

FIVE FORKS BRETHREN IN CHRIST CHURCH

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SERMON: *“A week from Thursday...”*

SERIES: *FATAL - Sloth (Laziness)*

SCRIPTURES: *Proverbs 26:14-15; Proverbs 24:30-31*

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DATE: *2020 - 9 - 6*

**Credit to Tony Campolo “Seven Deadly Sins”; John Ortberg CT Article;*

Well good morning, it so great to worship with you.

Want to say welcome to all of you in this room and to so many gathered on-line.

Last week was a special week we got to take communion together. And I owe thank you to someone in our congregation. I told you last week, communion was gonna be a little different, because here at Five Forks we traditionally have some really amazing communion bread, homemade, freshly baked and last week we had to substitute that with these little wafers. And someone in the congregation sensed my disappointment and mid-week this past week they brought into the office, a personal sized sliver of homemade, freshly baked Five Forks communion bread. And so every morning this past week I was able to start my day by taking communion. So thank you to that person for thinking so much of me. And I just thought I'd throw this out there as well...not only do I love communion bread I also love 80" plasma flat screen televisions.

And I just want to ask you a question that we're gonna come back to in a few minutes. **What would you say is our society's most prevalent, but also unacknowledged sin?**

I think it's probably gonna surprise you but that's what we're gonna spend our morning talking about.

But let me just take a moment to set up where we're headed for the next several weeks. Today we are starting a new series, called **FATAL (SERIES GRAPHIC)**.

Back around the Middle Ages as followers of Jesus read their Bibles they began to pick up on certain vices, that seemed to show up in the lives of many of the Biblical characters. Not so much egregious, obvious, big sins, like murder, adultery...although there's plenty of that, but more subtle vices.

In fact what they began to notice is that those egregious, obvious, big sins, were usually the result of not taking seriously these subtle vices. And so they began to call these vices the "7 deadly sins." 7 traits that are creeping around in the dark, quiet corners of the human heart, that we don't often notice, but if we don't address can be fatal to following Jesus. Can you name the 7 deadly sins? Now some of you are cheating, because you're looking at the screen behind me and just reading the list on that screen. But you'll notice cheating isn't one of the deadly sins, so I guess that's ok.

Sloth, Envy, Lust, Anger, Pride, Gluttony, Greed...

And for our series, we're actually going to be adding one more to that list...

Deceit

To make it 8 deadly sins or 8 fatal vices.

Now, I realize that it can be kind of discouraging to talk about those areas in our lives that need changing, removing. But I just think this is really important for a couple of reasons...

One, we need to talk about this, because as we'll see, **these vices exist within all of our hearts**. Just ignoring their reality because we don't want to talk about them or because they make us feel uncomfortable doesn't make them go away.

Imagine if you went to a doctor's office for a check-up. Doctor says, "Wow, you are a magnificent physical specimen. You have the body of an Olympian." Later that day while sitting in your living room recliner, eating chips and drinking soda, your heart gives out. You find out your arteries were clogged. Your cholesterol is through the roof.

You go back to the doctor and ask, "Why didn't you warn me?" Doctor says, "Well I knew your body is in worse shape than the Pillsbury doughboy, but if I talk to folks about stuff like they tend to get all offended. They stop coming back. It's bad for business. So I try to avoid those conversations. I want this to be a place where people feel good about themselves when they walk out."

(Adapted from John Ortberg)

You'd be furious, right?

Now imagine coming to Five Forks, week after week and all we say is, "Don't worry about the subtle vices, eating away at your heart. Just try to avoid the BIG sins. Nobody here will confront you on that because we don't like conflict. The goal is to walk out of this church feeling good!"

See, part of following Jesus is recognizing that, our goal is not simply "big sin avoidance", instead we need a heart transformation to be the people God created us to be. And that means we need to deal with these 8 fatal vices.

More importantly, we need to talk about these vices, because **Jesus does**.

This is from Mark 7, Jesus says...

Mark 7:21-22 - ²¹ For it is from within, out of a person's heart, that evil thoughts come—sexual immorality, theft, murder, ²² adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. ²³ All these evils come from inside and defile a person.”

If Jesus thinks these vices are worth talking about, then we should too.

So, are you ready? Back to the question we started with. **What would you say is our society's most prevalent, but also unacknowledged sin?**

SLOTH.

Now be honest, how many of you were thinking Sloth? How many of you know what sloth is?

Sloth is kind of an outdated word. We don't really use it any more.

The most common synonym we use today is: **laziness.**

The way I know sloth/laziness is our societies most unacknowledged sin is because it is almost never mentioned. You never hear anyone confessing to sloth or laziness.

Think of job interviews. When someone is asked, "What's your biggest weakness?" 90 percent of the answers are variations of "I work too hard," and "I tend to be too perfectionistic." You never hear someone say, "Well, I'm just too lazy"?

First,

I. What it is?

Turn to Proverbs 24. Book of Proverbs talks a lot about sloth. Just want to hone in on one particular passage. And before I read this just picture a well-kept garden

(IMAGE OF BEAUTIFUL Vineyard). You got that in your mind. No weeds. Plants are pruned, healthy and watered. An abundance of produce...now hear the writers description of sloth...

Proverbs 24:30-31 - ³⁰ I went past the field of a sluggard, past the vineyard of someone who has no sense; ³¹ thorns had come up everywhere, the ground was covered with weeds, and the stone wall was in ruins.

There was an animated movie came out a few years ago, called Zootopia, have you seen it? This really great scene from the movie that depicts the nature of slothfulness. Check this out...

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Aeij-oc-18s>

You almost get this feeling of uneasiness, just watching the clip don't you? You're thinking get on with it already!

Sloths mostly crawl along at a speed of 10 feet per minute, which means their all-out sprint is about 1/9th of a mile per hour! They are so lazy they do not bother to build shelters for themselves or their young. They sleep 15-20 hours a day.

Now, I know what some of you are thinking. *"This is not my issue, we are so busy, I never have time to sit down and kick up my feet. I never get to move through a day that slowly."*

So, listen carefully, because this is really important to understand...while laziness is at the heart of sloth, that doesn't paint the whole picture for us. So let me give you the truer more accurate definition of sloth and I'll warn you, you are not gonna like this.

Sloth is not so much “doing nothing”, but rather **the failure to do what needs to be done, when it needs to be done.**

Psychologist Scott Peck says, **“Even workaholics can be lazy. They may work furiously but only because they are trying to avoid doing something truly needful.”**

The LA Times wrote a story about a guy who visits the house where he grew up many years earlier and knocks on the door. He hadn't been there for 20 years. He asks the owners if he can walk through the house, and they let him. While in the attic, he finds an old jacket of his. He puts it on, reaches into the pocket, and pulls out a stub. It's a receipt from a shoe repair shop. He realizes he had taken a pair of shoes there 20 years before, and in the midst of the move, he had never picked them up.

On a whim he decides to go to the shoe repair shop. Just to be funny, he takes the receipt out and hands it to the guy behind the desk, saying, "Are my shoes ready?" The guy goes back to the workroom for a minute, comes back to the counter, and says, "Come back a week from Thursday, they'll be ready then." That's the mind of sloth; "A week from Thursday."

In my own life, I don't ever tell myself, "Never"; instead I tell myself, "A week from Thursday." (John Ortberg)

And see when I understand sloth in that manner, then all of a sudden I see it all over my life, our lives. I would say, we have become experts at avoidance and procrastination techniques.

It is amazing when I have a task that I know needs done, how quickly my schedule fills up with all kinds of other things.

I have to take care of my diet and my body, but *"There's only one day a week that you can start a diet—Monday—so I'll start then."*

I know I need to get my finances in order, get out of debt, and I've always wanted to give to God and be generous, *"I think I'll make that one of my New Years resolutions and I'll start at the beginning of the year."*

The danger with SLOTH is not that I say, "Never"; it's that I say, "A week from Thursday."

This statement gives me permission to avoid doing what needs to be done, when it needs to be done.

31 thorns had come up everywhere, the ground was covered with weeds, and the stone wall was in ruins.

You can be extremely busy...you can fill your life with activities and work and still be suffering the fatal condition of sloth...because you can fill your life, all in an effort to avoid doing what truly needs to be done in your life.

Let me just talk for a minute about why SLOTH can be fatal...

II. Why SLOTH is fatal?

A. Relationships and SLOTH

It seems sloth is most likely to show in our relationships. I'll show you how this happens...

And I'll give you the classic line we use...have you ever said this before, **"We should get together some time."** Now, think about this, how many times have you said

that to someone and never followed through. “I’ll let you know, maybe we can do that a week from Thursday.”

How about married couples?

I know, Jenny and I (married couples) should go on dates regularly. I know, we should take a walk and hold hands and we should pause and look into each other’s eyes and have long focused conversations about life. “I think, I’ll do that a week from Thursday.”

How about with our children? The author Tony Campolo writes this, **Most of the problems related to raising children in our world today are caused by parental sloth.**

There’s that famous passage in Proverbs that says, **Train your children in the way they should go and when they are old they will not turn from it...**

But you know training children is hard work isn’t it? Helping kids learn how to straighten up their room and do chores and help out around the house, teaching your kids responsibility is hard work. They’re always complaining and whining. It’s a lot easier to send them to school and put that responsibility on teachers and our school system.

I know I should build legos with my kids or go for a bike ride or teach them how to go fishing but it’s a lot easier to send ‘em to their room and entertain them in front of Television screen or video game or an Ipad.

Reading Bible stories, conversations with my kids about following Jesus, requires time and effort as a parent. It’s easier to just take them Sunday school for an hour each week or Wednesday club and hope the church, Sunday school teachers and pastors can make your kids into good Jesus followers.

It's not that I'm doing nothing, it's that "I'm not doing what needs to be done in my relationships", it's a form of relational sloth it's killing our world.

B. Following Jesus and SLOTH

And I fear this lazy attitude has worked its way into our understanding of following Jesus. Jesus said, "if anyone would come after me, he must take up his cross and follow me." For many people following Jesus often comes down to what is the least I can do and still be a Christian and get into heaven. That is sloth.

We know we need to get our spiritual lives in shape and get involved in a church, but we think to ourselves maybe, "*When we have kids, then our sense of spiritual responsibility will increase.*" Or maybe when our kids are grown and schedules slow down...

We know that prayer is really important, but "*When I'm old, I bet I'll be devoted to prayer; right now I'm busy with so many responsibilities.*"

To take time to sit and read the stories about his life and teachings. To take time to think about those stories and how they should be applied in your life. Isn't that what the Pastor is for?

Learning to be patient and gentle. Hard work. Loving your enemies. Hard work. Wrestling with SLOTH, what it means, where it shows up in my life and how to begin overcoming it. Hard work. See, so often with our spiritual lives our answer is... "I'll take care of that next Thursday."

Scott Peck says that ultimately there is one great impediment to spiritual growth ***"and that is laziness. If we overcome laziness, all the other impediments will be overcome. If we do not overcome laziness, none of the others will be***

hurdled.... Spiritual growth is effortful, as we have been reminded again and again."

See, what he's saying? Think about it like this. Next Sunday we're gonna be talking about envy and how fatal that is to your life. And the week after that, why deceit is fatal. And the week after that why anger is fatal. But the truth is, if sloth finds it's way into your relationship with Jesus or if it has already...your response to every one of those sermons will be "I'll start working on that a week from Thursday".

So last thing, you need to know this about sloth. You'll see as we're making our way through this series that each of these fatal vices often has some nasty side effects.

Eventually, sloth leads to a constant, pervading sense of anxiety, unrest and uneasiness.

C. Sloth and anxiety

Do you ever get that uneasy feeling, at the end of the day, that something is hanging over your head?

Do you recognize this symbol? **(IMAGE OF OIL LIGHT IN YOUR CAR)** The oil light in your car. Comes on when it's time to get the oil changed. Do you know why you recognize this symbol? Because so many of us drive around, for several hundred miles, after that light comes on, waiting until we find time to get the oil changed.

That light bugs us, causes unrest, anxiety every time you turn the ignition key...until when? Until you get it done. And the day you drive it home, with that light off, you are finally able to rest.

That sense of anxiety is often related to sloth. There is something you know needs to be done, but you didn't do it. And you live with this constant oil light in your heart and your mind.

Get to the end of the day and don't feel right about what you've done or who you've been that day. You can't exactly put your finger on it.

There was a phone call. There was a conversation. There was a visit. There was a task. It was on your mind. But you avoided it all day.

It's fascinating, when God was creating the world, book of Genesis, we are told He got to the end of each day and had a sense of rightness about his day, the work he had accomplished...each day ends with the phrase...**"And it was good."**

Restfulness in your life, comes with a sense of "what needed to be done, got done today." When that doesn't happen, there will be a pervading sense of unrest in your life.

This is why, nobody ever sat and binge watched Netflix for 6 hours or zoned out on Facebook from dinner to bedtime or sat and watched an entire, miserable Pittsburgh Steelers football game and then said, "Boy that was a super-life-enhancing experience."

Sloth leads to anxiety.

So,

III. What do we do about SLOTH?

First,

A. Heart change always starts with Jesus.

We're gonna see this all throughout our series. Spiritual transformation is not simply about me giving my best efforts. I need help.

Jesus preached a sermon one time and said to his listeners, **“Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well.”**

So dealing with sloth as a follower of Jesus, first means, you need to have sit down with Jesus where you commit your life to Him and His kingdom and His way. Maybe you've never really done that before. You've always sort of thought, *“I'll take care of that part of my life a week from Thursday.”* I'm telling you this is where dealing with sloth begins.

God sends his Holy Spirit to come and live in you and with you, to help you do and be, what you cannot do or be on your own.

And so if you haven't committed your life to Jesus, that's the best place to start.

And if you're wondering how you make that commitment a practical reality of your everyday life, I'll just tell you, I believe you need to get in the habit each morning of committing your day to him. Make Him the master of your day today. Your attitude, today. Your words, today. Your schedule, today. That conversation you need to have. That task you need to accomplish. Tell him, you want this day to be His day, in your life.

B. Identify and change a habit.

Maybe sloth has found its way into your **work habits**.

You're wasting too much time on Facebook while on the job.

Or this happens in a lot of work places, you're getting caught up in unnecessary conversations with co-workers while you're "on the clock." It's easy to justify because it's with your co-workers, but we can waste a lot of time, just talking unnecessarily often to avoid getting back to work and accomplishing the tasks of the day.

Identify a habit at work and each day this week, focus on changing that one habit.

Maybe sloth has found it's way into your **relationships**.

If the reason you aren't taking a walk with your spouse is because you're working 60 hour weeks you have a sloth problem. You're not doing what needs to be done and justifying it with "work-a-holism."

If the reason you aren't building forts in your living room with your kids, every once in a while is because your sitting on the couch watching TV. You might need to remove that TV or turn off that TV.

Maybe sloth has found its way into your **finances**. Proverbs has a lot to say about finances. In **Proverbs 3** the writer says, "**Honor the Lord with all your wealth, with the first fruits of all your crops.**" Maybe finances are that area where you've been neglecting, *"I know I should be giving and I've always wanted to be more generous...I know I should be planning for retirement and making sure my will is in good order but..."*

Maybe sloth has found its way into your **physical health**. Paul writes to the church at Corinth, "**Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit? Therefore, honor God with your body.**" Are you doing that? How are you treating the temple? Have you become lazy with your diet? Have you become lazy with exercise? You don't have to be obsessive about it like our society can sometimes get,

but maybe you've been neglecting your body, choking out the life that God wants for you.

Or maybe sloth has found it's way into your **relationship with Jesus**. Somehow you have time in your schedule for everything but Jesus. You have plenty of time for work, athletics, entertainment...but reading about the life and teachings of your master or daily talks with your master, that has kind of been put off "until next Thursday." There are four books in your Bible that tell the story of the life of Jesus. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Pick up your Bible this week and begin reading about the life and teachings of your Master.

Maybe your sloth has to do with the way you've been **approaching church**. It's easy to get lazy with this. You're watching the service on-line every week or you're coming to the building, but you aren't disciplining yourself to engage with the worship or the message. You're kind of going through the motions.

One way you can tell you've become lazy in this area is to evaluate how you prepare for church. If you think things like... "I hope the band/worship leader is good this morning. I hope they sing the songs I like. I hope the service goes quickly. I hope the sermon is entertaining." Chances are you're becoming lazy. Maybe for you it's as simple as making a commitment to re-engage with the primary purpose that you attend church. Focused attention during our worship, so that you are worshipping Jesus, not just listening to the band play some nice music.

Make a commitment, think specifically about what you will do to change a habit this week. And don't wait until Thursday.