
★ A GUIDE TO CARE FOR YOUR SOUL ★










Make Me Clean

MATTHEW 8:2

Laundry

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Let's do some Laundry!



BY BRETT HILLIARD, SENIOR PASTOR

From insidious comparisons which are fuelled by envy to atomic explosions of anger to the ego worship that is often unchecked pride, the results of sin are very real and present in our lives. But we live in a world in which we don't like to talk about sin. In fact, we've created other words to make it a bit more palatable such as "dysfunction", "mistake" and "disease". We are quick to shift the blame to our background, our environment, or other people's faults. In reality, we sin.

The presence of a sinister spiritual force that wreaks havoc in our lives is rarely mentioned in today's world. But the truth of the matter is that people do bad and stupid things, they sin, as a result of evil that exists in the world and in their hearts.

So we need to be prepared. We need to be equipped. We need to be sober-minded. We must "*abstain from the passions of the flesh which wage war against your souls*" (1 Peter 2:11).

In 590AD, Pope Gregory popularised teaching that had been around for centuries — the concept of 7 deadly sins. There are certainly more than seven ways to ruin your life, but these categories at least provide for us a way to examine our own weaknesses, and hopefully prevent the destruction that always comes from sin.

Pride / Envy / Sloth / Gluttony / Lust / Wrath / Greed

These seven topics will help us as we examine our own hearts, and seek to purify our core beliefs and enjoy the intimacy with God that He longs for us to have.

As the apostle Paul wrote to his disciple, Timothy:

...if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonourable, he will be a vessel for honourable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work.

2 Timothy 2:21-22

Let's get rid of the filth of envy. Let's purify ourselves from pride. Let's clean our minds of impure thoughts.

Let's do some laundry, shall we?

Brett

BEFORE A DOWNFALL THE HEART IS HAUGHTY,
BUT HUMILITY COMES BEFORE HONOUR.
PROVERBS 18:12



Pride to Humility

100% Supernatural

SESSION 1 / PRIDE

Soaking: An Introduction

There is no other faith on earth that places more value on human beings than the Christian faith. We believe humans are so valuable to God that He even sent His only Son Jesus to redeem us. What other evidence do we need to convince us of our value?

Despite that, psychologists observe that low self-esteem is a pervasive psychological dysfunction and if this problem is addressed, many other psychological issues will diminish substantially or disappear completely.

We want to feel good about ourselves. Enter "feel good about yourself" in Google and it comes up with 358 million entries. Enter "it's all about me" and you get 10 times more entries. On the opposite end of the spectrum of low self-esteem is pride. Pride says, "It's all about me." Pride is the most insidious of all vices. Many of us are willing to confess any vice but pride.

Yet, pride seems to be the root of many mistakes. Proverbs 16:18 says, "Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall." Pride corrodes the heart and blinds the eyes. A prideful person often sees others as below him/herself, and (wrongly) thinks him/herself superior.

Both low self-esteem and pride have the same common root – a wrong understanding of self.

Heat Setting: A Warm Up

Think of a movie character who you consider to be prideful. Share with the group some of his/her behaviours. Discuss why such behaviours are detrimental.





Spin Cycle: Diving in Deeper

Today's study will focus on a person who was perhaps one of the most successful, powerful, famous, competent men in ancient history. He conquered a fierce empire. He ruled a large land. He built one of the Seven Wonders of the World, the Hanging Gardens of Babylon. Yet, his pride reduced him to an extremely miserable status. His name was King Nebuchadnezzar.

¹In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. ²And the Lord delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along with some of the articles from the temple of God. These he carried off to the temple of his god in Babylonia and put in the treasure house of his god. Daniel 1:1-2

King Nebuchadnezzar (c.64-562) was perhaps the most famous king of the Babylonian Empire. He conquered the world power at the time, the Assyrian Empire, and left its capital, Nineveh, in ruins. He later conquered Judah, the southern kingdom of the Israelites, and exiled many people back to his Babylonian kingdom. The famous Old Testament character Daniel was among those exiled.

Ask a group member to read Daniel 2:1-13 in a dramatic way while others listen:

¹In the second year of his reign, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams; his mind was troubled and he could not sleep. ²So the king summoned the magicians, enchanters, sorcerers and astrologers to tell him what he had dreamed. When they came in and stood before the king, ³he said to them, "I have had a dream that troubles me and I want to know what it means." ⁴Then the astrologers answered the king, "May the king live forever! Tell your servants the dream, and we will interpret it."

⁵The king replied to the astrologers, "This is what I have firmly decided: If you do not tell me what my dream was and interpret it, I will have you cut into pieces and your houses turned into piles of rubble. ⁶But if you tell me the dream and explain it, you will receive from me gifts and rewards and great honour. So tell me the dream and interpret it for me."

⁷Once more they replied, "Let the king tell his servants the dream, and we will interpret it."

⁸Then the king answered, "I am certain that you are trying to gain time, because you realize that this is what I have firmly decided: ⁹If you do not tell me the dream, there is only one penalty for you. You have conspired to tell me misleading and wicked things, hoping

the situation will change. So then, tell me the dream, and I will know that you can interpret it for me."

¹⁰The astrologers answered the king, "There is no one on earth who can do what the king asks! No king, however great and mighty, has ever asked such a thing of any magician or enchanter or astrologer. ¹¹What the king asks is too difficult. No one can reveal it to the king except the gods, and they do not live among humans." ¹²This made the king so angry and furious that he ordered the execution of all the wise men of Babylon. ¹³So the decree was issued to put the wise men to death, and men were sent to look for Daniel and his friends to put them to death. Daniel 2:1-13

In Chapter 2, King Nebuchadnezzar had a bad dream. As if that was not enough, he forgot what the dream was about! So, he asked the astrologers and magicians in his court to tell him both his dream and the interpretation of it. Of course they protested vehemently at such an impossible task. However, the King threatened to kill them all if they were not able to tell him his dream and the interpretation.

- What did the astrologers say when the King asked them to tell him his dream and the interpretation? (Daniel 2:10-11) What would you have said if you were in their shoes?

This is when Daniel came to centre stage. Daniel prayed to God and God told Daniel both the dream and the interpretation. Then, Daniel went and relayed God's message to the King. What the gods of Babylon could not do, Daniel's God could!

⁴⁶Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell prostrate before Daniel and paid him honour and ordered that an offering and incense be presented to him. ⁴⁷The king said to Daniel, "Surely your God is the God of gods and the Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries, for you were able to reveal this mystery." Daniel 2:46-47

- What was King Nebuchadnezzar's response? How would you have responded?



In Chapter 3, Daniel's three friends were thrown into a blazing furnace but were miraculously protected by a divine figure. Seeing this miracle, King Nebuchadnezzar broke out in praise of God.

²⁸ Then Nebuchadnezzar said, "Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who has sent his angel and rescued his servants! They trusted in him and defied the king's command and were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God.²⁹ Therefore I decree that the people of any nation or language who say anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego be cut into pieces and their houses be turned into piles of rubble, for no other god can save in this way."

³⁰ Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the province of Babylon. Daniel 3:28-30

- Based on the two experiences above, what gave King Nebuchadnezzar reason to believe that Daniel's God is powerful? In your own words, how would you say that the King has experienced God in a personal way?

Up to this point, we have two observations about the King: a) He is a competent and successful man. In whatever measure, he is a role model for anyone who wants to do something great in life. b) He had multiple personal experiences with God. He saw God at work many times, and he was convinced that God is great and awesome.

You would expect that with such a background, King Nebuchadnezzar would learn to relate to God in a humble way. However his pride got the best of him and his destruction was imminent. Yet, God was gracious to warn him.

Daniel Chapter 4 is written as a first person account. King Nebuchadnezzar was recounting what had already happened to him. Daniel 4:1-18 is a dream through which God warned the King. Then, 4:19-27 is the interpretation.

Read Daniel 4:28-37 together.

²⁸ All this happened to King Nebuchadnezzar.²⁹ Twelve months later, as the king was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon,³⁰ he said, "Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?"

³¹ Even as the words were on his lips, a voice came from heaven, "This is what is decreed for you, King Nebuchadnezzar: Your royal authority has been taken from you.

³² You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like the ox. Seven times will pass by for you until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and gives them to anyone he wishes."

³³ Immediately what had been said about Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled. He was driven away from people and ate grass like the ox. His body was drenched with the dew of heaven until his hair grew like the feathers of an eagle and his nails like the claws of a bird.⁴ At the end of that time, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven, and my sanity was restored. Then I praised the Most High; I honoured and glorified him who lives forever. His dominion is an eternal dominion; his kingdom endures from generation to generation.³⁵ All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: "What have you done?"

³⁶ At the same time that my sanity was restored, my honour and splendour were returned to me for the glory of my kingdom. My advisers and nobles sought me out, and I was restored to my throne and became even greater than before.³⁷ Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just. And those who walk in pride he is able to humble. Daniel 4:28-37

Sometimes people will say that if they know the exact consequence of a certain action, then, they will act according to what they know.

- Read Daniel 4:29-30. In your own words, how did Nebuchadnezzar perceive himself?
- Why do you think that King Nebuchadnezzar still sinned even though he had such a clear warning from God?

King Nebuchadnezzar may be suffering from zoanthropy (a person believes himself/herself to be an animal and acts accordingly) or lycanthropy (a psychiatric syndrome in which a person believes that he/she can transform into a lower animal.)

- What was Nebuchadnezzar's personal judgment on why he suffered such a consequence?
- Name a few possible purposes for what God put Nebuchadnezzar through.

Pressed: From Pride to Humility

- What is the relationship between "humility" and "self-confidence"? Are they in conflict with one another? Or do they complement one another?

Read Romans 12:3:

For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you.

- How does this passage define humility?
- According to this passage, how can humility develop in a believer?

Before Paul gives this exhortation for humility horizontally amongst believers, he says in Romans 12:1, *"Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship."*

- Name as many ways as possible how this exhortation for our vertical relationship with God develops humility in a believer.

Ready-to-Wear: Living it Out

C. S. Lewis once said, "Humility is not thinking less of yourself but thinking of yourself less."

- In what areas are you tempted to be self-absorbed?
- How do you worry that others won't give you enough credit for what you have done?
- How would thinking of yourself less help with worrying about getting credit?
- How can we become people who think of ourselves less?

Here are some practical things you can do to help grow in humility.

- Do something good for other people but make sure no one else knows. (Matthew 6:3-4)
- In an appropriate time and setting, disclose some of your weaknesses and ask for prayer. (James 5:16)
- In your next social gathering or care group time, take initiative to do something for others without being asked. (Matthew 20:28)
- Share your appreciation with 2 people this week, telling them something that you have learned from them.
- Pray for a person that you don't like. Pray that God will change your heart.
- For married couples: list 20 things you like or appreciate about your spouse.
- Take some time to think of two concrete ways that you can grow in your humility. Apply one of the examples above to your life or come up with your own way to grow in humility. Share them with your group.

Scripture Memory

Before a downfall the heart is haughty, but humility comes before honour.

Proverbs 18:12



I HAVE LEARNED THE SECRET OF BEING CONTENT
IN ANY AND EVERY SITUATION, WHETHER WELL FED OR HUNGRY,
WHETHER LIVING IN PLENTY OR IN WANT.
I CAN DO ALL THIS THROUGH HIM WHO GIVES ME STRENGTH.

PHILIPPIANS 4:12-13



Envy to Contentment

100% Supernatural

SESSION 2 / ENVY

Soaking: An Introduction

This week we are looking at envy, one of the most powerful human emotions. Countless men and women have fallen prey to feelings of envy, which can lead to deadly results. There are several well-known examples of this. In the fairy tale “Snow White,” the Queen is envious of Snow White’s beauty, and seeks to kill the young woman in order to remain “fairest of them all.” In Genesis, envy of God’s favour for his brother’s sacrifice is the motivation for Cain’s murder of Abel.

Envy occurs when people find themselves experiencing an overwhelming emotion due to someone else owning or possessing desirable items or attributes that they do not. It is the strong desire for others’ traits, status, property, abilities, or situation.

Hong Kong can be a breeding ground for envy! Everywhere you go, you will find someone who has something you would like - a better job, better home, nicer watch, those shoes you couldn’t afford, that latest hair style, the bigger flat. While it is okay to desire to be better, we move from desire to envy when there are feelings of lower self worth, emotional pain or impairment of relationships because others are seen to be better.

Envy is more than desire. It leads to a sense of emptiness inside one’s self, a blindness [the Latin for envy is “nonsight”] to who we are and what we actually have! We need to be on guard against the deadly sin of envy.

Heat Setting: A Warm Up

A well-known hit song by the rock band U2 has these lyrics: “I have climbed the highest mountains. I have run through the fields... I have run, I have crawled, I have scaled city walls... But I still haven’t found what I’m looking for!” So many people are searching, running, scaling, looking for something, but not finding it. What are some of the things that people in Hong Kong eagerly look for?

What areas of life do people tend to envy most? Are you personally prone to envy in any area more than others?

Laundry: Envy to Contentment





Spin Cycle: Diving in Deeper

Certainly one person caught up in envy was King Saul. Let's take a look at his life and delve into a few details in his story that captures envy in some detail.

Saul was the first King of Israel, reigning from 1096-1056 BC. He was a handsome, tall man – “a head taller than any of the others” (1 Samuel 10:23). The people of Israel had for centuries been governed and rescued from military crises by leaders known as judges. But this system eventually lost support and the people demanded that the last of the judges, the prophet Samuel, change the system and name a king. At God's direction, Samuel selected Saul. When a critical situation surfaced, Saul rose to the occasion and assembled an army to defeat the enemy, thereby becoming a hero. He was then confirmed as King with great celebration. (1 Samuel 11:15)

Eventually Saul became unfit for leadership, repeatedly placing pride and greed above his service to God, Saul began to ignore his kingly duties. After repeated acts of foolishness and not carrying out God's instructions (1 Samuel 15:11), God's spirit leaves Saul and he is tormented with bouts of melancholy. His attendants assist Saul in enlisting a teenaged, gifted musician, named David, to soothe him.

1 Samuel 16:21-23 states:

²¹ David came to Saul and entered his service. Saul liked him very much, and David became one of his armour-bearers. ²² Then Saul sent word to Jesse, saying, “Allow David to remain in my service, for I am pleased with him.”

²³ Whenever the spirit from God came on Saul, David would take up his lyre and play. Then relief would come to Saul; he would feel better, and the evil spirit would leave him.

- While Saul's envy of David had not yet explicitly surfaced, do you think he might have had some degree of envy of this young man who had such wonderful talents used by God? What does envy look like when it is just forming?
- Saul was at a time in his life when he was not at his best! This led to emotional and relational problems. What are some of the types of people, talents or abilities that you might be prone to envy when you are not at your best?
- Depression can precede or accompany envy. What else have you seen to accompany envy?

The story of Saul and David goes on to record how one summer when two armies are engaged in battle, a huge Philistine champion named Goliath roamed about challenging any Israelite to one-on-one combat. The Philistine said, “This day I defy the armies of Israel! Give me a man and let us fight each other.” On hearing the Philistine's words, Saul and all the Israelites were dismayed and terrified. (1 Samuel 17:10-11)

Only the young boy, David, was willing to stand against the giant. The almost humorous scene as told in 1 Samuel 17:38-49 tells of him not being able to wear the weighty armour and proceeding with only a shepherd's sling with people wondering who in the world is this kid? David killed Goliath and became a hero, going on to lead many successful battles. 1 Samuel 18 records what happened next.

⁶ When the men were returning home after David had killed the Philistine, the women came out from all the towns of Israel to meet King Saul with singing and dancing, with joyful songs and with timbrels and lyres. ⁷ As they danced, they sang:

“Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands.”

⁸ Saul was very angry; this refrain displeased him greatly. “They have credited David with tens of thousands,” he thought, “but me with only thousands. What more can he get but the kingdom?” ⁹ And from that time on Saul kept a close eye on David.

¹⁰ The next day an evil spirit God came forcefully on Saul. He was prophesying in his house, while David was playing the lyre, as he usually did. Saul had a spear in his hand ¹¹ and he hurled it, saying to himself, “I'll pin David to the wall.” But David eluded him twice.

¹² Saul was afraid of David, because the Lord was with David but had departed from Saul.

¹³ So he sent David away from him and gave him command over a thousand men, and David led the troops in their campaigns. ¹⁴ In everything he did he had great success, because the Lord was with him. ¹⁵ When Saul saw how successful he was, he was afraid of him. 1 Samuel 18:6-15

- Saul became jealous and fearful of David. Discuss why? Put yourself in the situation and try to imagine what this was like for both of these men. What applications can you make to your life?



Envy can lead to destructive behaviour. Though King Saul had nothing to fear from David, Saul's suspicion became jealousy and anger, his jealousy and anger became hate, his hate became imagined danger, and imagined danger made David an enemy to be destroyed. So he sought to destroy David before David could destroy him.

- Do you know of any people whose jealousy or envy has grown to the point of causing destruction? What principles can we learn from this?

Pressed: From Envy to Contentment

King Saul lived out his later life questioning God's decisions and actions and justifying his own. He was consumed with envy, fear, and anger – and these changed the direction of his life. David was the opposite. He was not blameless and had times of fear, but he believed in God's promises even when the situation looked bad. He had confidence in God, such as when he faced Goliath. He was willing to let God have control and this allowed him to be content with his place in life. Unlike Saul, David was content to leave God's business in God's hands.

- On a scale of 1 to 10, how fully do you trust God in your life right now?

There is an incredible power to contentment. Being content is not a matter of never trying to improve your life. There is nothing wrong with wanting to improve. Striving for a goal, enjoying a challenge, improving your business or society is not counter to being content. Contentment is a matter of being content with your life and what you have, while also being willing to improve, grow and stretch as God directs your paths.

- On a scale of 1 to 10, how content are you with your life this past month?
- Discuss this statement: "You can choose to be content, just as you can choose to be happy, and if you choose to be content, you will be happy."

Paul, the apostle, learned the secret of being content. He knew how to be content whether he had plenty or whether he was in need. In Philippians 4:11-13, he writes:

¹¹ I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. ¹² I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. ¹³ I can do all this through him who gives me strength.

- According to Paul, what is the secret of being content?

True contentment lies in the strength of God. Because of God's strength, Paul was enabled to focus on how he was to live his life, not on what he had or in any present situation. Paul gave God the place of priority in his life – knowing that God would sustain him and ultimately supply what he needed.

Envy and out-of-balance desire for more "stuff" can often be a longing to fill an empty place in one's life. Contentment is the antidote to such envy – contentment centred in putting Jesus Christ first in your life. None of us are immune to wants and desires. However, there is an incredible power, as Paul learned, in contentment centred in Christ.

- How content are you with your position and priorities?
- How content are you with your finances, job, family situation, relationships?



Ready to Wear: Living it Out

The ancient philosopher Cicero made the following statement related to contentment: “If you have a garden and a library, you have everything you need.” He likely had to struggle a life-time to come up with such a simple statement of what was essential for contentment.

- Can you come up with a statement of what you need to be content with your life?

Scripture and worship songs can assist us in staying focused on the essentials and being content.

- Do you have a special song or Scripture that assists you to stay content?
- What insights into being content can you find in the song, “*Blessed Assurance*” by Fanny Crosby (1873)?

*Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine!
Oh, what a foretaste of glory divine!
Heir of salvation, purchase of God,
Born of His Spirit, washed in His blood.
This is my story, this is my song,
Praising my Saviour all the day long.
Perfect submission, perfect delight,
Visions of rapture now burst on my sight;
Angels, descending, bring from above
Echoes of mercy, whispers of love.
Perfect submission, all is at rest,
I in my Saviour am happy and blest,
Watching and waiting, looking above,
Filled with His goodness, lost in His love.*

- How can reflecting and experiencing the truths of what we have in Christ help in times of envy?

If you find yourself having trouble being content, try one of these:

- Count your blessings
Make a list of the good things in your life.
- Appreciate your life
Take time to reflect on your life with gratitude for what and who is around you and part of your life.
- Enjoy the simple things
Things that are free: walks, running, conversations, playing sports, board games.
- Stop, breathe, smile
Take a deep breath, remind yourself of the basics, and then smile; it will change your outlook.
- Consider why you want something
Wait a month to make certain you need it.
- Appreciate someone
Relationship, not things, are at the centre of true contentment – spend time with special people, join a care group, send a thank you, give a hug.

Discuss with each other experiences where an example above did make a difference in growing contentment.



Scripture Memory

I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength.

Philippians 4:12-13



A PERSON CAN DO NOTHING BETTER THAN TO EAT AND DRINK
AND FIND SATISFACTION IN THEIR OWN TOIL.
THIS TOO, I SEE, IS FROM THE HAND OF GOD,
FOR WITHOUT HIM, WHO CAN EAT OR FIND ENJOYMENT?

ECCLESIASTES 2:24-25



Sloth to Work

100% Supernatural

SESSION 3 / SLOTH

Soaking: An Introduction

Sloth was one of the Seven Deadly Sins before it was the name of a mammal. But when explorers discovered the medium-sized creature with long arms and specialized claws that allow it to live in and hang easily from trees, they also noted that it was extremely slow-moving and apparently lazy, and thus gave it the name “sloth.” The sloth can be misunderstood though. Its extreme slow motion is said to be beneficial: with a slow metabolism, it requires less food to live. The slowness, so slow it can appear like stillness, helps it blend in with its surroundings and is therefore a good defense mechanism against predators.

It’s also easy to draw quick conclusions about the Deadly Sin of Sloth. We often think of sloth simply as laziness, but other words have been associated with sloth and give more insight into the sin: malaise, apathy, boredom and spiritual frustration. An ancient term for it was “acedia,” which was a kind of listlessness, not unlike depression. So sloth is actually a very nuanced and complex idea, not easily categorized as laziness. The Desert Father, Evagrius, wrote about “Eight Deadly Thoughts” in the fourth century (which were adapted by Pope Gregory in AD 590 to become the Seven Deadly Sins). Evagrius was not as much concerned about the outward sinful behaviours, but on the thought patterns that formed the “soil” in which these sins grow. When we look more closely at these thought patterns, we can see that sloth ultimately comes from missing or denying our call from God.

Heat Setting: A Warm Up

What are some ways you relax and unwind after a stressful day or stressful week?

Describe the last time you went through a moment or period of laziness.

Describe a time you felt a deep weariness that caused you not to care about things.





Spin Cycle: Diving in Deeper

You may be surprised to see how the main character of this study, Jonah, struggled. You might not have thought of Jonah as a lazy person, and he wasn't. He was slothful. The fact is that sloth is related to calling. A definition of sloth could be avoidance or ignorance of one's calling, that thing that gives us fulfilling purpose. More on this later.

Have someone read 2 Kings 14:25 aloud.

[Jeroboam, king of Israel] was the one who restored the boundaries of Israel from Lebo Hamath to the Dead Sea, in accordance with the word of the Lord, the God of Israel, spoken through his servant Jonah son of Amittai, the prophet from Gath Hopher.

Jonah was a prophet who ministered around 800-750 BC during the reign of King Jeroboam II, who is the subject of the above passage from 2 Kings. Under his reign, Israel regained territory from its enemies and restored its borders and boundaries, so it was a time of prosperity and optimism, especially when this was foretold by Jonah's prophecy. Prosperity and peace led to a sense that God had finally found favour with his chosen people. But, as often happens with Israel, this led to complacency. People believed a Day of Judgment was coming when other sinful nations would be struck down, while Israel itself would be saved. But Israel failed to see "the log in its own eye" in their continuing immorality and disobedience to God, and therefore prophets like Amos and Hosea – contemporaries of Jonah – were sent to warn Israel that God will not spare even His own nation from judgment. (e.g. Amos 6:1, 7:8) It is in this context that God sends Jonah to warn Nineveh.

Have someone read Jonah chapter 1:

¹ *The word of the Lord came to Jonah son of Amittai: ² "Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me."*

³ *But Jonah ran away from the Lord and headed for Tarshish. He went down to Joppa, where he found a ship bound for that port. After paying the fare, he went aboard and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the Lord.*

⁴ *Then the Lord sent a great wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up. ⁵ All the sailors were afraid and each cried out to his own god. And they threw the cargo into the sea to lighten the ship.*

But Jonah had gone below deck, where he lay down and fell into a deep sleep. ⁶ The captain went to him and said, "How can you sleep? Get up and call on your god! Maybe he will take notice of us so that we will not perish."

⁷ *Then the sailors said to each other, "Come, let us cast lots to find out who is responsible for this calamity." They cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah. ⁸ So they asked him, "Tell us, who is responsible for making all this trouble for us? What kind of work do you do? Where do you come from? What is your country? From what people are you?"*

⁹ *He answered, "I am a Hebrew and I worship the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land."*

¹⁰ *This terrified them and they asked, "What have you done?" (They knew he was running away from the Lord, because he had already told them so.)*

¹¹ *The sea was getting rougher and rougher. So they asked him, "What should we do to you to make the sea calm down for us?"*

¹² *"Pick me up and throw me into the sea," he replied, "and it will become calm. I know that it is my fault that this great storm has come upon you."*

¹³ *Instead, the men did their best to row back to land. But they could not, for the sea grew even wilder than before. ¹⁴ Then they cried out to the Lord, "Please, Lord, do not let us die for taking this man's life. Do not hold us accountable for killing an innocent man, for you, Lord, have done as you pleased."¹⁵ Then they took Jonah and threw him overboard, and the raging sea grew calm. ¹⁶ At this the men greatly feared the Lord, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows to him. ¹⁷ Now the Lord provided a huge fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.*

Jonah 1:1-17

- What was Jonah's calling and what was God's purpose for this?
- What is Jonah's response? Why do you think he does this?



At first glance, we may not associate Jonah with sloth or laziness, but pastor and writer Chip Ingram has a helpful insight to laziness. He defines laziness as, “not doing what you should be doing at the time.” This is certainly an apt description of Jonah in Chapter 1 and his actions give us a fuller understanding of the problem of sloth. Sloth is not simply avoiding or escaping work - it’s avoiding important things, priorities and common sense things that need to be done at that moment. It even seems to be a lack of awareness or willful ignorance of basic necessities. King Solomon often addresses the ways of the “sluggard”.

Below are a few of the Proverbs that address sloth and the sluggard for you to discuss.

- Which ones seem to apply specifically to Jonah’s actions on the ship? Why?

Proverbs 10:4-5

Lazy hands make for poverty, but diligent hands bring wealth. He who gathers crops in summer is a prudent son, but he who sleeps during harvest is a disgraceful son.

Proverbs 13:4

A sluggard’s appetite is never filled, but the desires of the diligent are fully satisfied.

Proverbs 19:15

Laziness brings on deep sleep, and the shiftless go hungry.

Proverbs 15:19

The way of the sluggard is blocked with thorns, but the path of the upright is a highway.

Proverbs 20:4

Sluggards do not plough in season; so at harvest time they look but find nothing.

Proverbs 21:25-26

The craving of a sluggard will be the death of him, because his hands refuse to work. All day long he craves for more, but the righteous give without sparing.

Proverbs 26:13

A sluggard is wiser in his own eyes than seven people who answer discreetly.

- The ancient term for sloth was “acedia,” (ah-SEE-dee-uh) and it has many layers of meaning. In addition to laziness, it also means indifference, boredom, dejection and apathy. Can you find examples of “acedia” in Jonah’s actions in Chapter 1?
- What is Jonah’s response to the sailors’ question about how to make the sea calm down? What does this seem to show about Jonah’s state of mind? (“Pick me up and throw me in the sea and it will be come calm.” 1:12; this seems to show indifference and apathy about life.) What is the sailors’ response?

It’s interesting that even though the sailors know that this is a severe storm and they try to do everything to save themselves, they will not throw Jonah overboard. Instead they do their best to row back to land through the storm (1:13), showing more concern and empathy for Jonah than he does himself. Only when they realize that there is no other choice do they do it, and even then with great reluctance and repentance. The pagan sailors are more righteous than the prophet of God!

- When the sailors ask “What do you do?”, how does Jonah answer? What does he leave out? What doesn’t sit right with you about what he does say?

Read Jonah 3:1-6

¹ Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time: ² “Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you.” ³ Jonah obeyed the word of the Lord and went to Nineveh. Now Nineveh was a very large city; it took three days to go through it. ⁴ Jonah began by going a day’s journey into the city, proclaiming, “Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown.” ⁵ The Ninevites believed God. A fast was proclaimed, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth. ⁶ When Jonah’s warning reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust.

- What happens when Jonah accepts and obeys God’s calling to preach to Nineveh? How successful was Jonah in his mission to the Ninevites?



Remember the ancient term for sloth, “acedia”? What made this a “deadly sin” was not just that it makes us unproductive and lazy, but that it also implies an indifference and apathy about – even rejection of – spiritual good and God.

Read Jonah 3:10 – 4:3.

^{3:10} *When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened.* ^{4:1} *But to Jonah this seemed very wrong, and he became angry.* ² *He prayed to the Lord, “Isn’t this what I said, Lord, when I was still at home? That is what I tried to forestall by fleeing to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity.”* ³ *Now, Lord, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live.”*

- How did Jonah respond when God showed mercy to the Ninevites? How can you relate to Jonah’s attitude?



Pressed: From Sloth to Work

The antidote for sloth is work. But in the same way that sloth is not simply the equivalent of laziness, work is not simply our day job. God did not intend work to be hard, difficult and labourious. It was and is meant to be a creative and glorifying endeavour, the fulfillment of our purpose.

Read Genesis 2:1-7, 15.

^{2:1} *Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array.* ² *By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work.* ³ *Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.* ⁴ *This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created, when the Lord God made the earth and the heavens.* ⁵ *Now no shrub had yet appeared on the earth and no plant had yet sprung up, for the Lord God had not sent rain on the earth and there was no one to work the ground,* ⁶ *but streams came up from the earth and watered the whole surface of the ground.* ⁷ *Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.* ¹⁵ *The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.*

- Where do you see “work” mentioned in this passage?

The Hebrew word for work in these passages is “avad”, which also means “to serve” in the sense of serving God, i.e. to worship. The pictograph of work/“avad” suggests a path leading to the tent or door of God. So work and service is how we come before the Lord in worship.

After sin entered the world through Adam and Eve’s choices, Genesis 3:17-19 says,

¹⁷ *To Adam [God] said, “Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You must not eat from it,’*

“Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life.

¹⁸ *It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field.*

¹⁹ *By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.”*

- How does the same job of working the earth look different in Genesis 2:15 and Genesis 3:17-19? What changed?



For Christians, we are always first and foremost called to God and into a relationship with Him. This is our salvation and ultimate fulfillment. As we saw from passages above, the entrance of sin into this world and into our lives meant we could neither relate to God or this world rightly. Even though God cursed Adam, and all humans to follow, with frustrating their work, it was also a form of provision. If humans could find fulfillment through work alone then they would never seek God in their sinful state. God knew that and even in the Garden of Eden, He promised and prepared the way for good to overcome evil — for Christ to overcome Satan. In Genesis 3:14-15 God gives this curse to the serpent:

*“Cursed are you above all livestock
and all wild animals!
You will crawl on your belly
and you will eat dust
all the days of your life.
And I will put enmity
between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and hers;
he will crush your head,
and you will strike his heel.”*

In these verses, God foreshadows how Jesus Christ would be born of the Virgin Mary, and that Christ would crush Satan’s head underneath His foot. Christ would be victorious!

- How does knowing that God will take care of sin in us and in this world change the way you work? or the way you struggle with sloth?
- How could this relationship with God empower you and heal you against all the forms of sloth talked about in this study?

Work as God intends it to be is more than just punching the clock for a pay cheque. From the very beginning, God gives us a high calling – a mandate – to glorify Him. Ephesians 4:1 exhorts us to “live a life worthy of the calling you have received.” Our word “vocation” touches this idea of calling and work. It comes from the Latin root “voca”, which means a calling or summons, often by name. God knows each one of us and created us each uniquely in our gifting so when we receive a job or task from God, it is something custom-made for us. And when we discover our calling – and if we embrace it – it is deeply fulfilling and satisfying.

- Try to apply this “antidote” for sloth to Jonah and the lazy person in Proverbs. Do you think it is an appropriate and effective antidote?



Living It Out

A quote attributed to Frederick Buechner says, “The place God calls you is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.” Pastor and author Bob Roberts Jr. says, “Vocation is formed when passion and skills come together to fulfill what God has called you to do. Every follower of Christ has a deep longing that comes from God, a passion that we need to identify.”

- If you do not know your calling from God, how does the lack of it affect you?
- If you know what your calling is from God, what is it and how does it affect your every day life?
- How are you able to live out your calling in your “day job”? How about in your personal time?



Scripture Memory

*A person can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in their own toil.
This too, I see, is from the hand of God, for without him, who can eat or find enjoyment?*

Ecclesiastes 2: 24-25



FOR THIS VERY REASON, MAKE EVERY EFFORT TO
 ADD TO YOUR FAITH GOODNESS; AND TO GOODNESS, KNOWLEDGE;
 AND TO KNOWLEDGE, SELF-CONTROL;
 AND TO SELF-CONTROL, PERSEVERANCE;
 AND TO PERSEVERANCE, GODLINESS;
 AND TO GODLINESS, MUTUAL AFFECTION;
 AND TO MUTUAL AFFECTION, LOVE.

2 PETER 1:5-7



Gluttony to Self-Control

100% Supernatural

SESSION 4 / GLUTTONY

Soaking: An Introduction

Everyone enjoys a good meal, right? There is something special about sitting down to your favourite food. Your brain immediately starts triggering involuntary responses. Your stomach leaps for joy, your salivary glands start going crazy, and your nose is very pleased with the aroma of this delicious feast before you. This is going to be fun.

However, maybe because it tastes a little too good, it's hard to stop eating. And then the guilt sets in. How many calories did I just consume? How many kilometers do I need to run to burn this meal off? Oh, dear...

Gluttony is not a sin that many people talk about. If we eat too much, we usually laugh it off – mostly because we've all been there. And then, when we see a friend gaining weight, we don't say too much about it. It's just food, right?

But gluttony isn't just about food. It's about a lack of self control. It's the idea that, "if it makes you happy, it can't be that bad." And advertising only helps to entice you. "You deserve a break" and "Treat yourself" are messages that bombard us. However, today we will think about how limiting our desires can help us grow in Christ.

Heat Setting: A Warm Up

Talk about your favourite holidays and how much food is involved.

Why is food such an important part of family gatherings and holidays?

What are some of your "guilty pleasure" foods?



Spin Cycle: Diving in Deeper

In this study, rather than focusing on one character, we will look at a group of characters - the people who make up the church at Corinth - The Corinthians. The Apostle Paul established this church in his second missionary journey. He was effectively their pastor. He set up the church, helped them get going, and then moved on in his journey. But, as the saying goes, while the cat is away, the mice will play.

Paul received reports that the Corinthians began to be divided on their faith. Because of so many different spiritual influences in the city of Corinth, Paul was being careful to make sure they were of the same mind on their beliefs (1 Corinthians 1:10-17). But something else being reported was the Corinthians' immorality. He was deeply concerned about their attitudes towards sexuality, food, and personal disputes. So Paul wisely used a phrase that was common in that culture - "Everything is permissible for me". But Paul qualified this statement, with an additional phrase - "but not everything is beneficial". He knew that their attitude was selfish and an abuse of the grace that God had given them. So Paul, being a loving pastor of this church, set out to correct the immoral behaviour of these people.

Paul, trying to drive this point home, wrote a very terse letter to the church in Corinth. He wanted them to see that they needed to wake up from some of their behaviour and start understanding more about self control – one aspect of the fruit of the Spirit.

Have someone read each section in 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 aloud then discuss the questions together. As you listen try putting yourself in the Corinthians' shoes.

¹⁷ In the following directives I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good.

¹⁸ In the first place, I hear that when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you, and to some extent I believe it. ¹⁹ No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God's approval. ²⁰ So then, when you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat, ²¹ for when you are eating, some of you go ahead with your own private suppers. As a result, one person remains hungry and another gets drunk. ²² Don't you have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God by humiliating those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you? Certainly not in this matter! 1 Corinthians 11:17-22

- What stands out to you in this passage?
- What do you picture this meal to be like? How is it similar or different to how we celebrate communion?
- How does the Corinthians' "everything is permissible" attitude coincide with this passage?
- Why are some people hungry and others drunk at this feast?
- How has gluttony caused problems with the Lord's Supper that the Corinthians are celebrating?

²³ For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, ²⁴ and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." ²⁵ In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." ²⁶ For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. 1 Corinthians 11:23-26

- There is a reverence for the Lord's Supper that Paul is trying to explain. He wants the Corinthians to understand how important this act of worship is to believers. Share with each other what celebrating communion means to you.

²⁷ So then, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. ²⁸ Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup. ²⁹ For those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves. ³⁰ That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep.

³¹ But if we were more discerning with regard to ourselves, we would not come under such judgment. ³² Nevertheless, when we are judged in this way by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be finally condemned with the world.

³³ So then, my brothers and sisters, when you gather to eat, you should all eat together.

³⁴ Anyone who is hungry should eat something at home, so that when you meet together it may not result in judgment. And when I come I will give further directions.

1 Corinthians 11:27-34

- Why is Paul so upset?
- How does what Paul says in verses 27-29 affect your practice of celebrating communion in church?
- Why is our body so important to God? Why should we be careful of not being gluttons?
- How do you feel when you eat or drink too much? Do you ever connect it to your faith in God? Does it matter or do you have any guilt associated with it?
- Why do we eat or drink too much?
- What is Paul's instruction on how to avoid being gluttons and drunkards at the Lord's Supper?
- What is Paul's overall point in this passage?

The Corinthians had made a mockery of the Lord's Supper. Celebrating what was called the "agape feast", people would bring food from home as they gathered and shared together. It was designed to be a celebration. However, it had become quite divisive. With some getting drunk, and some going hungry, it had become a display of humiliation and partying. The meal had become a mockery of the important breaking of bread and sharing of the cup that is the Lord's Supper.



Pressed: From Gluttony to Self-Control

Gluttony appears in different parts of scripture. We see in Proverbs 23:21, "for the drunkard and the glutton will come to poverty, and slumber will clothe them with rags," and Philippians 3:19 says, "Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things."

Gluttony is eating or drinking in excess, or even accumulating and hoarding money or things. If gluttony is the vice, then the virtue would be temperance, which is "the habitual moderation in the indulgence of the appetites or passions" - or, self-control.

Galatians 5:22-23 says,

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

Paul tells us about the nine fruits of the Spirit, self control being one of them (often forgotten, because it's last on the list). Self control teaches us that we will not be mastered by anything. We have the power to say no. The Holy Spirit lives inside of us. We have freedom in Christ and He gives us the strength!

Every single day, we are faced with choices. There is a right way and a wrong way to go. If gluttony (food, drink, drugs, money) is a battle in your life, you can make a choice to do the right thing. However, if you know the right choice, but can't ever seem to follow through, seek help. Talk with someone who you can trust. Or, if you want anonymity or professional advice, seek out pastoral counselling. There is no shame in doing the right thing.

Paul follows up his exhortation for Christians to live out the fruit of the Spirit by saying, "Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit." (Galatians 5:24-25) Paul is giving us further ammunition in living out the Christian life.

- How does knowing and experiencing that you "belong to Christ" help in having self control?
- How does knowing and experiencing that your "flesh with its passions and desires" have been crucified with Christ help in having self control?
- How does knowing and experiencing that the Holy Spirit lives inside of you help in having self control?



Living It Out

- What are some areas of your life that you feel you need to work more on self control?
- Name something you can say "no" to daily that would help build self control.
- The Corinthians' gluttony during the Lord's Supper was particularly upsetting to Paul because it violated this tangible representation of the Gospel and the unity therein. How can the Lord's Supper motivate us towards temperance?
- How can you respect God's grace more in your life? What are some areas where you see He has given you forgiveness for gluttonous actions?



Scripture Memory

For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love.

2 Peter 1:5-7

MY DEAR CHILDREN,
 I WRITE THIS TO YOU SO THAT YOU WILL NOT SIN.
 BUT IF ANYBODY DOES SIN, WE HAVE AN ADVOCATE WITH
 THE FATHER – JESUS CHRIST, THE RIGHTEOUS ONE.
 HE IS THE ATONING SACRIFICE FOR OUR SINS,
 AND NOT ONLY FOR OURS BUT ALSO
 FOR THE SINS OF THE WHOLE WORLD.

1 JOHN 2:1-2



Lust to Purity

100% Supernatural

SESSION 5 / LUST

Soaking: An Introduction

We tend to think that lust hardly needs definition. Our world has such a fascination with it that we think we know only too well what it is and what it feels like. However, there is one important point to be made at the outset. Lust is not the same as sex! Sex is God's gift to us and we all are created sexual beings. If sex within marriage is good but lust is not, what's the difference? What is so wrong with lust?

Lust happens when all a person can think about when they look at someone is their body and what it would be like to take it, possess it, conquer it. Thomas Aquinas, a theologian in the 13th Century, likens it to a lion who, seeing a stag, thinks of nothing else but the meal it is about to enjoy: fun for the lion, but not good news for the stag. Lust is disordered desire that is about personal and physical satisfaction. It thinks of the other person as a means of getting that satisfaction, of releasing the tension of sexual desire. And as such it makes the other person less than a person. It makes a person an object to be used.

Generally, this is what lies at the heart of lust: pure selfishness. Thomas Aquinas says it simply: We designate sexual lust self-love.

Heat Setting: A Warm Up

In your understanding, what is lust?

In what relationships does lust happen? Married relationships? Dating relationships? Friendships? Relationships with strangers?





Spin Cycle: Diving in Deeper

The classic biblical example of the destructiveness of lust comes in a story about King David, one of the great heroes in the Bible. Yet David was deeply flawed and vulnerable when it came to this area of life.

Looking out over his city one day, David spies a beautiful woman named Bathsheba bathing on the roof of her house. He wants her, will do anything to get her and, being a king, gets his way. Bathsheba becomes pregnant and covering it up means arranging for the murder of her husband. The ugly deed is done, bringing untold sorrow and tragedy into their lives, and leading indirectly to the break-up of David's kingdom. It all comes from lust, David's self-centred obsession with possessing and conquering Bathsheba for himself.

Lust happens when one person treats another person as just a body and no more. Lust is bad, not because sex is 'dirty', but because sex distorted in this way is deeply and cruelly self-centred.

Let's take a look at David's story in 2 Samuel 11.

In the spring, at the time when kings go off to war, David sent Joab out with the king's men and the whole Israelite army. They destroyed the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. But David remained in Jerusalem.

² One evening David got up from his bed and walked around on the roof of the palace. From the roof he saw a woman bathing. The woman was very beautiful,³ and David sent someone to find out about her. The man said, "She is Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite."⁴ Then David sent messengers to get her. She came to him, and he slept with her. (Now she was purifying herself from her monthly uncleanness.) Then she went back home.

⁵ The woman conceived and sent word to David, saying, "I am pregnant." 2 Samuel 11:1-5

- The story describes David looking at a woman bathing. Personally do you think David tried to stop himself from looking? Or did David just let himself keep looking?
- If you were David looking at an attractive lady, how would you respond? Why?

- David sent messengers to take Bathsheba. Although David knew that she was the wife of Uriah, he still sleeps with her. There seems to be little love and a lot of lust. What clues are there in the verses above that hint at why David was vulnerable to lust? What are some other things that make people vulnerable to lust?
- David let Bathsheba return to her home after sleeping with her. How do you feel about David's treatment of her? If you were Bathsheba, how would you feel and why?

⁶ So David sent this word to Joab: "Send me Uriah the Hittite." And Joab sent him to David.

⁷ When Uriah came to him, David asked him how Joab was, how the soldiers were and how the war was going. ⁸ Then David said to Uriah, "Go down to your house and wash your feet." So Uriah left the palace, and a gift from the king was sent after him. ⁹ But Uriah slept at the entrance to the palace with all his master's servants and did not go down to his house.

¹⁰ David was told, "Uriah did not go home." So he asked Uriah, "Haven't you just come from a military campaign? Why didn't you go home?"

¹¹ Uriah said to David, "The ark and Israel and Judah are staying in tents, and my commander Joab and my lord's men are camped in the open country. How could I go to my house to eat and drink and make love to my wife? As surely as you live, I will not do such a thing!"

¹² Then David said to him, "Stay here one more day, and tomorrow I will send you back." So Uriah remained in Jerusalem that day and the next. ¹³ At David's invitation, he ate and drank with him, and David made him drunk. But in the evening Uriah went out to sleep on his mat among his master's servants; he did not go home.

¹⁴ In the morning David wrote a letter to Joab and sent it with Uriah. ¹⁵ In it he wrote, "Put Uriah out in front where the fighting is fiercest. Then withdraw from him so he will be struck down and die."

¹⁶ So while Joab had the city under siege, he put Uriah at a place where he knew the strongest defenders were. ¹⁷ When the men of the city came out and fought against Joab, some of the men in David's army fell; moreover, Uriah the Hittite died. 2 Samuel 11:6-17



- In 2 Samuel 11:8, David asked Uriah to go to his house. In 2 Samuel 11:11, Uriah said that he will not go to his house to eat and to drink and to lie with his wife. Why did David keep on asking Uriah to go to his house?
- Throughout the story, David didn't share his problem of lust with anyone. Why do you think that he avoided this? Would the result have been different if he sought counsel from Nathan the prophet?
- What was David's plan after Uriah declined to go to Bathsheba? (2 Samuel 11:15)
- What kind of person do you think Uriah was? "David's lust caused an innocent one to suffer or even die". Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not?
- David's lust caused Bathsheba to become pregnant, and then caused Uriah's death, and then caused the Lord's displeasure. How do you think lust will cause harmful consequences if we don't face it?

¹⁸ Joab sent David a full account of the battle. ¹⁹ He instructed the messenger: "When you have finished giving the king this account of the battle, ²⁰ the king's anger may flare up, and he may ask you, 'Why did you get so close to the city to fight? Didn't you know they would shoot arrows from the wall?' ²¹ Who killed Abimelek son of Jerub-Besheth? Didn't a woman drop an upper millstone on him from the wall, so that he died in Thebez? Why did you get so close to the wall?' If he asks you this, then say to him, 'Moreover, your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead.'"

²² The messenger set out, and when he arrived he told David everything Joab had sent him to say. ²³ The messenger said to David, "The men overpowered us and came out against us in the open, but we drove them back to the entrance of the city gate. ²⁴ Then the archers shot arrows at your servants from the wall, and some of the king's men died. Moreover, your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead."

²⁵ David told the messenger, "Say this to Joab: 'Don't let this upset you; the sword devours one as well as another. Press the attack against the city and destroy it.' Say this to encourage Joab."

²⁶ When Uriah's wife heard that her husband was dead, she mourned for him. ²⁷ After the time of mourning was over, David had her brought to his house, and she became his wife and bore him a son. But the thing David had done displeased the Lord. 2 Samuel 11:18-27

- What did the Lord think about what David had done?
- Throughout the story in 2 Samuel 11, did David pray to the Lord? Do you think that the story would be different if David prayed to the Lord right after seeing Bathsheba bathing? Why or why not?
- According to this story, how would you describe David as a person? Do you want to be like David in this story? If not, how do we overcome lust in our lives?



Pressed: From Lust to Purity

How then do we overcome lust? One big mistake we could make would be to try to eliminate sexual desire altogether. Sexual feelings are part of being human and cannot be eliminated, nor should they be. Here are three suggestions helping us to overcome lust:

Lust is healed through a relationship with God. It is when we come back to God and learn to see other people as God sees them that it is possible to begin to overcome lust within the heart. It is our relationship with Christ that heals us from wounds that make us vulnerable to lust. It is our union with Christ that gives us strength to resist temptation.

I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. John 15:5

- Discuss ways the Gospel can help with the struggle against lust.

Think ahead. If we know we are going to be tempted by something that will cause us trouble, and we doubt whether we can resist, we can think ahead and put in place things that will restrain us when the time comes.

Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Won't he first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? Luke 14:31

- Discuss other practical ways that can help us against tempting situations.

Journeying together. This can mean finding a couple of close friends of the same gender who understand where we are coming from and the path of life we are trying to lead. The discipline of fellowship can be a strong help, with people who know us, trust us and can keep us walking on the right path.

If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up. Ecclesiastes 4:10

- Discuss how Christian community empowers us towards purity in Christ.



Living It Out

Lust twists relationships. It messes them up, and destroys beauty and innocence. Lust is selfish, and as such it is a cruel parody of love. Lust takes; love gives. The Christian life is a journey on which our desires are put in balance again and brought back under control so that they enhance rather than wreck our lives and the lives of others.

- Personal accountability can be life-giving and vital to Christian growth. If you don't already have a trusted confidante, consider starting such a relationship.
- Pray for one another that you remain in Jesus Christ, have wisdom to think ahead, and find friends that walk with you in the journey.



Scripture Memory

My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father — Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world. 1 John 2:1-2



MY DEAR BROTHERS AND SISTERS,
TAKE NOTE OF THIS: EVERYONE SHOULD BE QUICK TO LISTEN,
SLOW TO SPEAK AND SLOW TO BECOME ANGRY,
BECAUSE HUMAN ANGER DOES NOT PRODUCE THE RIGHTEOUSNESS
THAT GOD DESIRES.

JAMES 1:19-20



Wrath to Understanding

100% Supernatural

SESSION 6 / WRATH

Soaking: An Introduction

Many of us have mixed feelings about anger. We grew up being told that Christians should not get angry because anger is a sin. However, one of my Old Testament heroes, Nehemiah, actually said, "I was so angry!" (Nehemiah 5:6) Also, whenever I read about Jesus driving away traders in the temple (Mark 11:15-17), I can't help but think, "Wow, Jesus must be so angry!"

Yet, deep down in our hearts we also know that anger (in most cases) is bad, to say the least. We regret the times when anger led us to say harsh words, do stupid things, and even got us into unnecessary trouble. Jesus seems to say that if you are angry with somebody, you are subject to judgment (Matthew 5:21-24). Paul also teaches us to get rid of "all bitterness, rage and anger". (Ephesians 4:31)

So, can I get angry or not? What is anger? Is there something called "righteous indignation"?

Heat Setting: A Warm Up

How would you describe the behaviour of an angry person?

What makes you angry? Think of the last time you were very angry. What happened to you?





Spin Cycle: Diving in Deeper

Today we will study an Old Testament character, Cain, to learn something about anger.

Cain is the eldest son of Adam and Eve. He was the first ever human being born on earth. Cain has a younger brother named Abel, but they did not get along well. Cain is a farmer but Abel is a hunter.

Have someone read Genesis 4:1-13 aloud.

¹ Adam made love to his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain. She said, "With the help of the Lord I have brought forth a man."² Later she gave birth to his brother Abel.

Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil.³ In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the Lord.⁴ And Abel also brought an offering—fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The Lord looked with favour on Abel and his offering,⁵ but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favour. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast.

⁶ Then the Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast?⁷ If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it."

⁸ Now Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let's go out to the field." While they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him.

⁹ Then the Lord said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?"

"I don't know," he replied. "Am I my brother's keeper?"

¹⁰ The Lord said, "What have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground.¹¹ Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground, which opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand.¹² When you work the ground, it will no longer yield its crops for you. You will be a restless wanderer on the earth."

¹³ Cain said to the Lord, "My punishment is more than I can bear.

- Why was Cain angry? Who do you think he was angry at?
- People often get angry when they feel that they are being treated wrongly. Why do you think that Cain might have felt wronged?
- Why did God say that Cain had no ground to be angry?
- Do you think Cain agreed with God's assessment? Why or why not?
- To kill someone requires extreme hatred. Why do you think Cain wanted to kill Abel?
- Have you ever been extremely angry about something or someone? What was the most extreme action that you have taken out of that anger? Do you regret that?

There are three Greek words that are associated with the concept of anger:

Aganaktesis is a kind of anger that is triggered by or directed towards injustices. It is close to the meaning of indignation.

Orge describes an attitude of hostility that seeks revenge. It carries the idea of resentment.

Thumos is a boiling and turbulent emotion, uncontrolled and furious, like the word "rage" in English.

- What type of anger do you think Cain was experiencing? Do you think he regretted it?



Pressed: From Wrath to Understanding

My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires. James 1:19-20

- This is a question from children's Sunday school, but it is quite insightful: How many mouths do we have? How many ears do we have? So, what should be the ratio between how much we speak and how much we listen?
- Simon & Garfunkel had a famous song called "*The Sound of Silence*". One of the lines in the song says, "people hearing without listening." What is the difference between "hearing" and "listening"?
- We use the term "active listening" to mean the act of intentional listening in order to understand. Why do you think active listening can prevent anger?
- On the other hand, what does "slow to speak" mean and why can this help prevent anger? See Proverbs 15:1 below.

A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.

- The verse from Proverbs suggests that how we speak can affect someone's response to you just as much or even more than what we say. Have the group share some experiences of being on the receiving end of "a gentle answer" and "a harsh word".
- How do you understand the following Bible verse?

"In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold. Ephesians 4:26-27

Anger takes on many forms in us. Anger can certainly be yelling, but anger can also be a cold silence. Paul knows how prevalent anger is in us because of our alienation from God and our sin nature. He teaches us the source of the divine strength and healing we need in order to live lives of understanding. A few verses later Paul says this, "*And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.*"

- How does knowing that unholy anger grieves the Holy Spirit that dwells in you help towards living a life of understanding?
- How does knowing and experiencing that the Holy Spirit in you "seals you for the day of redemption" help in the struggle against anger?
- How does knowing and experiencing that "in Christ God forgave you" lead to a kind, compassionate, and forgiving way of relating to others?

Living It Out

How can you be "slow to become angry" (James 1:19)? What are ways to help you prevent anger?

- Count 1 to 100
- Eat an apple
- Take a shower
- Think of something positive
- Share examples that work for you personally.
- What "pushes your buttons?" How can you respond differently next time?

Scripture Memory

My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires. James 1:19-20



BUT GODLINESS WITH CONTENTMENT
IS GREAT GAIN.
1 TIMOTHY 6:6



Greed to Generosity

100% Supernatural

SESSION 7 / GREED

Soaking: An Introduction

In the 1987 movie *Wall Street*, Michael Douglas played the fictional character Gordon Gekko. A hard-driving, egotistical trader in New York, he made no apology for his swagger and style. Eventually convicted for insider trading, he was most famous for the quote, “Greed is good” (in addition to my personal favourite, “Lunch is for wimps”).

Here is a sample of that famous speech:

“The point is, ladies and gentleman, that greed, for lack of a better word, is good. Greed is right, greed works. Greed clarifies, cuts through, and captures the essence of the evolutionary spirit. Greed, in all of its forms; greed for life, for money, for love, knowledge has marked the upward surge of mankind.”

The Bible, and most other religious literature, would strongly refute the “Greed is Good” mantra. But recognising that greed is not good does not mean that it doesn’t have a grip on our lives. In fact, greed is extremely sneaky. If you’ve murdered, you know it. If you’ve committed adultery, you know it. But how do you know if you are greedy? Because we can always think of someone who is more materialistic than we are, we easily let ourselves off the hook when we look at greed.

But greed is NOT good, yet it is very close to being the driving force for many of us.

Heat Setting: A Warm Up

How do you think Hong Kong compares to other places in the world when it comes to greed? Is it more or less prevalent here? What are some comparisons that illustrate your view?

How is the world affected (positively or negatively) by a greedy attitude?

What are the earliest signs of greed you can remember seeing in your siblings? (It’s too painful to reveal your own greed, so we’ll pick on others!)

What companies or global personalities come to your mind when you think of greed? What makes them “greedy”?





Spin Cycle: Diving in Deeper

Tucked away in the Old Testament book of 2 Kings, we find an insightful but little-known story about a man named Gehazi. Sadly, he is remembered for being greedy. But his tragic story will help us diagnose the same root problems that may exist in our own lives.

Have someone read 2 Kings 5:1-27 aloud.

¹ Now Naaman was commander of the army of the king of Aram. He was a great man in the sight of his master and highly regarded, because through him the Lord had given victory to Aram. He was a valiant soldier, but he had leprosy.

² Now bands of raiders from Aram had gone out and had taken captive a young girl from Israel, and she served Naaman's wife. ³ She said to her mistress, "If only my master would see the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy."

⁴ Naaman went to his master and told him what the girl from Israel had said. ⁵ "By all means, go," the king of Aram replied. "I will send a letter to the king of Israel." So Naaman left, taking with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold and ten sets of clothing. ⁶ The letter that he took to the king of Israel read: "With this letter I am sending my servant Naaman to you so that you may cure him of his leprosy."

⁷ As soon as the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his robes and said, "Am I God? Can I kill and bring back to life? Why does this fellow send someone to me to be cured of his leprosy? See how he is trying to pick a quarrel with me!"

⁸ When Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his robes, he sent him this message: "Why have you torn your robes? Have the man come to me and he will know that there is a prophet in Israel." ⁹ So Naaman went with his horses and chariots and stopped at the door of Elisha's house. ¹⁰ Elisha sent a messenger to say to him, "Go, wash yourself seven times in the Jordan, and your flesh will be restored and you will be cleansed."

¹¹ But Naaman went away angry and said, "I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, wave his hand over the spot and cure me of my leprosy. ¹² Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Couldn't I wash in them and be cleansed?" So he turned and went off in a rage.

¹³ Naaman's servants went to him and said, "My father, if the prophet had told you to do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much more, then, when he tells you, 'Wash and be cleansed!'" ¹⁴ So he went down and dipped himself in the Jordan seven times, as the man of

God had told him, and his flesh was restored and became clean like that of a young boy.

¹⁵ Then Naaman and all his attendants went back to the man of God. He stood before him and said, "Now I know that there is no God in all the world except in Israel. So please accept a gift from your servant."

¹⁶ The prophet answered, "As surely as the Lord lives, whom I serve, I will not accept a thing." And even though Naaman urged him, he refused.

¹⁷ "If you will not," said Naaman, "please let me, your servant, be given as much earth as a pair of mules can carry, for your servant will never again make burnt offerings and sacrifices to any other god but the Lord. ¹⁸ But may the Lord forgive your servant for this one thing: When my master enters the temple of Rimmon to bow down and he is leaning on my arm and I have to bow there also — when I bow down in the temple of Rimmon, may the Lord forgive your servant for this."

¹⁹ "Go in peace," Elisha said.

After Naaman had travelled some distance, ²⁰ Gehazi, the servant of Elisha the man of God, said to himself, "My master was too easy on Naaman, this Aramean, by not accepting from him what he brought. As surely as the Lord lives, I will run after him and get something from him."

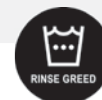
²¹ So Gehazi hurried after Naaman. When Naaman saw him running toward him, he got down from the chariot to meet him. "Is everything all right?" he asked.

²² "Everything is all right," Gehazi answered. "My master sent me to say, 'Two young men from the company of the prophets have just come to me from the hill country of Ephraim. Please give them a talent of silver and two sets of clothing.'"

²³ "By all means, take two talents," said Naaman. He urged Gehazi to accept them, and then tied up the two talents of silver in two bags, with two sets of clothing. He gave them to two of his servants, and they carried them ahead of Gehazi. ²⁴ When Gehazi came to the hill, he took the things from the servants and put them away in the house. He sent the men away and they left.

²⁵ When he went in and stood before his master, Elisha asked him, "Where have you been, Gehazi?" "Your servant didn't go anywhere," Gehazi answered.

²⁶ But Elisha said to him, "Was not my spirit with you when the man got down from his chariot to meet you? Is this the time to take money or to accept clothes — or olive groves and vineyards, or flocks and herds, or male and female slaves?" ²⁷ Naaman's leprosy will cling to you and to your descendants forever." Then Gehazi went from Elisha's presence and his skin was leprous — it had become as white as snow. 2 Kings 5:1-27



- To get an understanding of the story, divide up into groups and have each group explain one of these key characters in one or two sentences:
Naaman
King of Aram
Israeli servant girl
King of Israel
Elisha
Gehazi
- The prophet Elisha's servant, Gehazi, was the bearer of news the Syrian officer, Naaman, did not want to hear. As a result, Naaman threw a fit. But how did Naaman eventually behave?
- According to Naaman's words in verse 15, what can we conclude about God's motive in healing him of leprosy?
- According to verse 16, Elisha declined any reward for the healing. Why do you think he refused any token of appreciation?
- What are some ways that we can guard our hearts against greed like Elisha did? What kind of situations do you find yourself in that may be similar to Elisha? What things in your life do you have to offer that can also tempt you to give with hidden motive?
- In verse 20, Gehazi speaks to himself. This self-talk, eventually led him to actions of outrageous deceit and greed. What are some possible "self-talks" that we could say to ourselves that could lead to similar destruction?



Pressed: From Greed to Generosity

The remedy for greed is not to simply try harder to not be greedy. A tendency toward greediness is an issue of our hearts, and therefore, we must experience deep and lasting change to our very core. Read the story of Zacchaeus and look for insight as to how he was changed.

Have someone read Luke 19:1-10.

¹⁹ Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. ² A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. ³ He wanted to see who Jesus was, but because he was short he could not see over the crowd. ⁴ So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way.

⁵ When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." ⁶ So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly.

⁷ All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a sinner."

⁸ But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount." ⁹ Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. ¹⁰ For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

- What words or phrases do we see in the scripture that describe Zacchaeus?
- What accounts for the lavish giving that Zacchaeus offered to the poor and others in worship of Jesus?
- Most of us have not stolen blatantly like Zacchaeus. So, is it possible for us to have a generous heart like him? Or is that only available to those who have sinned greatly? Share your thoughts.



Read Malachi 3:8-10 aloud.

⁸ “Will a mere mortal rob God? Yet you rob me.” But you ask, “How are we robbing you?” “In tithes and offerings.” ⁹ You are under a curse — your whole nation — because you are robbing me. ¹⁰ Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,” says the Lord Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it.

- What indictment does God give to the prophet Malachi?
- According to verse 10, what percentage of giving does God expect to be given to his “storehouse”?
- In comparison, what percentage of giving did Zacchaeus offer to Jesus?
- We are told that ideally, our giving should be done “cheerfully, not with a grudge” (2 Corinthian 9:7). How would you counsel someone if they said, “Since I am not cheerful about my giving to God at this point in my life, I’m not going to give. After all, He doesn’t need my money, and I need to wait until my heart is in the right place.”
- Learning to hold things loosely — to be content — is the beginning of enjoying generosity. How would you describe contentment and what are some of its benefits?



Living It Out

Jesus said, “Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.” Luke 12:15

Note that Jesus tells us there are many kinds of greed. Unlike adultery, murder, or gossiping, He reminds us that greed can take on many forms.

- Other than material greed, what other types of greed are tempting?
- When well-meaning Christians gather for accountability, financial giving is usually the most-avoided topic. Why do you suppose this is the case?
- Do you have anyone that challenges you in the area of generosity? In other words, who holds you accountable with your money?
- What would be a realistic, yet faith-stretching goal for you in giving? Make a point to share this with someone who will help you with it.



Scripture Memory

But godliness with contentment is great gain. 1 Timothy 6.6



Notes

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