

Seven Deadly Sins

REAL STRUGGLES FROM REAL PEOPLE



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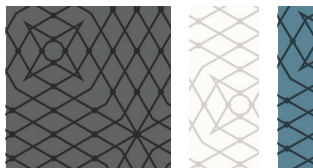


Not all snakes are poisonous. Some, like the garter snake, are harmless. Many people have seen these types of serpents over the course of their life, and in fact, even feel confident to pick them up. When people encounter this type of snake, they have no need to worry whatsoever. However, snakes like the water moccasin are very poisonous. A bite from this type of venomous reptile requires immediate medical attention. Some snakes are harmless; others are deadly.

Sin, however, is always deadly. That is, there are no harmless sins. Those that give in to the lure of sin will find that it places a tight grip on their lives and causes more pain and destruction than they ever thought possible. Although some may struggle with a certain sin, the good news is that God can and does forgive and enables us through the power of the Holy Spirit to gain victory over those sins. Sin is lethal, but God's redeeming power is greater.

Seven Deadly Sins: Real Struggles from Real People examines seven of the most common sins that people wrestle with and looks at the ways in which we can evade, deal with, and triumph over each one through the power of God working in our lives.

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Lust

Elliott and Jessica enter my counseling office. As their therapist I will soon learn that they've been married for a number of years and are at a place they never thought they would be: a pending separation because of Elliot's rampant lust.

Elliott sits down. Without an introduction he immediately shares that his lust is out of control.

Lust. What is it and why is it so powerful and destructive?

Simply put, lust is having an intense desire for someone or something that isn't yours. It is believing you need something, rather than accepting God's embracing love. If not managed biblically, the craving may well consume us. James 1:14-15 describes how we can be tempted, enticed, and then, *"after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death"* (v. 15).

We often associate lust with inappropriate sexual wants, but we can lust after so many other things as well: power, control, and food, to name a few.

Whatever the object, lust starts with our thoughts. The apostle Paul instructs the church at Philippi as to what we should yearn for rather than lust after. *"Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things"* (Philippians 4:8).

Reflect on this...

How would you define lust?

Are there areas of your life where you struggle with lust?

Have you invited God to help you combat any lustful feelings?

As a church counseling pastor with my own private practice company, I often find myself silently praying for my patients. It's my hope that they will allow God to help them embrace whatever pain they're facing, rather than run from it. These prayers are especially important when the person sitting across from me is battling lust.

In the case of Elliott's private thoughts, lust has ruined his life. It's been said that who you are in public is perception; who you are in your mind and heart is character. Elliott's character is flawed, and needs a heart-felt nature change—not just a behavior change.

Out of all the seven deadly sins, lust wreaks the most carnage of all. Elliott is a prime example.

Paul clearly states in 1 Corinthians 6:18, *“Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body.”* Although the Bible is crystal clear that all sins receive full forgiveness through Jesus Christ (1 John 1:9), lust leads a person down the most slippery of slopes—often to where a person may well lose everything they’ve worked for and most treasure. A spouse, children, a home, a job, a reputation.

This idea of taking advantage of a brother or sister—even if just thinking about another person lustfully—is crossing a boundary. Some describe it as defrauding another person. Jerome (writing on Ephesians 5:3) has a phrase which carefully expresses the sense: *“transgredi concessos fines nuptiarum,”* meaning “to transgress the permitted bounds of marriage.”

Ephesians 5:3 reads, *“But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God’s holy people.”*

Reflect on this...

In what ways can lust seem so enticing?

Why is there a temptation to want something that’s not ours?

What is it within human nature to desire that which isn’t ours?



Although sexual lust is seriously harmful, lust for money, power, or control can have devastating results as well. I am reminded of an interview with a billionaire mogul. Apparently, this person likes to have bragging rights in demonstrating who's the wealthiest in his circle. When asked why, he says, flippantly, that it's human nature to want more. To want what you don't yet have.

It's sort of like the cartoon of two cows, each with their individual heads reaching through the other's fence, trying to get the grass from the other cow's field. The caption reads: *Discontented*.

Discontentment without God's presence always leads to destruction. For this billionaire, lust may be attempting to fill a void only God can.

The Bible is clear in that we lust because we are trying to fill the void where only a personal relationship with Jesus satisfies. This billionaire mogul appears to believe he doesn't have enough—he needs more. That's discontentment. That's at the root of lust. Wanting something more, or something that's not yours.

During therapy I often uncover things from a person's poorly developed childhood. I've seen multiple times over these many years of counseling: an unhealthy marriage resulting from childhood wounds and subsequent unhealthy self-medicating behaviors. Unhealthy people depend on self through addictive behaviors of alcohol, drugs, and sex; healthy people ultimately depend on God.

Reflect on this...

If you are struggling with this sin, is something in your past fueling lust?

Is there a professional counselor available to help you?

Would you be willing to talk with your pastor?

Often, lusting turns into addiction. Lustful thoughts are like a careening train with no breaks. We act out, which quickly turns into guilt and shame; the result is compensatory behavior. It goes like this: a person has a lustful thought, hangs onto the thought, it cycles—similar to the hamster running as fast as he can in his cage’s spinning wheel without going anywhere except in circles—and then acts on it.

Like a train that barrels off track, wrecking everything in its path, lust, when unattended, destroys everything in its way. For many, it leads to the death of their marriage and the cause of extensive trauma to their children.

It’s no wonder God gave us the Ten Commandments. At least three focus on lust in one way or another. For example:

- **The first commandment** (Exodus 20:3) says we must not worship any other than God. We lust after power. We all want more, without God's restraint, our lust is to become a god.
- **The sixth commandment** (Exodus 20:14) tells us to not commit adultery. This rule clearly instructs how not to lust after someone other than your marriage mate.
- **The ninth commandment** (Exodus 20:17) says not to desire your neighbor's wife. Nothing could be more clear as to how to avoid lust.

So, how did can a person get help? And, how can you get help? It is certainly no easy task. For starters, admit the lust. This begins the necessary steps toward healing. Following awareness, confess your sin, becoming determined to turn from your sin. Then, join a serious accountability group where the accountability partners are honest.

Additionally, individual therapy with a Christian professional is needed in some cases, and may or may not be needed in your life.

Although your lust may not have reached the level of Elliott, you may need to seek help. For starters,

- First, ask **God for help**. He wants you to experience a pure life.
- Second, **ask for God's forgiveness**.
- Third, **talk with your pastor** or a trusted accountability partner who understands biblical truths surrounding lust. God knows this is a challenging area of any person's life. God wants to help you live life to the full (John 10:10b)!

- Fourth, **develop consistent spiritual disciplines of prayer**, Bible reading, fasting, and church attendance; continually inviting God into all areas of your life.