

**Sermon – Pride (Intro Message to Seven Deadly Sin Series)
Sunday February 19, 2022**

Today we're beginning a new sermon series. Our last series was about joy and this series will pick up where we left off. It's a series that logically builds on joy - it's a series on the Seven Deadly Sins.

Now I what you're thinking. That's so strange. What's the connection between joy and the deadly sins? Aren't the deadly sins "anti-joy"? How does talking about sin help us experience joy?

While the connection might not seem obvious, understanding sin is essential to experiencing joy. Why? Because **Our struggle with sin is our greatest obstacle to joy.**

Ernest Becker, a Pulitzer Prize winning writer puts it like this.

The plight of the modern therapeutic individual is that he or she is a sinner with no word for it. (Ernest Becker)

What's the modern therapeutic individual trying to do? They're trying to make life work. Why? So they can be happy. So they can have joy.

But what's our greatest challenge? Our greatest challenge isn't just that we're sinners. Our greatest challenge is that we're sinners and we don't realize it - we don't have the language for it.

Do you know what makes this statement even more incredible? Ernest Becker isn't even a Christian. But here's what he knows. He knows that there's something deeply wrong with us. Something that keeps us from joy. Something the world can't explain.

But even though we can't explain it, we feel it and we see it.

- We see it in our anxiety and depression.
- We see it in our trauma from the past.
- We see it in our strained relationships.

These struggles make life hard and rob us of joy. But according to Becker our real problem is this: We'll never overcome these challenges until we realize they're spiritual issues. We'll never move forward until we realize we're dealing with sin.

That's why we're doing this series. It's called *Taming the Monster Within*. The monster within is of course - sin. And this series will look at our lives through the lens of the seven deadly sins. We're going to name each monster within so that we can overcome it and experience joy.

So how are we going to do this? Here are a couple things we're *not* going to do.

We're not going to make you feel guilty about your sin. This isn't about shaming; this isn't about making you feel bad about yourself. Why?

Because the ground is level at the foot of the cross. We're all sinners in need of God's grace. We're all beggars telling other beggars where to find food.

Someone once said it like this, **The church is a hospital of sinners not a museum of saints. (Pauline Phillips)**

We're also not going to make certain sins bigger so that we can feel better about the "smaller" sins we commit. Have you noticed that whenever Christians talk about sin, they tend to point out the sins in others - usually non-Christians? That's why Christians have a reputation for being *against* people, not *for* people.

A great example of this is the Flanders, the family that live next door to the Simpsons. In one episode, Maude Flanders comes back from Bible camp and when she talks about what she did, she says, I was learning to be more judgmental.

In the New Testament, there was a group of people well known as legal experts and respected for their observance of the Law. This group was called the Pharisees and last week I mentioned that they were constantly condemning tax collectors and other sinners.

And yet, which group did Jesus rebuke? Did he rebuke the sinners or the Pharisees? Jesus never rebuked the tax collectors and sinners. But he did rebuke the Pharisees. He condemned their judgmentalism and lack of love.

So who is this series for? Here's a hint: it's not for your spouse, your kids, your boss, your small group member or your annoying neighbour. So don't send them that sermon on gluttony and tell them they need it.

Who is this series for? This series is for you and it's for me. Together, we're going to shine a light on these sins so that the monster within us loses its power. We're going to name these sins - not to make you feel guilty, not to point out the sin in others, but so that we can bring them into the light and confess them. And in confessing them be free from sin's power so that we can experience God's joy.

At the end of this message, you'll have the opportunity to make a Lent commitment. But right now, let's turn to our passage for this series which is in Colossians 3.

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ²Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. ³For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. ⁴When Christ, who is your^[a] life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

⁵Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. ⁶Because of these, the wrath of God is coming.^[b] ⁷You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. ⁸But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. ⁹Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices ¹⁰and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.

Colossians 3:1-10

Over the next seven weeks we're going to talk about the deadly sins. But what is sin? In the Hebrew, sin is an archery word. In the Greek, it's used for throwing a spear. But in both contexts, sin is having a target to aim for but missing the mark.

In the fourth century, a monk named Evagrius led a group of monks into the desert. They wanted to separate themselves from the sinful world so that they could live holy lives. But ironically, it was in the desert that they were confronted with their own sin. Evagrius wrote down the biggest sins he observed and called them the “eight evil thoughts.”

One of his students, John Cassian brought these ideas to the Western Church where they were translated from Greek to Latin. Later in the sixth century, St. Gregory the Great (who would become Pope Gregory I) took his list and revised it. It became what we now call the Seven Deadly Sins: Pride, Envy, Anger, Sloth, Greed, Gluttony and Lust.

Now I know these sins don't sound very deadly. They actually sound pretty ordinary. Where are the sins like murder, adultery or torture?

What makes these sins deadly isn't how gruesome they appear. What makes them deadly is their power to give birth to more sin. That's why they're also called the source or the cardinal sins.

But out of all the seven sins, one of them is the deadliest of all. One of them is the root of all the other sins. One of them is the “upstream” sin that feeds the other sins. The sin we're going to talk about today is Pride.

Pastor John Stott says that, **Pride is more than the first of the deadly sins; it is itself the essence of all sin. (John Stott)**

C.S. Lewis said, **Pride leads to every other sin: it is the complete anti-God state of mind. (C.S. Lewis)**

Pride was also the first sin ever committed. Satan, the wisest and most beautiful of God's creatures refused to acknowledge God's authority. He was so obsessed with his own beauty and intelligence that he said. **“I will make myself like the Most High.” (Isaiah 14:14).**

The sin that corrupted him was pride – instead of loving God and serving him, Satan wanted to be God.

Pride also caused the fall of the human race. We were created in God's image: to be like him in his character, to serve others in love, to get our needs met by God.

But along comes the serpent.

“Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden’? ...You will not certainly die... For God knows that when you eat from [the tree of the knowledge of good and evil] your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil. (Genesis 3:1, 4-5)

The sin that corrupted the human race was pride – instead of loving God and serving others, human beings wanted to be God.

So what does pride look like?

A man walks into a confession booth. He says to the priest, Forgive me father for I have sinned. In the last 30 minutes, I just committed all seven deadly sins.

The priest was stunned. How is that possible? What happened?

The man says, Well, I was angry and envied my neighbour. So I flirted with his wife. Then I ate all the ice cream in his freezer and I didn't share with anyone. I was also too lazy to clean up.

But that's only 6 of the deadly sins. You forgot pride.

Oh no, said the man. I'm really proud of it!

So what is pride?

Pride is an excessive view of yourself that denies your need for God.

It's essentially cosmic arrogance. It's magnifying your self-love while minimizing your concern for others. It's putting yourself in the place of God and thinking you can run your own life.

That's why at the core, pride is self-idolatry. Because you believe you deserve the honour and glory that belong to God. So here's what we're going to do. Turn to your neighbour and tell them, There is a God and it is not you.

But why is pride so deadly? Pride is so deadly because it's a cancer to your soul. If left undiagnosed and untreated, it will destroy you.

That's why the wisest man who ever lived said: **Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall. (Proverbs 16:18)**

Pride is a cancer. It will eat away your life, destroy your relationships and steal your future. But here's the problem. Pride is so hard to detect. Why? Here are three reasons.

First, **Pride is subtle.**

Other sins are concrete and tangible. You know when you're doing them. But it's not so easy with pride. Just think:

- When someone asks you what you've been up to, and you mention some accomplishments from the past week, are you just giving them an update or are you trying to impress them?
- When you're posting your vacation photos on social media, are you just sharing with your friends or are you trying to make yourself appear a certain way?
- When you tell your small group how God got you through a hard time and you couldn't have done it without him, do you really believe that? Or do you actually believe you did it yourself but you want to appear more spiritual?

It's not so easy as it is, to know when you cross the line into pride. Because unlike other sins, pride isn't concrete, it's subtle.

C.S. Lewis says, Pride attacks us on a sliding scale. It's always a matter of degree. It's open to subjective interpretation and harder to diagnose.

The second reason pride is hard to diagnose is that **Pride is self-deceptive.**

Have you ever noticed that pride is easy to see in others but impossible to see in yourself?

Jeremiah noticed that too. He says, **the pride of your heart has deceived you. (Jer 49:16)**

Why is that? It's because pride exaggerates your self-importance. That's why you always need to lie to others and to yourself to justify your self-worth. That's why you'll always be blind to reality and your true spiritual condition.

Pastor Tim Keller says, We're so instinctively and profoundly self-centered that we don't think we are.

The third reason pride is hard to diagnose is because **Pride capitalizes on your successes.**

Other sins generally tempt you when you feel bad about yourself. But when does pride tempt you? When you feel good about yourself, when you've done well, when you've done good things for God. That's when pride attacks.

- When you get accepted into all the schools you applied to.
- When you get recognized at work for your outstanding performance.
- When you read your Bible everyday and know God's word inside out.
- When you preach a sermon on pride and people tell you how good it is.

Martin Luther spent many years trying to be humble. He wore hair shirts every day, fasted regularly and slept every night on the cold stone floor. Then one day, he realizes, "I finally achieved humility! And when I did I was proud of it!"

Pride is hard to detect because it's subtle, self-deceptive and it capitalizes on your successes.

So how do you know if you struggle with pride? Here are the Top Ten 10 Signs you may be struggling with pride.

1. You don't listen well and people say they don't feel heard.
2. You assume you already know something before someone says it.
3. You compare yourself with others.
4. You like to name drop.
5. You think you're too good to do certain things.
6. You talk about yourself a lot and feel the need to correct people.
7. You don't take constructive criticism well.
8. You feel threatened by people who are better than you.
9. You rarely admit you're wrong or apologize.
10. You don't think you struggle with pride.

These are ten signs that you may struggle with pride. Now raise your hand if at least one of these apply to you. Raise your hand if you were too proud to raise your hand the first time.

Even with having a list like this, pride is still so hard to detect. Why? Because we've gotten so used to hiding it. That's why only the Holy Spirit can expose our pride. That's why we need God's help. So let's do that together now.

I invite all of you to stand up if you're able and we're going to pray this responsive prayer together. I'll pray the part that says ONE and you pray the part that says ALL.

ONE: Search us, O God...

ALL: And know our hearts.

ONE: Test us, O God...

ALL: And know our anxious thoughts.

ONE: See if there is any offensive way in us...

ALL: And lead us in the way everlasting. Amen.

Please be seated.

We've been saying that Pride is an excessive view of yourself that denies your need for God.

It's the deadliest sin because it feeds all the other sins. Pride is a cancer that if left undiagnosed and untreated will destroy your soul.

So what's the antidote to pride? The antidote to pride is humility.

The Apostle Peter says, **God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble."** ⁶ **Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up... (1 Peter 5:5-6)**

You see, if pride is an excessive view of yourself, humility is a realistic self-assessment. If pride denies your need for God, humility acknowledges your total dependence on God. Humility acknowledges:

- that God is sustaining your life even right now at this moment
- that your life isn't a product of your own effort but a gift from God
- that apart from God you can do nothing.

That's humility. But what does humility look like? Is it thinking you're worthless? Is it telling others you're no good?

In his book *The Freedom of Self Forgetfulness*, Tim Keller writes:

"C.S. Lewis in *Mere Christianity* makes a brilliant observation about humility at the very end of his chapter on pride. If we were to meet a truly humble person, Lewis says, we would never come away from meeting them thinking they were humble. They would not be always telling us they were a nobody (because a person who keeps saying they are a nobody is actually a self-obsessed person). The thing we would remember from meeting a truly humble person is how much they seemed to be totally interested in us. Because the essence of **Humility is not thinking more of myself or thinking less of myself - humility is thinking of myself less.** Humility is not needing to think about myself. Not needing to connect things with myself. It is an end to thoughts such as, 'I'm in this room with these people, does that make me look good? Do I want to be here?' True humility means I stop connecting every experience, every conversation, with myself. In fact, I stop thinking about myself."

So what's humility?

Humility isn't thinking more of myself. It's not trying to connect every conversation to me and wondering if I should even be associating with these people.

Humility isn't thinking less of myself. It's not believing I'm worthless and a nobody.

Humility is thinking of myself less. It's not thinking about me and my need to prove myself so that I can focus on others and love them better. Because when you're truly humble,

- You listen well to others because you genuinely care.
- You put the needs and interests of others above your own.
- You compliment others and build them up without feeling threatened.
- You admit your mistakes and say you're sorry.

But how do you do this? How do you do this when everyone else is looking out for themselves? How do you do this when everyone else is trying to make themselves look better? You want to know the secret? Here it is: You can only do this when you know who you are.

- That you're a sinner in need of God's grace.
- That you're a beggar telling other beggars where to find food.
- That you are loved not because of what you do but because of who you are – a beloved child of God.

In the book *Prince Caspian*, the fourth book in the *Chronicles of Narnia* series, Prince Caspian finds out about the many sins committed by his ancestors. He admits to Aslan that he wishes he came from a more honourable lineage.

In response Aslan replies, You come of the Lord Adam and the Lady Eve. And that is both honour enough to erect the head of the poorest beggar and shame enough to bow the shoulders of the greatest emperor on earth.

Humility isn't thinking more of myself or thinking less of myself. Humility is thinking of myself less.

So how do you become humble? You can't. At least not on your own. You can only do this with Jesus' help. Because only Jesus can give you his grace, his wisdom and his power to become truly humble.

Who is Jesus? He's the sinless Son of God. Who loved us while we were still sinners. Who defeated sin so that we might have life.

⁶Who, being in very nature^[a] God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; ⁷rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature^[b] of a servant, being made in human likeness. ⁸And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death— even death on a cross! (Philippians 2:3-8)

How do you become humble? By becoming like Jesus - who humbled himself by becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross.

Lent is the 6-week period leading up to Easter. It's a season to reflect on the cross and to die to sin so that we might have life. It's a season to:

1. Give up something specific that tends to hinder our relationship with Jesus.
2. Take up a spiritual practice or discipline that will help us make more space for Jesus.

Lent is a great opportunity to Make Space for Jesus who helps us overcome our sins so that we can experience his joy.

For example, let's say you give up social media for Lent. You feel you're too obsessed with your image and what people think about you. In its place, you could take up morning and evening prayer using the Lectio 365 app. This will help you focus your mind and heart on Jesus so that you're not as concerned about what others think.

That's just one example of what a Lent commitment can look like. There are lots of things you can do.

We're going to give you some time now to make your Lent commitment for 2023.

<https://cornerstonechurch.ca/lent-commitment/>

[Note to Visual Worship Operator: please create QR code, display with URL and leave slide on screen during Lent Commitment exercise.]

If you're here in person, you would have noticed two cards on your seat when you came in. If you don't have a card, just raise your hand and an usher will bring you one.

Simply follow the instructions and fill out both cards. One of the cards is for you to keep as a reminder. The other one is for when you're ready, to come up and lay it down at the cross. It's a tangible and meaningful way of saying, Jesus I come to you and I lay down my life, I lay down my commitment to you at your cross.

If you're watching online, we'd love for you to participate as well. Simply go to the page you see on the screen.

There, you'll find instructions as well as resource options. You'll also find an online commitment form to fill out.

For all of you, there are some really great Lent resources on our webpage that include practices for growing in joy as well as some really great Lent ideas for kids. So please check them out.

May this season of Lenten be for us a way to Make Space for Jesus who helps us to overcome our sin so that we can experience his joy.

We'll give you a good 6-7 minutes now to go to the webpage and make your Lent commitment. If you're here in person, when you're ready, please come up to the front and lay down your card at the cross.