

THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS

Week 1: What Are the Seven Deadly Sins?

1. LEADER PREPARATION

LESSON OVERVIEW

Students may wonder why we should bother studying the seven deadly sins. The most familiarity we have with the vices comes from pop culture references in movies, music, literature, and art. We have very little concept of using the vices as a basis for self-reflection. In this lesson we will look at the definition of the seven deadly sins and why we should study them, and how they can help us to understand our sin.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

1. **WHAT:** The moral project for a Christian is to flee vice and pursue virtue.
2. **WHY:** Identifying the vices and their influence on our lives allows us to confront sin in our lives.
3. **HOW:** Students will be encouraged to identify sinful habits they have acquired and honor God by developing new habits.

PRIMARY SCRIPTURE

Ephesians 4:22-24

SECONDARY SCRIPTURE

Colossians 3:5-14

TEACHING PREP

The short overview below is designed to help you prepare for your lesson. While you may not want to convey this information word-for-word with your teenagers, you'll definitely want to refer to it as you lead your small group lesson.

The seven deadly sins are all around us in culture. The influence of the seven is seen in art, music, literature, and movies. Understanding the seven deadly sins, then, not only gives us a new understanding of the world around us, but of ourselves, too. The practical payoff is that this new understanding shapes our prayers and our practices. It puts meat on our confession by helping us understand specific sinful habits, and enables us to reevaluate our practices in order to defeat sin.

Though most often called the "seven deadly sins," the label "seven capital vices" is much more appropriate. They are called "vices," rather than "sins," because sins are specific actions, whereas vices are habits that are acquired through practice. We study the vices to understand the habits that guide our lives. We should also call the vices "capital," rather than "deadly," for two reasons. First, the term "deadly" refers to the difference between venial and mortal sins. In Catholic theology, venial sins are sins that do not deprive the soul of divine grace. Mortal sins, on the other hand, are grave sins that do deprive the soul of divine grace. The term "deadly" refers to this distinction,

which is absent in most Protestant theology. Secondly, the term “capital” is used in the sense of “head,” because from these seven vices spring specific sinful actions. The image of a tree is often used, with pride being the trunk, each of the seven being seven main branches, and little offshoot branches coming from the seven.

Every vice consists of desiring the wrong thing or desiring the right thing in the wrong way. The great vices all make the list because they are perversions of the most significant and deepest of human desires. The vices offer us a counterfeit good that seems like true human perfection and complete happiness, but isn't. The point of identifying the vices is so that we can turn from them and cultivate virtue. Virtue must be cultivated, because it too, like vice, is a habit acquired through practice over time. We study vice to pinpoint our shortcomings. A mark of having a virtue is that it becomes a natural part of who we are.

It is important to remember that all progress in the spiritual life comes by grace. Cultivating virtue requires our effort, but every effort we make is empowered by grace. Sanctification is about effort, but not earning. We do not earn any further grace, but we do work to build our sanctification.

Rebecca Konyndyk DeYoung, in “Glittering Vices,” says, “The more we understand the dynamics of sin and the deep network of its combined forces in us, however, the more amazing we will find the grace and power promised to us to help us change. The Christian tradition is a centuries-long witness to the hope and promise of our transformation from vice to virtue, and a venerable guide to the ways and means of engaging in this difficult but fruitful process.”

THE BEFORE & AFTER [optional]

Text Message Questions

Here are a couple of different text message questions to send out to the students prior to the meeting.

“Ever heard of the seven deadly sins? Come tonight and we'll talk about them!”

“Can you name all seven deadly sins? Prize tonight for whoever can!”

Parent Email

This is an email below to send to parents following the lesson. The hope is to encourage parents to continue the conversation at home.

Dear parents,

This week we started an eight-week study in our small groups examining the topic of the seven deadly sins. Though we don't talk about the sins that often, they're a good rubric to use for self-examination. The goal is to help our teenagers to identify sinful habits in

their own lives. Hopefully, by becoming aware of sin, we can change our habits. Horace said, “to flee vice is the beginning of virtue.”

In this first week, our teenagers studied Ephesians 4:22-24 and Colossians 3:5-14. We talked about the definition of virtue, what the seven deadly sins are, and why we should study them. Ephesians and Colossians talk about putting off the old man and putting on the new man in Christ. Part of putting off the old man is understanding and identifying our sin. That’s what the seven deadly sins do for us.

During the week, as the opportunity arises, discuss with your teenager what they think about the seven deadly sins. Here are some questions that could help launch your discussion:

- What are the seven deadly sins?
- What are some ways you think you might have developed sinful habits? How do you break those habits?
- What’s something you could start doing differently at your job, on a sports team, or at school that would communicate your integrity to break the habits you’ve acquired?

Talking with your teenager about how to flee vice will have a huge impact for a lifetime. Have a blessed week!

2. LESSON GUIDE

GETTING THINGS STARTED [optional]

Before the small group meets, conduct some research and find some examples of the seven deadly sins in pop culture. Look for movie references, art, and music. Bring these examples to small group.

As you begin your small group, welcome your students and invite them into your meeting area. Open in prayer, and then SAY SOMETHING LIKE:

I’ve brought along some pop culture, and I’d like you to take a few minutes to take a look at what I brought.

After your students have had a few minutes to look through the articles, ASK:

- *What theme are you picking up from pop culture?*
- *What are some specific sinful habits that these references portray?*
- *What are some of the ways our culture sends us messages on how to live?*
- *What is most surprising about pop culture?*
- *How do these things affect the way we think about following God? What would God think about this?*

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *The seven deadly sins, though not well known, can be spotted all over the place in our culture. We see art, music, movies, and literature all displaying*

one or more of the seven. Why are these so prevalent? How can they help us to understand our own sinful habits?

TEACHING POINTS

The goal of the Teaching Points is to help students capture the essence of each lesson with more discussion and less lecture-style teaching.

The main points here are (1) The seven deadly sins are habits we cultivate, (2) The key to overcoming these habits is identifying them, and (3) Once we've identified vices, we can build new habits of virtue.

Read Ephesians 4:22-24 together as a group. Consider allowing one or more of the teenagers to read the text.

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *Let's spend a few moments taking a look at what it means to "lay aside the old man" and "put on the new man."*

THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS ARE HABITS WE CULTIVATE

ASK:

- *What is the "old man" and the "new man"?*
- *How do you go about laying aside the old man?*
- *How do you put on the new man?*
- *If you could sum up the old man in one word, what would it be?*
- *In what areas of your life do you struggle to lay aside the old man?*

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *The way of life that we lived before we became Christians doesn't just magically go away. Paul refers to it as the "old man." The old man is the sinful habits we acquired and cultivated before we became Christians. In fact, we can learn new patterns of sinful behavior even after we become Christians.*

The seven deadly sins are patterns of living that Christian theologians have identified during the past two thousand years as being broad patterns of behavior that lead to specific sins. By identifying sinful habits like gluttony, we can recognize how sinful patterns have been established in our lives.

The new man is the new habits of virtue that are the calling of every Christian.

THE KEY TO OVERCOMING THESE HABITS IS IDENTIFYING THEM

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *The moral program for a Christian is to overcome vice in favor of virtue. It is to lay aside the old man and put on the new man. But we can't identify these habits until we understand what they are.*

ASK:

- *What are vices? Make a list of all the vices you can think of and a particular person or profession which exemplifies them (e.g., greed – Wall Street Banker; lust – pornographic movie producer).*
- *Can you list the seven deadly sins (envy, vainglory, sloth, avarice, anger, gluttony, lust)?*
- *Do you think all of the vices are still relevant today?*
- *What vice do you have a particularly hard time with?*

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: The great vices all make the list because they are perversions of the most significant and deepest of human desires. Every vice consists of desiring the wrong thing or desiring the right thing in the wrong way. The vices offer us a counterfeit good that seems like true human perfection and complete happiness.

ONCE WE IDENTIFY THE VICIES, WE CAN BUILD NEW HABITS OF VIRTUE

ASK:

- *With the list of the classical seven deadly sins (envy, vainglory, sloth, avarice, anger, gluttony, lust), what virtues are these vices opposed to? (You might want to read the overviews of the rest of the lessons to get a general definition of each of the vices and the virtues they are opposed to.)*
- *What are virtues? Make a list of all the virtues you can think of and a particular person or profession which exemplifies them (e.g., honor, courage, fidelity – US Marine; steadfastness, courage – Martin Luther King, Jr.).*

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: It is important that as Christians we are fleeing vice and sin and pursuing holiness and virtue. A mark of having a virtue is that it becomes a natural part of who we are. Cultivating virtue requires effort, but our effort is empowered by grace.

ADDITIONAL DISCUSSION [optional]

ASK:

- *Read Colossians 3:5-14. What vices and virtues are listed in this passage?*
- *What is Paul admonishing the believer to do?*
- *If pride is the root of all vice, then what do you think is the root of all virtue (love – cf. Col. 3:14).*

APPLICATION

ASK:

- *What are some unique ways in which a teenager might face the seven deadly sins that an adult wouldn't experience?*
- *What are some areas in your life where you feel enslaved to one of the seven deadly sins?*
- *What are you doing to try to change your sinful habits?*

Pair up with another person in the group for these questions.

ASK:

- *How are you fleeing vice?*
- *How are you pursuing virtue?*
- *Share with each other ways you could live in greater virtue.*
- *What are some ways you could demonstrate virtue at your job, on a sports team, or at school?*

Bring the group back together for this final question.

ASK:

- *If the most important thing for a Christian to do is lay aside the old man and put on the new man, then what are you doing to do that?*

SUMMARY

End your small group lesson here. Provide your teenagers with a quick summary or take-home challenge based on (1) the content of this lesson, (2) the dialogue that took place during the lesson, (3) your understanding of the issues and struggles your teenagers are facing, and (4) the big picture of your youth ministry and what your leadership team wants accomplished with the teaching and discussion time.

FOR KEEPS [MEMORY VERSE]

Encourage and/or challenge the teenagers to memorize the verse below.

“You were taught with reference to your former way of life to lay aside the old man who is being corrupted in accordance with deceitful desires, to be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and to put on the new man who has been created in God’s image—in righteousness and holiness that comes from truth.” (Ephesians 4:22-24)