

"The best defense is a good offense." That is not only the Strategic Offensive Principle in warfare but it is also true when it comes to football...and sin. Rather than allowing the seven deadly sins kill us, the Bible says we can actually put sin to death. We can kill sin. "For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live." (Ro. 8:13). By depending on the Holy Spirit and practicing the virtues that are the antidotes to sin, we can experience abundant life. Today we come to the sixth of the seven deadly sins, sloth. Just in time for the kick-off of Couch Potato Season.

Most people equate sloth with laziness. Laziness may be socially unacceptable in our culture but I would hardly consider it a deadly sin. In fact, laziness is a term that is culturally determined. In some cultures, a 30-hour work week is normal. If you only work 30 hours in the U.S., you might be labeled a slacker. In some countries, people go on holiday for a whole a month. If you tell your employer you are going to take a month off, you may not have a job when you get back. Americans have a reputation around the world for our work ethic as this commercial shows...

Americans are perceived as busy people. But as we will soon see, busyness is not the antidote to slothfulness. So what is sloth and why is it such a big deal? First of all, sloth is not inactivity. Sloth has nothing to do with pace, it has everything to do with purpose. Sloth, as a spiritual vice, is active rebellion or passive indifference to the process of sanctification. Sloth sabotages sanctification. Sanctification is God's divine process for repurposing our lives for the glory of God. When you surrender your will to Christ, His saving work not only insures your eternal well-being but He places His Spirit within you to transform you. You not only have new life but you have a new purpose. But God's sanctifying work requires our participation. Sloth is enjoyed by those who want the comfort and security of God's love without the effort required to live out their God-given purpose in Christ.

There are two classic impediments to sanctification: inactivity and activity. Sloth is usually associated with indifference or inactivity. But slothfulness can be characterized by undisciplined activity, peripheral activity, motion without meaning. I can avoid being repurposed by immersing myself in all sorts of activities, none of which furthers God's purpose for my life. Hard work does not insure your sanctification any more than homework insures your education.

Did you read about the controversial homework policy that Brandy Young, a 2nd grade teacher at Godley Elementary School in Ft. Worth, sent home to parents?

*“Dear Parents, After much research this summer, I am trying something new. Homework will only consist of work that your student did not finish during the school day. There will be no formally assigned homework this year. Research has been unable to prove that homework improves student performance. Rather, I ask that you spend your evenings doing things that are proven to correlate with student success. Eat dinner as a family, read together, play outside and get your child to bed early.”*

My first response was, "Homework in 2nd grade?" But the reason this note went viral is because we all know that just giving kids "busy work" does not necessarily expand their knowledge and further their education.

I don't know much about homework policy but I do know what Jesus thinks about sloth. Mt. 25:14-30 records a surprising parable that Jesus told His disciples. It is a warning passage about the danger of slothfulness. Jesus is telling stories about His promised return at the end of time. He says, "It will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property." When the man returned, he called his servants in to make sure they had acted in his best interests while he was away. The first two servants who had invested the master's resources wisely were commended. "Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master." The third servant, who took good care of what the master entrusted to him, received a big surprise, "You wicked and slothful servant!... take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Sounds a little harsh doesn't it? "You wicked slothful servant." How was he slothful? After all, he took care of his master's assets. That's good stewardship isn't it? Why does Jesus call him lazy? Because the master expected his servants to use what he gave them to pursue profitable activities in his absence. The third servant was more focused on preserving the resources he received than investing them. The Master expects a return on his investment. This parable is often used to teach the responsible use of money. But it is so much bigger than that. It teaches us the responsible use of everything the Master gives us - money, time, abilities, relationships and anything else that can be leveraged for the kingdom. If your highest goal is to simply preserve your life and be comfortable, you're missing the point. We are to "seek first the kingdom of God" not our own self-indulgence.

Consider the example of one of the legendary missionary, David Livingstone. He pushed and plodded his way through unchartered territory in Africa for the gospel's

sake. Here's what he wrote in his diary: "I place no value on anything I have or may possess, except in relation to the kingdom of Christ. If anything will advance the interests of the kingdom, it shall be given away or kept, only as by giving or keeping it I shall promote the glory of Him to whom I owe all my hopes in time and eternity."

You could be the hardest working person here but if you are not pursuing your God-given purpose then you are what the Bible calls a sluggard, the OT for the slothful person. Prov. 26:13-16 provides us with four diagnostic questions to determine whether we are guilty of sloth.

1. v. 13 - Do you frequently make excuses? The sluggard creates imaginary circumstances to excuse not doing what he is supposed to do.
2. v. 14 - Do you consistently check out? On the internet, texting, etc.?
3. v. 15 - Do you finish what you start?
4. v. 16 - Do you consider the counsel of others? Or do you avoid accountability?

There is no more important assignment in life than pursuing the calling God has created us to pursue. God chose you, called you out of the world and set you apart for His purpose. He has given you His resources and invites you to partner with Him for the sake of the gospel, the hope of the world.

This has been a tough topic for me personally. I realized this week that I have been a slothful leader at times. I realized there have been times when I made a decision that was not as much about sanctification as it was about not making someone mad. I have occasionally backed off a decision that was in the best interests of those who really want to grow in Christ because I knew that it would mean change and I didn't have the heart (or guts) to put up with the complaints of those who were content to just sit around on their assets.

A couple of weeks ago I signaled to you that there are changes coming here at Fellowship. Some of you got very creative with those words! The only change I mentioned at the time was a name change. But let me be clear about the change that is at the center of any other changes to come. It is our new mission statement - "Calling each other to live out our God-given purpose in Christ every day." We want to be more intentional than ever before about the sanctification process. We want to be a people who understand and exemplify what it means to be repurposed. God has given each of us gifts, abilities, income, relationships, all of which are to be leveraged for the growth of the Body and the expansion of the Kingdom. So we have been systematically examining everything we do and asking, "How does this contribute to the vision God has given us?" And what is that vision?

Our vision is that "in the next 10 years we will become a training and launching ground for more than 10,000 men and women who will discover and live out their unique, God-given, Kingdom purpose in Christ." Think of it, 10,000 self-motivated, self-feeding Christians living as missionaries wherever God has placed them. Teachers, business people, moms and dads, all experiencing the joy of discovering God's unique purpose for their lives.

It won't happen if we are slothful. So what is the antidote to sloth? Disciplined routine. Determine a course of action that will help you grow spiritually and make it a habit. "Isn't that a gospel of works?"

The gospel is not opposed to effort. It is opposed to earning. You cannot earn salvation. It is a gift or grace. But the process of sanctification requires effort. D. A. Carson says, "People do not drift toward holiness. Apart from grace-driven effort, people do not gravitate toward godliness, prayer, obedience to Scripture, faith, and delight in the Lord. We drift toward compromise and call it tolerance; we drift toward disobedience and call it freedom; we drift toward superstition and call it faith. We cherish the indiscipline of lost self-control and call it relaxation; we slouch toward prayerlessness and delude ourselves into thinking we have escaped legalism; we slide toward godlessness and convince ourselves we have been liberated." (*For the Love of God*, vol. 2, p. 23)

What course of action will you take today that will lead to your sanctification? How will you cooperate with God so that your life will be repurposed? Is it regular worship attendance? Is it forming a group that you will meet with regularly for mutual accountability? Is it reading your Bible ten minutes a day or praying every time you brush your teeth? Is it serving others regularly? If you feel stuck, like you are not making progress in your life, choose one healthy practice and make it a habit...unless of course there's a lion in the road.