

- I. Let me ask us this morning...how many would describe yourselves as industrious or productive? How about mildly productive? Okay, how many would describe yourselves as mildly lazy? How about flat out couch potatoes? Be proud! Claim your couch potato-ness. And while you do here are some items you may interested in <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=897QJUx7XRw> . Okay, for full disclosure, I have stock in the baby mop. I really do think that is the best invention since the wheel.
  
- II. Okay, what was that all about? Today we begin our “Seven Deadly Sins” series. As Steph mentioned we are entering the time of Lent when Christians traditionally peer inward. We do so not to become narcissistic or self-consumed, as there is plenty of that going on in our world, but rather the opposite. So we can discover those areas in our lives holding us back from becoming more like Jesus. And as we become more like Him we will focus less on ourselves and more on the people around us. So we are exploring the seven sins that early Christians have identified as the most toxic to our lives and then ways in which we can overcome them. And these are not confined to Christianity; in fact all seven can harm us whether we are Christ followers or not. Today we are looking at...any guesses? Sloth. Now when you hear the word, most of us probably get a picture in our head of someone like this **(image)** The quintessential couch potato. So is this what Christians throughout the ages meant when they warned us away from sloth? Simply laziness? Is that a sin? Sure, you might not be winning an award for it, but it that really something that harms our relationship with God and those around us? Let us look at a few verses in the Old Testament. The book of Proverbs is like wise advice from your grandmother. Very practical. But in this case it’s from King Solomon, King David’s son. **Proverbs 6:6-11 The Message.** And then **Ecc 9:10 NRSV** also believed to have been written by Solomon. He doesn’t pull any punches, does he? Aren’t you glad Solomon wasn’t your father? No laying around watching cartoons on a Saturday morning for his kids! It does seem that at least in the Old Testament, those books written before Jesus, that the primary warning against sloth was to keep one from going hungry or to keep your family or extended family from starving. In a small farm based community, one person not doing their fair share could hurt everybody. And no doubt this kind of sloth, laziness, can bring us poverty in our world today. And it can lead to soured relationships at home or the office. How many of us had to spend more time at work or school on a project that someone else slacked off on? Is this behavior sinful then? I believe so to a point in that it harms our relationships with each others.
  
- III. But on the whole as Will Willimon, in his book *Sinning like a Christian*, points out, this kind of sloth is not what most Americans struggle with. In fact, it is the opposite. In the United States we work more hours than any other industrial nation in the world, take less vacation and retire later. That high work ethic is built into our culture. And we pride ourselves on it. We like to think the busier we are the more important we are, right? If anything, Americans need more time to relax not less. And there is nothing wrong with taking a break from work. In fact, as we have talked about before, in the Old Testament we are commanded to rest at least once a week...it’s called Sabbath. The word itself means to stop or rest. And rest and laziness are two very different things. Sometimes the best thing we can do is no thing or nothing...but rest with intentionality. That isn’t sitting on the couch beverage in hand

watching boob tube or now YouTube. But really rest by doing things that fill us up relationally, physically and spiritually. Like meeting a friend over coffee. Praying quietly near a river while on a hike. Listening to Christian music on the back porch. Reading a book near the fire. Walking on the greenway with your spouse or a good friend. These kinds of things don't lead to sloth but enable us to work with more joy and energy when we return to it.

- IV. So if most of us are not lazy but work hard for our money, then how is sloth something that can bring us down? Those early Christians who helped us identify the deadly 7 had a deeper understanding of sloth than just merely being idle. They understood the most dangerous aspect of sloth is **the failure to act on those things we know we should be doing**. Let me offer a small example. We have two dogs and both have what I would call "less than refined" palate. To put it plainly, they eat gross things. This often has negative consequences on their digestive system as you might imagine. I came home the other week and found the "result" of their less than stellar culinary choices in a pungent pile in our dining room. The right thing would have been...what? Grab the paper towels and spot shot and get on it. That is what I should do as a loving husband and father. But instead I pretended not to see it and went on my merry way. Not confessing to my wife of my crime till now. Because there is safety in numbers ☺. But typically, not doing something that we should can have more serious consequences. James, Jesus' younger brother, writes in his letter **James 4:17 NIV**. Now this is a game changer. This means we might be working an 80-hour week but still fall into this pitfall. In fact, I would argue that our overwork as a nation can increase slothfulness. How? **We replace doing the best thing, loving God and loving people, with merely a good thing, work.**
- V. The Christian journey always comes down to relationships. Our relationship with God and our relationship with each other. Let's look at the second before we turn to the first. How can our failure to act on something we know we should do, or sloth, hurt a relationship with a friend? How many times have we said, "I know Bobby is going through a hard time. I should call him." Or "I should send Lucy a text to check on her job." Or "I should go see Phil. He lost his mother and I should check to see how he is doing." But then we never do these things. Sure our intention is good but we let something else get in the way. Sometimes a good thing gets in the way like parenting or caring for parents but sometimes not. We scour Facebook on an app rather than using our phone as a phone to call a friend. In fact, a recent study shows that an average American spends around 3 hours a day on social media. That is sloth, and because of it our friendships suffer. Dr. M. Scott Peck, the great Christian psychiatrist, wrote that "**laziness is love's opposite.**" We replace an act of love such as sending a card or meeting someone for lunch with something as trivial as tweeting what we ate for lunch.
- VI. This kind of sloth also can harm a marriage. For those married types here this morning, do you remember the early days of your relationship? You hang on every word your girlfriend or boyfriend said. You laughed at all of their jokes, you dressed up for them when you went out, you brushed your teeth regularly and made a good hygiene when they were around. You generally treated them as if they were the most important person in the world. Then

you get married. And this may continue for the first couple of years. And then we move into our professions and some of us have kids. Our mates can sometimes get downgraded to a status just above the family dog or cat. Dates become a distant memory and you live in your sweats and only get dressed up for weddings or a funeral. The only time we see our spouses is early in the morning or late at night when we are exhausted and we can't get out one intelligible sentence except "change the channel." And we wonder why our divorce rate in the US is so high. I personally believe at the root of most failed marriages is not money issues, despite what is reported, but apathy which is sloth's close cousin. We stop doing these things that keep our marriages strong and eventually we stop caring. So our relationship withers and dies like a red rose a week after Valentine's Day. Now I realize that there are seasons in marriage and the honeymoon phase can't last forever. But it is so easy to fall into an unhealthy pattern and give into sloth and apathy. But there are some things we can do to keep it thriving. In short, learn your spouse's love language and begin to speak it. My wife for example couldn't care less for diamond earrings, but her heart melts when I vacuum the living room. The point? Learn how your spouse sees and feels loved and get on it.

- VII. And sloth affects parenting as well. A few years ago, I was listening to Dr. Tony Compello, a Christian sociologist and pastor, on the radio. He asked the question, "Do you know what music your kids are listening to? What they are watching on the TV or the Internet? The social media they are on?" Ouch. Here is what I generally see and what I have experienced in my own life. Mom and dad had a long day at work or working around the house and evening time comes and we are tired. All we want to do is what? Lay on the couch and turn on Netflix. And the kids? In many homes, I believe we live by this unspoken agreement, "You don't bug me and I won't bug you." And unless we hear shrieks of pain or see blood we are hands off. In the Kaiser Family Foundation study they found that kids spend on average 7.5 hours a day on media. It also found 70 percent of parents have no rules when it comes to what they watch, what they listen to, or what social media they engage in. Now I am not saying everything in media is bad, and I am not like the pastor of the church in which I grew up as a young child who preached rock music was from the devil. But I think many of us fall on the other extreme. We have given up setting boundaries. Let me ask us parents, would we allow our children to go to Syria to the front lines of that bloody civil war and watch the carnage? Or to go to the strip club? Then why do we allow them complete freedom on the web that has access to that and more? Sloth. We know the right thing is to get involved in what they are watching or listening to but we often don't.
- VIII. **Proverbs 22:6 NRSV.** I like how Proverbs put that. To train. For anyone who has trained for a marathon, a 5k or triathlon or whatever, we know that training takes work and time. To raise our children right, it takes work and it takes time and much effort. Especially if they are teenagers. So let me ask us, do we have rules on media in our houses? Are we talking with them about what they are listening to or watching? But training is not just something you don't do...like not eating Ben and Jerry's...but also involves primarily what you do. To train our children, if we are Christ followers, means to make sure they know and see in us what

the Christian life is about. Family devotions, seeing you have a personal devotion, serving at Center of Hope or Meadowlark Meals or whatever...are all ways we can train our children. I want to be very clear and say that I am not primarily responsible for training your children in this way. No offense, but that is your job as parents. And my guess is that many of us parents are spending only a fraction of our time investing in helping them to walk with Jesus than the time we are training them in academics, sports and their hobbies. Again, this is sloth and I am guilty of it as much as anyone.

IX. And then there is the relationship with God. And the most dangerous form of sloth. There is an old story about a man who used to be part of a Christian community who dropped out of worship, bible study and his ministry at the local soup kitchen. After a few weeks a friend from the church decided to visit him at home. He found the man at home alone, sitting before a blazing fire. Guessing the reason for his visit, the man welcomed him, led him to a comfortable chair near the fireplace and waited for the guilt speech. The friend made himself at home but said nothing but just watched the fire. After some minutes, the church friend took the fire tongs, carefully picked up a brightly burning ember and placed it to one side of the fireplace all alone. Then he sat back in his chair, still silent. The host watched all this in quiet contemplation. As the one, lone ember's flame flickered and diminished, there was a momentary glow and then its fire was no more. Soon it was cold and lifeless. The friend glanced at his watch and realized it was time to leave. He slowly stood up, picked up the cold, dead ember and placed it back in the middle of the fire. Immediately it began to glow, once more with the light and warmth of the burning coals around it. As the friend reached the door to leave, his host said with a tear running down his cheek, "Thank you so much for your visit. I will see you at worship on Sunday." Paul the church planter put it like this **Romans 12: 11-13 (MSG)** and how can we keep the flame burning? **Hebrews 10:24-25 (NIV)** do those things that feed our soul. I firmly believe that many Christ followers who give up their faith walk away from Jesus not because their minds were changed by savvy atheist like Richard Dawkins but because they had become slothful. They stopped doing those things they knew they should to keep their passion, their fire, their zeal for God alive. And Richard or someone like him simply provide a convenient intellectual excuse. Again our busyness at our work or at play can prevent us from corporate worship, reading our bible and expecting God to speak to us, praying or attending small groups. We give up the best thing, the right thing, for something that is merely an okay thing. This is sloth and it can end our Christian journey and severely harm all our other relationships. It can make our hearts grow cold, apathetic, and loveless.

X. I want to end this morning with a quote from the great British Statesmen. Edmunke Burke said "***The Only Thing Necessary for the Triumph of Evil is that Good Men Do Nothing.***" You see if we are couch potatoes with our vital relationships like with God, family and friends we undoubtedly become slackers on living out the Christian life in this world...as in standing up against evil, serving the poor, fighting injustice, and loving the unlovable. Then the greatest force of good and of God, the brightest light in this world...the Church...goes out. And then how dark will this world become? All because of sloth.