

se7en: Sloth

Reconnect – February 22, 2009

Text: II Samuel 11:1-2; Romans 12:9-12

Key Thought: Sin disconnects and destroys, but Jesus offers the antidote: a connection with God that brings health, life and joy.

The following spring, the time of year when kings go to war, David sent Joab and the Israelite army to destroy the Ammonites. In the process they laid siege to the city of Rabbah. But David stayed behind in Jerusalem. Late one afternoon David got out of bed after taking a nap and went for a stroll on the roof of the palace. As he looked out over the city, he noticed a woman of unusual beauty taking a bath.

(II Samuel 11:1-2, NLT)

Intro: “Forever Young” (Diet Pepsi ads)

- These commercials were a huge hit when they first came out a couple of years ago, because they reflected what we all do: sometimes, we just think about the past and wish that it was still around
- “Glory Days” – like the Springsteen song – just trying to recapture the good old days, the good feelings, the better times, instead of what’s happening now
- My wife threw out all my old jeans, unfortunately, or I’d be just as stylin’ as the guy in the video

Desire to escape = sloth

- Some of us like to live in the past – others of us wish that the future would come more quickly – and then there are those who prefer to withdraw into different worlds of fantasy, TV, movies, books, video games
- But all of those options have one thing in common: a desire to escape life as it is found at the moment
- Which believe it or not, is a pretty good definition of the first deadly sin: “sloth”

Sloth: what is it?

- Which doesn’t seem to sound right – isn’t sloth about laziness? Like the Wall-E clip?
- It’s certainly true that sloth doesn’t get any respect on the list of seven deadly sins - it comes at the end all the time, as if it barely made it
- And that makes sense, if it’s just laziness, because laziness can sometimes be a very good thing
 - When ingenuity is a virtue, when the idea of working harder isn’t as important as working smarter?
 - When we are constantly inventing more ways to amuse ourselves and escape from our busy, stressful, monotonous worlds?
 - When we’re stressed and workaholic and unable to slow down?
- Doesn’t sound like a deadly sin to me, maybe it’s even a good thing – so what gives?
- When it was named as one of the seven deadly sins 1500 or so years ago, it was termed “*accidia*” – which was more “spiritual weariness” or “despair”

- But today when we hear “despair” we think depression and therapy and drugs, and that’s not right either – we can all feel depressed from time to time, and some people suffer from a condition of depression – again, that’s not sloth

“Sloth... starts with small things – a shrug of the shoulders, a turning-away from someone in need, a switching-off of something in the heart. Sometimes it can be caused by disillusionment with life, but it begins a pattern of allowing oneself to drift towards a languid ‘couldn’t be bothered’ approach, which in time becomes a habit of life.” (Tomlin 166)

Our language: “meh”

- “Meh” – the word of the year – “a not caring-ness, a past caring-ness – “whatever””

Read Text: II Samuel 11:1-2

The following spring, the time of year when kings go to war, David sent Joab and the Israelite army to destroy the Ammonites. In the process they laid siege to the city of Rabbah. But David stayed behind in Jerusalem.

- “the time of year when kings go to war” – like the fighting season in Afghanistan – works around the rainy season, harvest time – their time was no different
- “when kings go to war” – but David doesn’t go to war like he should be, in that pre-emptive strike – he stays behind – meh
- David disconnects – he’s not where he should be, doing what he should be, and therefore, he’s asking for trouble – “idle hands are the devil’s playground”

Late one afternoon David got out of bed after taking a nap and went for a stroll on the roof of the palace. As he looked out over the city, he noticed a woman of unusual beauty taking a bath. (II Samuel 11:1-2, NLT)

- He’s even been taking a nap! He’s bored – the army’s gone, his top advisors are with them, he’s out of the loop – nothing to do but wander and scope – and that’s what gets him into trouble
- David already has many wives – six or seven more than he should – but he can’t resist “pulling a king” and taking another one
- David disconnects – and as a result, leads himself down the worst choices that he will ever make – lust, envy, wrath, pride and ultimately adultery, murder and deceit – and the judgement for these sins affects millions of people for hundreds of years
- (tell the rest of the story)

The gateway sin:

- Why is sloth so bad? What’s the big deal?
- It’s a gateway sin – it’s the one that functions as the doorway to all the rest, especially for the person who has a personal relationship with God

- The opposite of sloth is passion – connectedness – engagement – and those things lead to momentum in our relationship with God, growth with each other, we’re doing what we were meant to do
- But when we disconnect – when we get bored – when we get tired of what we have, for whatever reason, that’s when the danger starts – the lack of passion, the entropy, the apathy
- What can sloth look like for you and me? What are the warning signs?

Distraction:

- Sloth is anti-community – we cloister in our homes and stop talking to each other, even eventually stop thinking and disconnect from ourselves, content in our anaesthesia
- Like Morpheus himself has put us to sleep – we drug ourselves with our entertainment in a desire to escape the pressures that we face every day
- Everyone needs to unwind, but when your whole life is led to do that, then you have a problem – you’re running from something

Peter Kreeft on sloth: “How do we explain the irony that the very society which for the first time has conquered nature by technology and turned the world in a giant fun and games factory, a rich kids’ playroom, the very society which has the least reason to be bored, is the most bored? Why is the American child playing with ten thousand dollars worth of video equipment more bored than an Indian child playing with two sticks and a stone?”

(found in Tomlin 171)

- Disconnectedness leads to isolation, which leads to destruction, one choice at a time
- Unable to process all our distractions – living in a fantasy world, where nothing pleases and things must be more and more extreme to get our attention – where our emotions begin to die

Workaholism:

- Sloth has another angle – it’s not just about being bored or lazy – but you can be a workaholic and be slothful too – because being a workaholic disconnects you from your passion for God by replacing it with another diversion, of a different kind
- We ignore our friends, our families, our own needs, and our relationship with God – and it all begins to deteriorate
- Which can lead to what I think is one of the largest indicators in our society today of where sloth hits us hard:

Burnout:

- And that’s burnout – or at least, being really crispy on the edges for long periods of time
- We work too hard, we get burned out, we try to help too many people, we get burned out, we try to do too much, we get burned out – and we start hating what we loved
- And when our passion leaves us, it leaves hard

- III. – the tide on the beach
 - Ever walked on the beach at the edge of the ocean? Where the waves come in and go out? When you just stand there, and let the wave ebb out, it pulls away from your toes – and then your toes get dug into the sand as a result – slowly but forcefully pulled in
 - The water leaves, and in leaving, leaves you stuck in the sand
 - That to me is just like when we lose our passion

So how do we fight it? What’s the antidote?

- The ancient monks who came up with the list of seven deadly sins also came up with a corresponding list of virtues – antidotes to falling in the different traps
- The one that they assigned to sloth, to *accidia*, was passion – passion for God and passion in our relationship with Him
- We do get tired, we do get faint – but the Bible tells us that when we are tempted to disconnect, that it’s exactly the time to do the opposite – to try to increase our level of intimacy with God

“Don’t you know that the LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of all the earth? He never grows faint or weary. No one can measure the depths of his understanding. He gives power to those who are tired and worn out; he offers strength to the weak. Even youths will become exhausted, and young men will give up. But those who wait on the LORD will find new strength. They will fly high on wings like eagles. They will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not faint” (Isaiah 40:28-31)

- And Jesus gave this amazing invitation:

“Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28)

- Falling in love with Jesus – what does that mean? It means that we make time for Him – talk to Him more – in fact, that’s why Lent exists in the first place
- Music is one avenue towards that – because music helps us get in touch with our own emotions, music that focuses on Jesus can help us express our emotions to Him and help grow that heart connection

Key Thought:

Sin disconnects and destroys, but Jesus offers the antidote: a connection with God that brings health, life and joy.

Don’t just pretend to love others. Really love them. Hate what is wrong. Hold tightly to what is good. Love each other with genuine affection, and take delight in honouring each other. Never be lazy, but work hard and serve the Lord enthusiastically. Rejoice in our confident hope. Be patient in trouble, and keep on praying. **(Romans 12:9-12, NLT)**

Conclusion:

- If we're going to fight sloth, we have to keep our passion – grow it in the good times, surround ourselves in community and friendships that are going to help us keep going in the difficult times, when we're tempted to disengage
- David didn't have anyone to tell him in the middle of his bad decision, that he shouldn't be staying behind – he didn't have a friend to do that – but if he had, things could have been very different
- Engage – grow in community – reconnect – and watch what God can do in you and me

Response: Broken (Lifehouse Video)

- *[show video]*
- Is this you this morning? Has life been getting in the way of spending time with God? Of enjoying Him and the life He is giving you and I? If you're barely hanging on, God wants you to let go and grab onto His hand, instead of whatever it is you're so eager to hold on to – because it's not important next to Him
- Whatever your worries, my cares, our stresses, our problems, our issues, they pale in comparison to the power and strength of God
- *[close in prayer]*