



Turning Lost Students into Christ-Centered Laborers

## SEVEN • Sloth

### What Do I Need to Know?

#### Introduction

This will be a seven-week series focused on the Seven Deadly Sins, so the first study needs to provide some general introduction to the genesis of the idea. The Seven Deadly Sins is the list of wicked human passions, first refined by Pope Gregory in the 6th century. It was heavily taught in the Middle Ages and popularized by Dante in his work, *The Divine Comedy*. This epic poem had three parts: *Inferno*, *Purgatorio*, and *Paradiso*, which are about Hell, Purgatory, and Heaven/Paradise, respectively. They were called “Deadly Sins,” because of their fatal effect on spiritual health. In “Purgatorio,” Dante places each of the seven sins on a level, with the higher levels closer to Paradise and the lower ones closer to Hell.

There is no biblical support for the idea of “purgatory,” where sins are paid for by the sinner. Christ paid for all sin by His death on the cross. Those who receive His forgiveness have life; those that don’t do not have life. There is no in-between. Furthermore, the idea of a special list of “Deadly Sins” does not appear in the Bible. Some sins clearly have more devastating effects on one’s life than others, but the Bible does not create such overly simplistic categories. Try to avoid getting bogged down on a debate about these matters. It is simply an interesting premise for an evangelistic study, and though these ideas have no biblical support, the topics, and sins, are certainly worthy of study, and reflection for Christians. They will also be a means by which to share the gospel in the weeks ahead.

#### What’s a Sloth?

A sloth is someone who is lazy, and lacks initiative, diligence, and perseverance. The first part of the study is meant to introduce the idea of “sloth,” break the ice, and get people thinking. You are not looking for right answers here, as much as conversation.

#### How Do You Measure a Slug?

The study of sloth will center around a handful of passages from Proverbs. The book of Proverbs is a poetic book, and further classified as Wisdom Literature. It’s always important to be aware of genre. The power of poetry is in its ability to paint a picture, not simply give facts. Be aware of metaphors and the pictures they bring to mind. This is what the author wants to accomplish by using poetry. As Wisdom literature, what you are looking for is the general truism. Proverbs, are general truths about how the world works. Its intent is not to deal with life’s exceptions, but general principles. Wisdom literature, as well as

### What’s the Big Idea?

This study will introduce the members to the idea of the Seven Deadly Sins and will proceed to examine the first, Sloth.



poetry, will often make use of strong contrast, if/then statements, considered results, and/or parallelism (restating the same idea in a different way), to make its case for choosing the path of wisdom.

This is the main body of the study, and will examine from Proverbs, some of the habits and practices of the sluggard. The study examines five.

*Procrastination:* Proverbs 6:9-11, “How long will you lie there, you sluggard? When will you get up from your sleep? A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest – and poverty will come on you like a bandit and scarcity like an armed man.” The cause of procrastination can be any number of things. Often it is the fear of failure. Whatever the cause, fear, or doubt that threatens to immobilize, the sluggard chooses to avoid the problem, rather than face it head-on with the effort and attention that will be required to solve it.

*Unfulfilled desires:* Proverbs 21:25, “The sluggard’s craving will be the death of him, because his hands refuse to work.” This Proverb brings out the sad truism that laziness causes unfulfilled desires. The reason is simple: when you refuse to work, you usually don’t get what you want. Results and fruitful labor are usually the result of hard work. In the end, the sluggard is often bitter and unhappy because his desires go unmet. Added to this, is the shadow of regret for things neither accomplished, or even attempted.

*Irrational fears:* Proverbs 26:16, “The sluggard says, ‘There is a lion outside!’ or, ‘I will be murdered in the streets!’” We have here a self-feeding cycle. Inactivity can lead to irrational fears about the outside world, and potential outcomes. At the same time, these irrational fears cause further immobilization.

*Self deception:* Proverbs 26:16, “The sluggard is wiser in his own eyes than seven men who answer discreetly.” What makes it so difficult for a sloth to change his ways? He really thinks that he’s the one who is wise, by choosing not to invest his time and energy in any form of productive work. He feels he has successfully “cheated the system” and therefore feels he is wiser than everyone else. From this posture of pride, it’s almost impossible for him to see the foolishness of his ways.

*Obstacles:* Proverbs 15:19, “The way of the sluggard is blocked with thorns, but the path of the upright is a highway.” Most any project worth doing has it’s set of problems and obstacles. Because the sluggard lacks drive and perseverance, the obstacles to any goal are impassable – they can not be bypassed or overcome, which leads to a feeling of futility.

#### Can I Change, or At Least Get Perkier?

Proverbs 6:6-8, “Go to the ant, you sluggard; consider its ways and be wise! It has no commander, no overseer or ruler, yet it stores its provisions in summer and gathers its food at harvest.” The advise here is pretty straight forward. The teacher advises the sloth to go observe the ways of the productive (the ant), and learn from their way of life. If you think about what motivates you to hard work, it is often the example of someone you saw as a positive role model, who was fruitful and productive. Sometimes, it can even be an inspiring biography, or movie about someone’s life, that causes you to stride further in your efforts. In Proverbs, when the application is to “consider,” there are often two things in view. One is emulation, and the other is to ponder the outcome of a particular way of life. So the teacher, here, advises the sloth to not only emulate the ways of the productive, but to consider the outcome of their way of life.

End 

#### What if There’s a Problem?

The first part of the study deals with the origins of the Seven Deadly Sins. It’s important for you to know that there’s no biblical support for the idea of “purgatory,” where sins are paid for by the sinner. Christ’s death paid for all sin, and those who receive His forgiveness have eternal life. There is no in-between. Furthermore, the idea of a special list of “Deadly Sins” does not appear in the Bible. This is a human categorization. Try to avoid getting bogged down on a debate about these matters. It is simply an interesting premise for an evangelistic study, and one that might have interest due to the popularity of the movie *Seven*.

## What Are the Answers?

1. The Seven Deadly Sins are: sloth, jealousy, greed, pride, lust, rage and gluttony. (Make sure you have the group read through all of the Web quotes and Bible passages that are on the study. Their content is essential to the flow of the study.)
2. Sloth is laziness, but also includes mental and spiritual lethargy.
3. Have the group share.
4. It could be a fear of failure, as well as a reluctance to work hard.
5. Discuss/share.
6. Discuss/share.
7. The sluggard lives with unfulfilled desires as well as regrets, because he is not willing to work. The life of a sluggard is deeply unsatisfied.
8. Go around the group and have each member share.
9. Have the group share. Often, inactivity leads to the development of irrational fears and phobias. These, in turn, further perpetuate inactivity.
10. The sluggard feels he has successfully “cheated the system,” and therefore feels he is wiser than everyone else. From this posture of pride, it’s almost impossible for him to see the foolishness of his ways.
11. Because the sluggard lacks drive and perseverance, the obstacles to any goal are impassable.
12. Discuss/share. Then have people take the Sloth Quiz and share how they did.
13. It’s a life of endless procrastination, always looking for ways to “cut corners.” It’s a life governed by laziness, irrational fears, and obstacles. It’s a self-perpetuating lifestyle: inactivity breeds greater obstacles and fears, thus greater inactivity.
14. The key here is to learn a lesson from the productivity of others. Think in advance of some principles you might share.
15. Discuss/Share. As the leader, this is a chance to bring in some gospel content. Share what you want to be true of your life, but also share that you know that entrance into heaven is not gained by what we have accomplished. Our labor affects our eternal rewards, not eternal life.

## What’s Our Response?

The application of this study is found in the last question. The subject of sloth and procrastination yields the question: “What will you say to God when you have to give an account for your life?” All kinds of goals may be discussed, and you might ask the question, “How will you make sure these things get carried out?” Now having said that, you might look for an opportunity to summarize the gospel message: that Christians believe that this judgment will be the basis for rewards – not for entrance into heaven. Eternal life is freely given through accepting Christ and receiving His death for our sin.