weaken those *toxins* within you, your family, and your church? How do you keep those *toxins* from leaching throughout your own life as well as throughout your family and church?

3. Having the presence of *toxic soil* and *sin* confronted in our lives is not easy to hear and is often offensive or causes us to be defensive about why it is okay for us to sin “in this situation.” Are you offended by any of the sins that Paul calls out in his list (that is certainly not exhaustive) from II Corinthians 6:9-11?²⁸⁴ Do you think that you are offended because it is a sin about which you are still in denial in your own life? Or do you think that you are offended because it is present in or even permeates the *toxic soil* of your life, family, church or community? Is there a sin that you are defending and need to confess and ask Jesus to cleanse and forgive you so that you can be a disciple with roots planted deeply in healthy soil, able to nurture others in healthy discipleship?

Church Evaluation

1. As you consider the various ways that *toxic soil* can be purified, which ones do you see your church doing best? Which ones could be beneficial but are not yet in use? As you live life within your church community, what *toxins* do you find most prevalent? Which of the purifying methods do you think would be most effective in removing that *toxin* from your church?
2. Knowing that spiritual toxins can be passed down through the generations of disciples, what *toxin* seems most pervasive and persistent in your church? Since *toxins* can leach throughout a congregation, how do you see your church keeping that

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from happening? How are temptations weakened? How are spiritual diseases identified and cured? How are contaminants removed?

3. The three heavy metals of spiritually *toxic soil* are *worship of self*, *selfish ambition*, and *willful ignorance*. How do you see these heavy metals being integrated into the life of your congregation? Are they so bound to the soil of your discipleship program or other ministries that it is going to take a lengthy purification process to remove them? An empty corner lot in my city where a gas station once stood has been going through a purification process for over ten years to remove its toxic soil. It is not yet completed. This indicates that some toxins may take years, or even a lifetime, to remove. What *toxins* would those be in your own life? What *toxins* would those be in your church?
4. Does your church excuse or justify any particular *toxin* or sin? Why do you think that is happening? Do you find your church changing what the Bible says is sin in order to be more acceptable to our larger, secular culture? What needs to happen to keep the congregation trusting God's Word rather than the surrounding culture?

Endnotes

- 1 Denny Wayman, *Discipleship Ecosystem* (FreeMo Journal, Free Methodist Church, 2019)
- 2 Galatians 5:22-34.
- 3 Many sources are available to compare and contrast this discussion. Here is one in simple form: <https://reasonsforhopejesus.com/faith-to-believe-gift-from-god/>

Monergism vs. Synergism

Election, according to Calvinism, is also referred to as monergism. That means only one person (God) is involved in the salvation of man [sic]. Reflecting on Jonathan Edwards' statement (he was a Calvinist), Calvinists say that man has absolutely nothing to bring to his salvation, therefore even the faith to believe must be given by God. Calvinists also believe that since God has chosen those whom He will save, He will give them the faith they need to believe and, at some point in their lives, they will believe in Jesus. On the other hand, synergism is the belief that man must make a free-will choice to repent and trust in Jesus. Then, as a result of that choice, God's saving grace is received. Synergists hold that while God offers His saving grace to all people, He will not force anyone to take His free gift of saving grace. Therefore, it is through one's personal faith that one must choose to believe or not believe. Synergism says faith is a free-will, personal decision, resulting from a progression of three things: 1. received knowledge, 2. intellectual belief, and 3. heart-felt trust.

Opposing Views

Monergism refutes synergism by saying: if faith is not given to us as a gift from God, then it is a work of ours to repent and trust in Christ, and no one is saved by any kind of works. This is not biblically supported. While it is true that no one is saved by their works, choosing to repent and trust in Jesus is not a work. It is a reasoned choice that comes from the heart and the mind. It is a response to the revelation of who Jesus is and what He has done, and it reflects an understanding of one's personal need for a Savior.

Synergism refutes monergism by saying: if God must give sinners the faith to believe, then He must choose to give it to some and withhold it from others. That would be in opposition to God's attribute of being just (Romans 3:26). And it would be in conflict with His revealed desire that all be saved (2 Peter 3:9). God is just, and God loves the whole world. Therefore, everyone must have an opportunity to make a free-will choice to trust in Jesus and be saved.

It's not the faith to believe that is given by God, it's the knowledge needed to choose to believe that God gives. He gives it through the revelation of

who He is and what He has done. And again, He gives it to all, so that all can make an informed and conscious choice to believe or to not believe.

- 4 <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S106173610080003X>
 “Synergy — here defined broadly as the combined (interdependent) effects produced by two or more parts, elements or individuals — is a ubiquitous phenomenon in nature and human societies alike. Although it plays a prominent part in most, if not all, of the scientific disciplines, its importance is not widely appreciated because it travels under many different aliases, including emergence, cooperativity, symbiosis, coevolution, symmetry, order, epistasis, mutualism, interdependencies, heterosis, phase transitions, systemic effects, even complexity and “dynamical attractors.” (A number of examples are provided to illustrate.) At the very least, the term “synergy” could be utilized as a pan-disciplinary lingua franca for the functional effects produced by cooperative phenomena of various kinds; a terminological shift would underscore the fact that the differently named phenomena studied by various disciplines are in fact variations on a common theme in the natural world. But more important, synergistic effects of various kinds have also played a major causal role in the evolutionary process; in particular, synergistic effects have provided the underlying functional basis for the evolution of complex systems in nature and human societies alike. The so-called “synergism hypothesis” is here briefly described, and the accumulating evidence in support of this theory is summarized.”

- 5 To say that God is our helper refers to the Old Testament word EZER. “God created the woman as an ezer. The word ezer occurs twenty-one times in the Old Testament. In two cases it refers to the first woman, Eve, in Genesis 2. Three times it refers to powerful nations Israel called on for help when besieged. In the sixteen remaining cases the word refers to God as our help. He is the one who comes alongside us in our helplessness.” <https://www.theologyofwork.org/key-topics/women-and-work-in-the-old-testament/god-created-woman-as-an-ezer-kind-of-helper-genesis-218>

- 6 The epistemology of Wesleyan thought includes four interlocking sources of truth often called the Wesleyan Quadrilateral. Scripture is our primary source for what is true, while reason, experience, and tradition are supportive resources.

- 7 “¹⁶ If you see any brother or sister commit a sin that does not lead to death, you should pray and God will give them life. I refer to those whose sin does not lead to death. There is a sin that leads to death. I am not saying that you should pray about that. ¹⁷ All wrongdoing is sin, and there

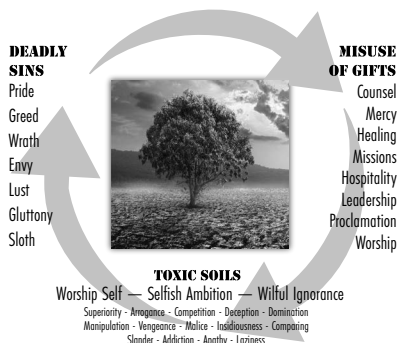
END NOTES

is sin that does not lead to death.” (1 John 5:16-17).

8 https://www.cslewisinstitute.org/How_We_Got_the_Seven_Deadly_Sins_Full_Article

9 There are various suggestions as to which sins are deadly. In more recent times two more have been considered. Based also on Scripture as sins with such a deadly result that if not confessed and turned from, they lead to death, these are Sinning against the Holy Spirit and the Sin of Ingratitude.

10



11 As we will see in Chapter 9, these three are similar to the Heavy Metals in organic Toxic Soil which require special attention and interventions.

12 “And they took their journey from Elim, and all the congregation of the children of Israel came unto the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai...” (Exodus16:1)

13 Exodus 20:1-6: “And God spoke all these words: ²”I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. ³”You shall have no other gods before me. ⁴”You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below.⁵You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, ⁶but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.”

14 A study of the Hebrew context and language of the Commandments is provided here: <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/502998cae4b096e761d86aac/t/54c11a77e4bob3a3a2d29f7b/1421941367284/Ex+20++BrugDecalogue.pdf...>

15 <https://www.quotescosmos.com/bible/bible-concordance/H1961.html>

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- 16 Deuteronomy 4:8: “There you will worship man-made gods of wood and stone, which cannot see or hear or eat or smell.”
- 17 It is no coincidence that the people of Israel were forging a golden calf/ bull while these Commandments were given to Moses. Even if the people were trying to honor the God of Moses by casting Him a bull or the Ba'al, (<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Baal-ancient-deity>) the transferring of honor before whom they bow is a toxic act shifting the nature of the I-Thou relationship — Martin Buber's Ich und Du (1923; I and Thou).
- 18 Acts 19
- 19 Romans 1:25
- 20 Narcissus, [https://www.britannica.com/topic/Narcissus-Greek mythology](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Narcissus-Greek-mythology)
- 21 <https://www.jimcollins.com/concepts/level-five-leadership.html>
- 22 Philippians 2:3-4
- 23 Philippians 2:6-8
- 24 We will see in Chapter 9 that one of the methods of removing toxins from the soil is to place plants in the soil that take the toxins up within them and are then “sacrificed” so the soil can be purified and provide healthy life for other plants.
- 25 Robert Louis Stevenson, *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, 1886.
- 26 In social psychology there is a similar concept called “Moral Disengagement.” “Moral Disengagement is a process of convincing the self that ethical standards do not apply to oneself in a particular context.” https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moral_disengagement. Most Christians experience this self-deception and would call it temptation — “what would normally be wrong for others to do is not at this moment wrong for me.” Moral dissociation is the suggestion that the mind is disengaged, dissociating from the moment. It is the suggestion that moral thought and even one's sense of self has been set aside. This is what is behind the claim of those who do horrendous sins: “That was not me!”
- 27 <https://www.globeatnight.org/mythology/gemini>
- 28 John 18:37-38

- 29 “Postmodernism is “post” because it denies the existence of any ultimate principles, and it lacks the optimism of there being a scientific, philosophical, or religious truth which will explain everything for everybody — a characteristic of the so-called “modern” mind. The paradox of the postmodern position is that, in placing all principles under the scrutiny of its skepticism, it must realize that even its own principles are not beyond questioning. As the philosopher Richard Tarnas states, postmodernism “cannot on its own principles ultimately justify itself any more than can the various metaphysical overviews against which the postmodern mind has defined itself.” (<https://www.pbs.org/faithandreason/gengloss/postm-body.html>)
- 30 <https://www.aaas.org/programs/dialogue-science-ethics-and-religion/what-scientism>
- 31 Ibid.
- 32 St. Augustine Confessions, Chapter 1: “1. Great are You, O Lord, and greatly to be praised; great is Your power, and of Your wisdom there is no end. And man, being a part of Your creation, desires to praise You — man, who bears about with him his mortality, the witness of his sin, even the witness that You resist the proud, — yet man, this part of Your creation, desires to praise You. You move us to delight in praising You; for You have made us for Yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You.”
- 33 This Choice Shift occurs to create increasingly risky behavior in the ecosystem of which we are a part. When an individual would not personally risk the extreme position, a group that has only heard one side of an issue will increasingly “shift” their decision-making to the more extreme belief. <https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/social-influence-network-theory/choice-shift-and-group-polarization/A5C7212B44E6E952D209A1523C0D67C1>
- 34 “Anglicanism [mother of Methodism] is known for the via media, which is a Latin term that means “the middle way.” The middle way allows us to synthesize great Christian truths into a central core, rather than focusing on extremes.” <https://anglicancompass.com/whatever-happened-to-the-anglican-via-media/>
- 35 A study of all 12 false gods/fallen angels is presented by Biljana Jezik in 2014 — <https://zir.nsk.hr/islandora/object/ffos%3A858/datastream/PDF/view>

- 36 *Paradise Lost*, book 2, lines 150-151
- 37 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sacred_prostitution
- 38 *Paradise Lost*, Book 1, lines 492-493
- 39 *Ibid*, Book 1, Lines 493-496
- 40 *Ibid*, Book 1, lines 500-502
- 41 “Hubris (/ˈhjuː.bris/, from ancient Greek ὕβρις) describes a personality quality of extreme or foolish pride or dangerous overconfidence,^[1] often in combination with (or synonymous with) arrogance.^[2] The term “arrogance” comes from the Latin *adrogare*, meaning to feel that one has a right to demand certain attitudes and behaviors from other people. To “arrogate” means “to claim or seize without justification.... to make undue claims to having,”^[3] or “to claim or seize without right... to ascribe or attribute without reason.”^[4] The term “pretension” is also associated with the term hubris, but is not synonymous with hubris. According to studies, hubris, arrogance, and pretension are related to the need for victory (even if it doesn’t always mean winning) instead of reconciliation, such as “friendly” groups might promote.^[6] Hubris is usually perceived as a characteristic of an individual rather than a group, although the group the offender belongs to may suffer collateral consequences from wrongful acts. Hubris often indicates a loss of contact with reality and an overestimation of one’s own competence, accomplishments or capabilities. The adjectival form of the noun hubris is “hubristic.” https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hubris#Ancient_Greek_origin
- 42 “Pride is a positive emotional response or attitude to something with an intimate connection to oneself, due to its perceived value. This may be one’s own abilities or achievements, positive characteristics of friends or family, or one’s country. Richard Taylor defined pride as “the justified love of oneself“,[1] as opposed to false pride or narcissism. Similarly, St. Augustine defined it as “the love of one’s own excellence”,[2]... <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pride>
- 43 St. Augustine has guidance on “Pride” in *Summae Theologiae*, 162. <https://www.newadvent.org/summa/3162.htm>
- 44 <https://www.verywellmind.com/can-you-have-too-much-self-confidence-4163364>
- 45 <https://www.amenclinics.com/blog/dr-amen-on-dr-phil-does-ineffective-parenting-create-entitled-kids/>

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- 46 The epistemology of Wesleyan thought includes four interlocking sources of truth often called the Wesleyan Quadrilateral. Scripture is our primary source for what is true, while reason, experience and tradition are supportive resources.
- 47 <https://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/greek/kjv/anupotaktos.html>
- 48 <https://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/greek/kjv/mataiologos.html>
- 49 Colossians 1:15-20
- 50 <https://inters.org/Pontifical-Council-for-Culture-New-Age#3%20NEW%20AGE%20AND%20CHRISTIAN%20SPIRITUALITY>
- 51 <https://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/greek/kjv/pseustes.html>
- 52 Exodus 20:16
- 53 John 8:43-44
- 54 <https://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/greek/nas/apeithes.html>
- 55 <https://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/greek/nas/hairetikos.html>
- 56 <https://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/greek/nas/huperephanos.html>
- 57 “Narcissistic personality disorder...is a mental condition in which people have an inflated sense of their own importance, a deep need for excessive attention and admiration, troubled relationships, and a lack of empathy for others. But behind this mask of extreme confidence lies a fragile self-esteem that’s vulnerable to the slightest criticism.” <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/narcissistic-personality-disorder/symptoms-causes/syc-20366662>
- 58 1 Timothy 3:14-15
- 59 In the *American Psychiatric Association’s Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, Fifth Edition (DSM-5), [1] NPD is defined as comprising a pervasive pattern of grandiosity (in fantasy or behavior), a constant need for admiration, and a lack of empathy, beginning by early adulthood and present in a variety of contexts, as indicated by the presence of at least five of the following nine criteria: a grandiose sense of self-importance; a preoccupation with fantasies of unlimited success, power, brilliance, beauty, or ideal love; a belief that he or she is special

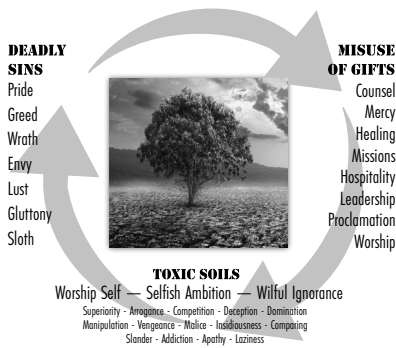
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and unique and can only be understood by, or should associate with, other special or high-status people or institutions; a need for excessive admiration; a sense of entitlement; interpersonally exploitive behavior; a lack of empathy; envy of others or a belief that others are envious of him or her; a demonstration of arrogant and haughty behaviors or attitudes.

60 1 Corinthians 12:7

61 The Coup created their album artwork in July but hadn't released it. The second by Dream Theatre had released a "Flaming Apple" (which included the World Trade Center) and recalled the cover. <https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/coup-party-music/>

62



63 <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2011/02/narcissism-dsm>

64 Romans 1:25

65 Exodus 20:17

66 Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations* (New York: Modern Library, 1965), p. 651

67 <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-020-02450-x>

68 Luke 8:14

69 "When you encounter resistance, slow the pace," Mitchell says. "Trying to go too fast is a perfect way to increase resistance. Only take baby steps with resistant clients." "Don't argue," Wubbolding says. "This creates more resistance." <https://ct.counseling.org/2010/02/managing-resistant-clients/>

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- 70 Matthew 25:31-46
- 71 Micah 6:8
- 72 <https://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/greek/kjv/aischrokerdes.html>
- 73 Matthew 25:14-30
- 74 <https://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/greek/nas/miaino.html>
- 75 Leviticus 27:30
- 76 Leviticus 19:9-10
- 77 <https://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/greek/kjv/oregamai.html>
- 78 Joshua 3
- 79 John 10:11-13: Jesus makes the distinction between the person who is in a position for the gain of money and the one who loves those they serve. "I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd gives his life for the sheep. But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, sees the wolf coming, and leaves the sheep, and flees: and the wolf catches them, and scatters the sheep. The hireling flees, because he is an hireling, and cares not for the sheep. I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. As the Father knows me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep."
- 80 Dollars for Docs <https://projects.propublica.org/doccdollars/>.
- 81 1 Timothy 5:17-18
- 82 James 3:1
- 83 Matthew 28:16-20
- 84 <https://thepostmillennial.com/blm-co-founder-spent-3-2-million-on-four-homes-since-2016>
- 85 <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2019/06/04/televangelist-kenneth-copeland-defends-private-jets-inside-edition/1337549001/>
- 86 <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2009/decemberweb-only/gc->

- 87 Acts 8
- 88 The best I have found is from Christianity Today: <https://store.churchlawandtax.com/church-compensation-second-edition-from-strategic-plan-to-compliance/>
- 89 Wall Street, 1987 <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0094291/fullcredits>
- 90 <https://www.merriam-webster.com/thesaurus/wrath>
- 91 Scott Peck, *People of the Lie*, pg. 72: “The evil of this world is committed by the spiritual fat cats, by the Pharisees of our own day, the self-righteous who think they are without sin because they are unwilling to suffer the discomfort of significant self-examination.”
- 92 Romans 12:19, Deuteronomy 32:35.
- 93 M. Scott Peck, *People of the Lie*: The Hope for Healing Human Evil. Peck also explains: “Evil then, for the moment, is the force, residing either inside or outside of human beings, that seeks to kill life or liveliness. And goodness is its opposite. Goodness is that which promotes life and liveliness.”
- 94 Ibid, pg. 70
- 95 Martin Luther King, Jr. states it: “Hate begets hate; violence begets violence; toughness begets a greater toughness. We must meet the forces of hate with the power of love.... Our aim must never be to defeat or humiliate the white man, but to win his friendship and understanding.... The ultimate weakness of violence is that it is a descending spiral begetting the very thing it seeks to destroy, instead of diminishing evil, it multiplies it.”
- 96 Ibid. pg. 70: “While usually subtle, their destructiveness is remarkably consistent. This is because those who have “crossed over the line” are characterized by their absolute refusal to tolerate the sense of their own sinfulness [willful ignorance].”
- 97 Isaiah 5:20
- 98 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/ethics/war/just/introduction.shtml>
- 99 Scott Peck, *People of the Lie*, Pg. 75: “The words “image”, “appearance”

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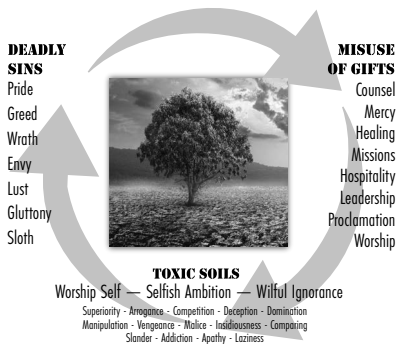
and “outwardly” are crucial to understanding the morality of ‘the evil’.... While they lack any motivation to be good, they intensely desire to appear good.... Their goodness is all on a level of pretense. It is in effect a lie. Actually, the lie is designed not so much to deceive others as to deceive themselves. We lie only when we are attempting to cover up something we know to be illicit.” http://www.justice4you.org/recom_people_of_the_lie.php

- 100 John 3:16-21: “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son. This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God.”
- 101 Genesis 3
- 102 Romans 8:1-2: “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death.”
- 103 Steinbeck, John. *The Grapes of Wrath*, 1939
- 104 <https://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/greek/kjv/orgilos.html>
- 105 Matt. 5:21-22
- 106 There are many different cycles that are used but all join in the understanding that it is an ecosystem, or addiction.
- 107 Luke 23:34 — I think the prayer Jesus made on the cross was not only one of interceding for these who did not know what they were doing, but it was also the prayer of a man in excruciating pain at the hands of others. Providing a model for how we are to act when we are being crucified in obedience to God, we ask the Father to supernaturally make us able to “forgive them.”
- 108 <https://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/greek/nas/plektes.html>

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109 <https://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/greek/kjv/mache.html>

110



111 <https://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/greek/nas/kakia.html>

112 <https://www.abuseandrelationships.org/Content/Behaviors/grooming.html>

113 Ibid; also https://www.abuseandrelationships.org/Content/Survivors/trauma_bonding.html

114 “I am defining multigenerational transmission as the process of passing along relational patterns, resources, symptoms, strengths, anxiety, and behaviors from individuals and groups to their successors.” <https://www.ctsnet.edu/multigenerational-transmission/>

115 <https://www.fatherhood.org/father-absence-statistic>

116 Doctrine of Discovery — <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1066&context=nlr>; Also germane is the historical account of what happened here in the “New World” where indigenous people had been living for centuries: <https://pluralism.org/first-encounters-native-americans-and-christians>

117 <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/group/westboro-baptist-church>

118 The film *Amadeus* earned ten Academy awards in 1984 including Best Picture, Best Director and Best Actor in a Leading Role: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amadeus_\(film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amadeus_(film))

119 <https://www.deseret.com/2006/4/8/19946996/envy-151-sin-that-s-no-fun-at-all-has-elements-of-pride-greed-anger> “The gluttonous eat, the

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lustful have sex, the slothful sleep, the angry blow off steam, the greedy accumulate, the prideful feel especially good about themselves. Sins aside, there is something that at least might look like an upside to six of the seven deadly sins. But what do the envious do? Want. Seethe. Feel cheated and miserable because someone else has the very house, child, job, admiration they desire. But the truly envious don't stop there. If they can't have what you have, they want you to not have it, either. "Of the seven deadly sins, only envy is no fun at all," writes Joseph Epstein in the book *Envy*.

120 Exodus 20:17

121 Ibid. "The main difference between envy and covet is that envy is a feeling of discontent and resentment based on someone else's possessions, abilities or status while covet is wishing, longing, or craving for something that belongs to someone else." But the same author goes on to note that "Envy and covetousness are two negative feelings that make us unhappy. In fact, covet is part of the Ten Commandments, while envy is one of the seven deadly sins. Moreover, these two feelings are interconnected as envy can lead to covetousness and vice versa."

122 Romans 12:5

123 1 Corinthians 12:7

124 1 Corinthians 12:27 – 13:3

125 <https://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/greek/kjv/apatao.html>

126 Epstein, Joseph *Envy: The Seven Deadly Sins*, (New York Public Library Lectures in Humanities, 2003)

127 http://changingminds.org/explanation/behaviors/coping/reaction_formation.htm

128 As noted in Milton's *Paradise Lost*, it was the Envy of Satan that caused him to seek to destroy God and His creation. Thus, acting as though he was a supportive counselor toward Eve, Satan instead deceived her out of deadly Envy. Once deceived, Eve invited Adam to join her in disobedience and worship/obey themselves rather than God.

129 <https://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/greek/nas/anatrepo.html>

130 Foster, George. *The Anatomy of Envy: A Study in Symbolic Behavior*, 1972 <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/6oh425cx>

- 131 Ibid.
- 132 The most deadly of all the deceitful acts produced by envy is to overturn or destroy faith. Envious that a person believes and trusts in God, theological lies and experiential deceit is used to destroy their faith, as in implying the resurrection has already happened and you missed it!
- 133 <https://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/greek/nas/phthonos.html>
- 134 In this thorough list of sins, it is clear that the toxic soil out of which they grow is when a person replaces the worship and acknowledgment of God, with worship of self. It is also clear that the willful ignorance of those who know the ordinance of God is a toxic soil that creates an ecosystem of hearty approval toward those who willfully, knowingly sin. John Wesley defined sin as a “Willful [voluntary] transgression of a known law of God.”
- 135 Matthew 10:16
- 136 “It comes as no surprise to any experienced therapist that the therapeutic alliance — that felt bond between therapist and client — is the most powerful factor in the process of emotional and psychological healing.”<https://www.mentalhelp.net/blogs/understanding-the-therapeutic-alliance/>
- 137 <https://www.harleytherapy.co.uk/counselling/machiavellianism-psychology.htm>
- 138 “You know it makes sense that as a clinician you may be triggered by a client or you remind the client of someone they know. You may feel it’s common sense and it will be easy to identify in the clinical setting. However, transference and countertransference can be the areas that cause the most significant issues for you as a clinician.” <https://www.therapistdevelopmentcenter.com/blog/transference-vs-countertransference-whats-the-big-deal/>
- 139 <https://www.acs.org/content/acs/en/education/resources/highschool/chemmatters/past-issues/2015-2016/april-2016/open-for-discussion-can-smells-harm-you.html>
- 140 <https://www.thecut.com/2014/08/why-cant-you-smell-your-own-home.html>
- 141 <https://churchexecutive.com/archives/a-church’s-culture-is-the->

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atmosphere-in-which-the-church-functions

- 142 Theological attacks come from any source where the desire is to destroy the church or pastor. The attack can even come from those whose theology is atheistic. <http://www.paleoorthodoxy.org/2019/07/the-spiritual-reality-behind-leftist.html>
- 143 <https://www.ligonier.org/blog/how-should-christians-respond-attacks-and-insults/>
- 144 There are many sources to explore this attack by John MacArthur. Here is a representative one: <https://www.sharefaith.com/blog/2013/11/strange-fire-controversy-john-macarthur-charismatics-matters/>
- 145 <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/bully%20pulpit> — Modified quote.
- 146 Charles Sanders Pierce, *The Popular Science Monthly*, Volume 12, 1877.
- 147 1 Corinthians 13:4-6: “Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.”
- 148 1 John 2:15-17
- 149 1 Corinthians 6:18: “Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually sins against their own body.”
- 150 Genesis 3:7-11a
- 151 <https://anthropology.msu.edu/anp455-fs14/2014/10/23/ancient-egyptian-sexuality/>
- 152 <https://www.atlasobscura.com/places/brothel-advertisement-at-ephesus>
- 153 <https://notesofnomads.com/ancient-roman-brothel-advertisement-ephesus-turkey/>
- 154 <https://www.theoi.com/Cult/AphroditeCult.html>
- 155 <https://www.historyextra.com/period/roman/in-bed-with-the-romans->

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a-brief-history-of-sex-in-ancient-rome/

- 156 <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2018/04/26/essay-erotics-mentorship-sets-debate-whether-sexuality-has-any-place-academic>
- 157 <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780195396584/obo-9780195396584-0109.xml>
- 158 <http://www.isis.aust.com/stephan/writings/sexuality/enli.htm>
- 159 <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/love-and-sex-in-the-digital-age/202001/healthy-lust-vs-unhealthy-lust>. Modern psychology has attempted to understand why some people lose the ability to love an entire person and instead focus on their body, or flesh. One theory is that it comes from “early attachment trauma.” “Early in life, some people learn to use sexual fantasy and experience as a form of emotional coping, self-soothing, and self-regulation. When such people experience strong stressors or uncomfortable feelings, they use sexualization and sexual fantasy to cope. In this respect, the concept of sexualizing our feelings is very similar to the concept of eating our feelings. When experiencing intolerable dysregulation and emotional discomfort, individuals may turn toward dissociation via pleasurable sexual fantasies (sometimes acted upon, sometimes not) simply to feel better. For them, highly rewarding and pleasurable sexual fantasies serve the psychological function of emotional escape.”
- 160 <https://ifstudies.org/blog/the-legacy-of-nbcs-friends>
- 161 <https://freemethodistconversations.com/pornography-use-increases-loneliness/>. Research has also found that pornography portrays a hatred of women and has “been directly linked to physical problems like early erectile dysfunction, depression, irreversible relationship issues, human trafficking, and sexual exploitation.” <https://freemethodistconversations.com/category/all-aspects-of-sexuality/page/2/>
- 162 <https://historylists.org/art/9-circles-of-hell-dantes-inferno.html>
- 163 <https://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/greek/kjv/phrenapates.html>
- 164 In the Wesleyan Quadrilateral, toxic soil can deceive any of the four epistemological sources of truth, with reason that is lustful being a deception of our own minds such that we cannot trust what we ourselves think. As in all the deadly sins, deception and self-deception is a foundational aspect. This has long been a study of philosophy: <https://>

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plato.stanford.edu/entries/self-deception/ “It is a problem of existential concern, since it suggests that there is a distinct possibility that we live with distorted views of ourselves, others, and the world that may make us strangers to ourselves and blind to the nature of our significant moral engagements.”

165 <https://marriageemissions.com/about-us-2/quotes-on-pornography-and-cybersex/>

166 <https://www.priorygroup.com/blog/ocd-and-guilt-understanding-why-you-feel-that-you-ve-done-wrong>

167 <https://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/greek/nas/aischros.html>

168 <https://humanumreview.com/articles/old-friends-pornography-and-technology>

169 <https://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/greek/nas/gaster.html>

170 <https://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/greek/nas/apostrepho.html>

171 2 Samuel 13

172 <https://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/greek/nas/miaino.html>

173 Isaiah 1:18: “Come now, and let us reason together,” saith the Lord. “Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.”

174 In chapter 9 we will discuss this purifying power of God made possible through Jesus Christ and His Holy Spirit.

175 The word translated dreaming is Ejnupniavzomai (Enupniazomai) and means filthy dreamer, or to be beguiled with sensual images and carried away to an impious course of conduct. <https://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/greek/kjv/enupniazomai.html>

176 <https://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/greek/nas/ekstrepho.html>

177 <https://www.abuseandrelationships.org/Content/Behaviors/grooming.html>

178 <https://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/greek/nas/epithumia.html>

179 <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevin-wax/c-s-lewis-no->

right-happiness/

180 Matthew 7:5

181 <https://www.continuingcourses.net/active/courses/course130.php>

182 Ibid.

183 Kasomo, Daniel. *An investigation of sin and evil in African cosmology* https://academicjournals.org/article/article1379413683_Kasomo%20%20pdf.pdf

184 <https://en.google-info.org/910453/1/flirty-fishing.html>

185 Ibid.

186 <https://www.charismamag.com/site-archives/120-features/unorganized/1638-predators-in-the-sanctuary>

187 <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/traversing-the-inner-terrain/201112/sexy-sexy-power-o>

188 <https://time.com/5748267/bombshell-true-story-fox-news/>

189 2 Samuel 11

190 2 Samuel 13

191 Judges 16

192 <https://evangelicalfocus.com/life-tech/3431/the-bible-is-utterly-honest-about-all-of-the-range-of-sexual-temptations-that-people-experience>

193 <https://www.hanoverbaptistchurch.org/blogpastor/2015/what-does-the-bible-say-about-hobbyhorses-and-preaching/>

194 2 Samuel 6:14

195 Genesis 1:27-28

196 The inability to forgive ourselves is a diabolical form of pride. Though God will forgive me, I will not. In other words, I have higher standards than God and I will hold myself to them at the cost of my very soul.

197 <https://www.tonyrobbins.com/productivity-performance/reward-yourself/>

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- 198 “Simply defined, a person with the StrengthsFinder theme of achiever is known for having a great stamina for hard work. In fact, achievers enjoy working hard and they also gain momentum with accomplishing more and more work. Someone with the strength of achiever has a particular motivation, drive, and determination to achieve something with her time. You may recognize an achiever because he seems to be in constant motion, or activity, or with different types of projects. Think of an achiever as an endurance athlete when it comes to getting things done. Once an achiever gets started, they seem to have a unique pace to getting their work done. And this pace, different with each person, can be maintained over a great deal of time.” <https://www.leadershipvisionconsulting.com/exploring-the-strengthsfinder-theme-of-achiever/>
- 199 How Addiction Hijacks the Brain: <https://www.health.harvard.edu/.../how-addiction-hijacks-the-brain>
- 200 In my book *Discipleship Ecosystem*, I note that the spiritual discipline of fasting is how we grow the fruit of self-control. Saying “no” to the addicted brain and fasting from whatever has broken us is to put God and His will for our lives first.
- 201 <https://www.precisionnutrition.com/all-about-gluttony-1>
- 202 <https://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/greek/nas/gaster.html>
- 203 <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Foodie>
- 204 <https://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/greek/nas/adokimos.html>
- 205 Genesis 3:17-18
- 206 <https://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/hebrew/kjv/zalal.html>
- 207 “Americans eat 815 billion calories of food each day — that’s roughly 200 billion more than needed — enough to feed 80 million people...700 to 800 million people, perhaps even as many as a billion, don’t get enough food to support normal daily activities.” <https://public.wsu.edu/~mreed/380American%20Consumption.htm>
- 208 As seen in forests where the larger trees protect the smaller ones from storms while sharing water and nutrients through their intertwined root systems, the removal of large churches from fellowship with small churches parallels removing large trees from the forest of all sizes of trees which not only causes harm to the smaller trees but also to the larger ones as large churches can become myopic in their viewpoint and self-

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focused rather than exercising compassion and care for smaller ones.

209 <https://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/greek/kjv/exousiazo.html>

210 <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/managing-your-memory/201712/don-t-listen-your-lizard-brain>

211 <http://baltimoreauthors.ubalt.edu/writers/fscottfitzgerald.html>

212 Romans 17:15-17

213 For centuries, Christians have nurtured spiritual growth to become more like Christ through daily practicing the spiritual disciplines. The best modern resource for this is by Richard Foster in *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*, February 2007.

214 <https://www.hebrew4christians.com/Holidays/Introduction/introduction.html>

215 1 Corinthians 11:17-34

216 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Foundation_series

217 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_History_of_the_Decline_and_Fall_of_the_Roman_Empire

218 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Hunger_Games

219 David Augsburger, *Pastoral Counseling Across Cultures*, 1986, p.34

220 In an interview of Rieff, we find his view of the “deadendedness” of this emerging 3rd culture: “And when I suggest the first of his forthcoming works, *My Life Among the Deathworks*, has an unusual title for a work of sociology, he replies: “Yes,” before adding, with crushing finality, “but why not?” What precisely, then, are these “deathworks”? “James Joyce,” he explains, “mounted a deathwork against the novel and the European tradition. Picasso certainly mounted a deathwork against painting in the European tradition. So, in photography and more recently, did Robert Mapplethorpe.” What the term implies, in Rieff’s analysis, is deadendedness. They are instances of artistry that perversely annihilate the possibilities of art — and with it, life. If, as Freud contended, there are two basic drives in human civilization, eros and thanatos, life and death, the current triumph of deathwork marks the triumph of thanatos.” <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2005/dec/05/highereducation.uk1> It is also interesting that the Marvel Universe created two films about an

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Infinity War and the Endgame in which Thanatos or Thanos is the main character. <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt4154796/reference>

221 Ibid.

222 John 6:35: “Jesus declared, ‘I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.’”

223 Deuteronomy 30:16-18: “For I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in obedience to him, and to keep his commands, decrees and laws; then you will live and increase, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess. But if your heart turns away and you are not obedient, and if you are drawn away to bow down to other gods and worship them, I declare to you this day that you will certainly be destroyed. You will not live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess.”

224 <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Protestant-ethic>

225 Howard Snyder, *Salvation Means Creation Healed: The Ecology of Sin and Grace*. <https://www.amazon.com/Salvation-Means-Creation-Healed-Overcoming/dp/1608998886>

226 <https://www.franciscanmedia.org/ask-a-franciscan/understanding-sins-of-omission>

227 Genesis 4:1-26

228 <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/anemia/symptoms-causes/syc-20351360>

229 <https://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2009/february/biggest-sin-in-your-church.html>

230 <https://www.jimcollins.com/concepts/level-five-leadership.html>

231 “Acedia initially referred specifically to the “deadly sin” of sloth. It first appeared in print in English in 1607, describing ceremonies which could induce this sin in ministers and pastors, but that sense is now rare. Acedia now tends to be used more generally to simply imply a lack of interest or caring, although it sometimes still carries overtones of laziness.” <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/acedia>

232 Proverbs 24:31-32

- 233 <http://www.scholarpedia.org/article/Entropy>
- 234 <https://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/greek/kjv/mataios.html>
- 235 Romans 1:21
- 236 Ibid.
- 237 James 1:26-27
- 238 <https://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/greek/nas/arneomai.html>
- 239 <https://mariancatechist.com/the-will-of-god-christian-morality/>
- 240 <https://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/greek/kjv/okneros.html>
- 241 My dissertation developed an evaluative instrument to find if and when such traumatic experiences injured a person's ability to trust God and others: *The Trusting Test*, 1997.
- 242 <https://www.goodtherapy.org/learn-about-therapy/issues/trust-issues>
- 243 <https://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/greek/kjv/nothros.html>
- 244 Proverbs 16:27-29
- 245 Matthew 12:44: In *The Message*, the story is expanded to: "When a defiling evil spirit is expelled from someone, it drifts along through the desert looking for an oasis, some unsuspecting soul it can bedevil. When it doesn't find anyone, it says, 'I'll go back to my old haunt.' On return it finds the person spotlessly clean, but vacant. It then runs out and rounds up seven other spirits more evil than itself and they all move in, whooping it up. That person ends up far worse off than if he'd never gotten cleaned up in the first place. That's what this generation is like: You may think you have cleaned out the junk from your lives and gotten ready for God, but you weren't hospitable to my kingdom message, and now all the devils are moving back in."
- 246 Edmund Burke, *Thoughts on the Cause of the Present Discontents* 82-83 (1770) in: *Select Works of Edmund Burke*, vol. 1, p. 146 (Liberty Fund ed. 1999). "Whilst men are linked together, they easily and speedily communicate the alarm of any evil design. They are enabled to fathom it with common counsel, and to oppose it with united strength. Whereas, when they lie dispersed, without concert, order, or discipline, communication is uncertain, counsel difficult, and resistance

impracticable. Where men are not acquainted with each other's principles, nor experienced in each other's talents, nor at all practiced in their mutual habitudes and dispositions by joint efforts in business; no personal confidence, no friendship, no common interest, subsisting among them; it is evidently impossible that they can act a public part with uniformity, perseverance, or efficacy. In a connection, the most inconsiderable man, by adding to the weight of the whole, has his value, and his use; out of it, the greatest talents are wholly unserviceable to the public. No man, who is not inflamed by vain-glory into enthusiasm, can flatter himself that his single, unsupported, desultory, unsystematic endeavors, are of power to defeat the subtle designs and united cabals of ambitious citizens. When bad men combine, the good must associate; else they will fall, one by one, an unpitied sacrifice in a contemptible struggle."

- 247 Psalm 23:4: The phrase shadow of death is a very unusual hyphenated Hebrew word: Tsalmaveth. It literally means Death-Shadow. Because hyphenated words are unusual, some scholars suggest this is a phrase meaning a dark place. I disagree. Having walked through valleys with the death-shadow blocking out the sun/Son, I can assure you this is a very real place. That is why I walk through these valleys with them and have others walk with me when I am in the valley of the shadow of death.
- 248 Called by various names, we now recognize that counselors develop Secondary Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, or Vicarious Traumatic Stress Disorder. <https://www.psychiatrictimes.com/view/secondary-traumatization-mental-health-care-providers>
- 249 Though there are many opinions about the impact of the missions movement throughout the world, there is no doubt that colonial and imperial expansion was a part of it. Cambridge University Press author Anna Johnston: "Christian missionary activity was central to the work of European colonialism, providing British missionaries and their supporters with a sense of justice and moral authority. Throughout the history of imperial expansion, missionary proselytising offered the British public a model of 'civilised' expansionism and colonial community management, transforming imperial projects into moral allegories. Missionary activity was, however, unavoidably implicated in either covert or explicit cultural change. It sought to transform indigenous communities into imperial archetypes of civility and modernity by remodelling the individual, the community, and the state through western, Christian philosophies. In the British Empire, and particularly in what is historically known as the 'second' era of British imperialism (approximately 1784–1867), missionary activity was frequently involved with the initial steps of imperial expansion." <https://www.cambridge>.

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org/core/books/missionary-writing-and-empire-18001860/british-empire-colonialism-and-missionary-activity/82E91D7828CEB48FD7237DoCE1B30438

250 <https://winstonchurchill.org/resources/in-the-media/churchill-in-the-news/sweat-and-tears-made-winston-churchills-name/>

251 Genesis 2:2

252 <https://thebuddhistcentre.com/text/four-noble-truths>

253 “We sincerely repent, and we are genuinely sorry for all wrongdoing and every failure to do the things we should. Our hearts are grieved, and we acknowledge that we are hopeless without Your grace.” *Book of Discipline*, 2019, Paragraph 8110.

254 http://www.scholarpedia.org/article/Butterfly_effect

255 Ibid.

256 1 John 1:7-9

257 <https://www.everythingconnects.org/soil-pollution.html>

258 <https://www.hindawi.com/journals/isrn/2011/402647/>

259 Ibid.

260 <https://enva.com/case-studies/contaminated-soil-treatment-methods>

261 <https://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/greek/nas/bios.html>

262 John 14:6

263 <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2590262821000095>

264 <https://engineering.stanford.edu/magazine/article/new-approach-cleaning-heavy-metals-out-soil>

265 <https://engineering.stanford.edu/magazine/article/new-approach-cleaning-heavy-metals-out-soil> “Jinwei Xu brainstormed about how to solve the basic problem: heavy metals bind to the soil and become virtually inextricable.”

266 2 Corinthians 5:21

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267 1 Peter 3:18-22

268 <https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/earth-and-planetary-sciences/bioremediation>

269 <https://engineering.stanford.edu/magazine/article/new-approach-cleaning-heavy-metals-out-soil>

270 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethylenediaminetetraacetic_acid

271 Isaiah 48:10

272 Daniel 12:10

273 Ed Stetzer provides a more complete explanation of this in his Christianity Today article titled *Three Ways Suffering Produces Sanctification*. <https://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2016/june/3-ways-suffering-produces-sanctification.html>

274 Romans 5:3-5

275 Not all suffering is caused by our own deadly sin, but in most situations, it is the deadly sin in someone's life that is at the root. Even in suffering that comes from living in a broken, fallen world, we share this human condition because of the deadly sin of pride in Adam and Eve.

276 <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0160412019311250>

277 1 John 1:8

278 Ephesians 4:17-20

279 Matthew 4:4

280 Job 1:10

281 Matthew 5:29-30

282 1 John 1:9

283 <https://enva.com/case-studies/contaminated-soil-treatment-methods>

284 "Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men¹⁰ nor thieves nor the greedy

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nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.¹¹ And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”