



VAV

VICES AND VIRTUES

SERMON SERIES





A L E N T E N S E R M O N S E R I E S

2/19 – Greed vs. Generosity

Greed is the desire to hold onto more than is ours to hold onto, to pursue and cling to more wealth than we need, and to be slow to release our grip and give away what God has put under our control. When we are given to greed, our hearts grow cold toward others; we become absorbed with things that thieves can steal and moth and rust can destroy; and we become blind to things that last – things that matter to God (cf. Mt. 6:19-21). Greed is profoundly contrary to a life of faith, for it does not trust God to provide for our future, but rather trusts in hoarding and acquisition as the solution to our ultimate need. Greed turns us away from God as our provider.

Greed's antidote and contrasting virtue is generosity, which releases our grip from what we possess and turns our gaze away from what we might acquire, and rather toward others, and to what we might give. Living generously embodies faith by actively trusting God to provide for us as we offer to others what he has already given to us. Throughout the Scriptures, we are challenged to permit God to shape and limit our desires and to let him control our wealth, that we might be more fully available to God and to others in the ways of love. The commandment against covetousness (Ex. 20:17, etc.), Deuteronomy 15:7-11, the Wisdom Literature (e.g. Prov. 11:6, 11:24-26, 22:9, etc.), the Prophets (e.g. Is. 58:6-8, etc.), The Lord's teaching in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 6:19-34), the story of the Rich Young Ruler in Luke 18, the Parable of the Rich Fool in Luke 12, and Paul's instruction in 1 Timothy 6 all reveal God's desire that we be "free from the love of money" (Heb. 13:5, etc.) and available to God and others to "freely give" even as we have freely received (Mt. 10:8). As you discuss the Scriptures in your group this week, seek God to help you find practical ways that you can embrace generosity and reject greed in your life. Remember, progress generally comes in small steps, not great strides.



Anchoring Text: Matthew 6:19-34

Have someone read this section of the Sermon on the Mount out loud. Jesus often teaches on money in the Gospels. In this section, Jesus focuses on our attitude and actions regarding money and possessions.

1. Verse 21 is particularly well-known. Contemporary views of giving often focus on giving to causes that we love. But the teaching of Jesus completely reverses this approach. Jesus says that our heart will follow where our money goes. How is this view of generosity different from modern notions of generosity?
2. According to this passage (esp. v. 24), we see that money is a spiritual matter. Jesus says that we are unable to serve two masters. How have you experienced the discomfort of trying to serve competing causes in your life?
3. Jesus connects worry to our possessions. In what ways have you seen your worry and anxiety relate to your material life?
4. Considering verse 33, what does it mean to seek the kingdom and his righteousness in your daily life?
5. Holding onto our resources causes us to lose instead of gain. A life of generosity is offered as the path to a better quality of life. What are some concrete ways, even small ways, that you sense God inviting you to live more generously in your present situation?
6. As we have read, money reveals what we value. If you were to receive \$25,000, what would you do with it? What values are revealed in where your mind takes you as you consider this? How might this amount of money impact your levels of anxiety, hope, and reliance on God?
7. Jesus and his disciples lived abundant and generous lives. Reflecting on your own experience, have you ever met an unhappy generous person? What characteristics mark the generous people you've encountered?



A L E N T E N S E R M O N S E R I E S

2/26 – Sloth vs. Diligence

Sloth is our tendency toward laxness, laziness, and despair in the way we approach our life of faith. Sloth leads us to become cynical regarding the value of exerting ourselves in the way of Jesus, and either to give ourselves to indolence and inactivity, or to “counterfeit” activity that keeps us from the things God has actually asked us to do – consider times you may have lost long periods of time to scrolling on your phone when you know God is inviting you to do something else. Sloth can have a particularly destructive impact in our life of faith, for to make progress in any of the “heavenly virtues” requires effort on our part, and to embrace sloth leads us to become passive, cynical, and indifferent about the things that matter most to God.

Sloth’s antidote and contrasting virtue is diligence, which leads us to engage with consistency, focus, and discipline in the things that God has put before us to do, whether that is our professional work, activity that cultivates virtue in our own lives, or action that blesses and benefits others. The Proverbs point to the ant as an example of diligence, and it is the foolish person who is given to idleness and sloth as a way of life (Prov. 6:6, ff., etc.). Jesus often refers in his parables to people undertaking their work with diligence and attentiveness – The Faithful Steward (Lk. 12:35 ff.), The Good Shepherd (Jn. 10:11 ff.), and The Parable of the Talents (Mt. 25:14 ff.) are good examples, as are Paul’s words regarding work in Colossians 3:23-24 and the admonitions in Hebrews 6:9 ff. and Hebrews 12. As you reflect on these and other scriptures on your own and in your group this week, be attentive to ways sloth may have slipped into your own life and seek God for small yet practical steps to embrace diligence – drop by drop a river is born.



Discussion Questions

1. First, let's further define sloth. What do you think are the differences between rest and laziness?
2. Read Matthew 25:14-28. What stands out to you? What do you think Jesus is trying to communicate here?
3. Compare the master's reactions to each of the servants. What do you notice?
4. What are some of the talents, gifts, and resources God has given you?
5. What are some of the risks and rewards of investing in God's service? What most often holds you back from doing so?
6. Spend some time during prayer ministry asking God to reveal any areas of your life where slothfulness may have taken root. Practice confession and repentance during ministry time.
7. Close by spending time asking God for areas where he'd like you to invest your gifts in his kingdom.



A L E N T E N S E R M O N S E R I E S

3/5 – Gluttony vs. Temperance

Gluttony is the inordinate desire for and consumption of food and drink, and by extension, of other things as well (e.g. media, news, etc.) – it is essentially greed as it applies to all that is edible and consumable. A gluttonous person consistently fails to place limits on their consumption, and consistently goes “beyond grace” regarding what they eat, drink, and otherwise consume. Like other vices, gluttony may serve as a form of “counterfeit grace,” where through excessive eating and drinking or other forms of consumption we seek to avoid pain or distract ourselves from the things God is inviting us to seek him for and to attend to.

Gluttony’s antidote and contrasting virtue is temperance – think of tempered glass, which through a strengthening process is better able to resist extremes of heat and pressure. Temperance, therefore, is the capacity to place limits on our desires and appetites, and on what we consume. It is like the governor on a lawnmower engine that places a limit on how fast the motor can run, for its own good. The Proverbs (e.g. Prov. 28:20-21, 28:7, etc.), the Prophets (e.g. Is. 5:11 ff, etc.), and Paul’s instruction to the Ephesian church (Eph. 5:15-21) and to the Corinthian church (1 Cor. 6:12 ff., 9:27, etc.) regarding food and drink are among the many helpful reference points in the Scriptures regarding gluttony and temperance.

It is important in addressing gluttony that we do not create new universal laws and legalisms as our strategy – food and drink within reasonable limits are gifts of God to be savored and enjoyed. Rather, through periodic practices of fasting, paying attention to our habits of consumption, and seeking support and accountability from trusted family and friends, we can learn to place gentle limits on our own consumption in an overall atmosphere of freedom. May God meet you and your group in taking small, consistent steps forward in the ways of temperance this week – remember, progress generally comes in teaspoonfuls and not truckloads.



Discussion Questions

1. What good pleasures do you find most difficult to enjoy in moderation?
2. Often, we may use food or other pleasures to avoid, escape, or suppress something painful or that causes shame in our lives. In doing so, how does this push us further away from God?
3. What things do you see in our current culture that encourage gluttony? What are things that encourage you to excessively indulge regarding certain pleasures? (Ex: social media, food delivery, etc.)
4. 1 Corinthians 6:12 says, “I have the right to do anything” – but I will not be mastered by anything.” The Message Version phrases the last part of this verse by saying “...I’d be a slave to my whims.” How does this verse bear on the sin of gluttony? How can our inordinate desire for food, drink, or other consumables become our master, rather than God?
5. We read that temperance is the antidote to gluttony, and in 1 Corinthians 9:27, Paul says “I discipline my body and keep it under control.” How might this bodily discipline look for us today? How might it look for you personally? What are some small steps you can begin to take to practice self-control?
6. How do you think fasting helps us cultivate temperance in our lives? As you participate in this Lenten season, do you sense God inviting you into any changes you might make in your life regarding matters of gluttony and temperance?



A L E N T E N S E R M O N S E R I E S

3/12 – *Lust vs. Chastity*

Lust is the unchecked desire for sexual pleasure. It begins with the eyes and the heart and often leads to sexual practices and liaisons that draw us away from the good purposes of God regarding sex and bring deep hurt upon ourselves and others. The Apostle Paul encourages us to “flee immorality” (1 Cor. 6:18-20), for we are told that engaging in sex outside of covenantal marriage after God’s own design is particularly destructive, and violates the sacred claim that God makes on our physical bodies, the temple of the Holy Spirit. Jesus, however, reminds us that adultery occurs when we even look upon others lustfully (Mt. 5:28, etc.), and James reminds us that immorality does not occur in a vacuum, or as a result of “spontaneous combustion,” but rather begins when we allow ourselves to lust – to look upon and sexually desire others in ways apart from God’s design (cf. James 1:12 ff.).

Lust’s antidote and contrasting virtue is chastity, which is the habit of placing limits on our sexual appetites and actions. Chastity is to lust and sexual activity what temperance is to gluttony – it places limits on what we permit ourselves to desire and act upon as regard sex. In a highly sexualized society such as our own, where we encounter sexual images and invitations at every turn, chastity requires diligence and discipline on our part to make real in our lives – consider Job’s “covenant with his eyes” in Job 31:1. As we grow in chastity, we also learn to look on others as sacred persons beloved of God and worthy of our honor, and not merely as sexual objects to be desired and used. In addition to the texts referenced above, and others, Eph. 4:17 and ff. and 5:3 ff. are also good starting points for reflection and discussion. As you examine your own life and heart regarding lust and discuss it in your group, look for hidden and dark places in yourself, and for ways to turn from and confess these things, and seek God through small steps to help you embrace a life of chastity. Brick by brick, my citizens, brick by brick.



Discussion Questions

1. What is it like for you to believe that God wants what is best for you?
2. What do you think of when you imagine Jesus telling the Pharisees that adultery includes when we look upon others lustfully?
3. What kind of a response from God do you expect when bringing lustful thoughts, desires or actions to Him? Have you ever done that? If so, what was it like? How was your experience similar to or different from what Scripture tells us to expect when we confess our sin to God (see 1 Jn. 1:8-10, The Parable of the Prodigal Son (Lk. 15:11-32), The Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Gatherer (Lk. 18:9-14), etc.)?
4. When you think of the word chastity as the virtue partner to lust, what things come to mind? How could the fruit of the spirit in Galatians 5:22-23 help us apply the practice of chastity in our lives?
5. When you think of “living in our highly sexualized society” and the temptations we are met with daily, what does the idea that God asks us to look on others (and ourselves) as “sacred persons beloved of God and worthy of honor” bring to your mind? In what other areas of life might this be something to nurture as a way of living this out with integrity?
6. Read Ephesians 4:14-24. Discuss how the surrounding verses support the idea of turning from lust toward chastity.



A L E N T E N S E R M O N S E R I E S

3/19 – *Envy vs. Kindness*

Envy involves us feeling threatened by the good fortune of others or desirous of their misfortune. When we are envious of others, we cease to see them with eyes of love, and rather look upon them with a hard heart and a jealous eye, often referred to as the “evil eye” in many cultures. We lose touch with the heart of God and become consumed with an often-bitter desire for what others are or have, or with the desire that they lose what they have. Envy turns us inward on ourselves, lacks all sense of gratitude and contentment, views the world through a lens of lack and not sufficiency, and blinds us to God’s goodness and grace to us in the present.

Envy’s antidote and contrasting virtue is often considered to be kindness, which over against envy looks upon others with a warm and generous eye, rejoices in and desires their flourishing, and prays against others’ loss and hardship. In Romans 12, Paul’s rich chapter on spiritual gifts and grace in community, we are called to “weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who rejoice” (Rom. 12:15) – a striking contrast to a posture of envy. The anatomy of envy is also strikingly evident in King Saul’s attitude toward David in 1 Samuel 18:1 ff. In that and the following chapters, we see a man consumed with insecurity and envy, blind to God’s will and provision, obsessed with the blessing David had enjoyed, and determined to snuff it out. Saul’s envy in the end is a major contributor to the loss of his kingdom and his ultimate death. Psalm 73; Proverbs including 3:31, 14:30; 23:17, 24:1, and 27:4; Jesus’ words in Mark 7:14 ff; Titus 3: 1-7, and James 3:14 ff. and 4:1-10, among other scriptures, are helpful reference points for your reflection and discussion this week. May God meet you and your group and by his word and his Spirit help you to find simple, practical ways to cast off envy and put on kindness in your life with God and others – the battle is generally won in BB’s and not cannonballs.



Discussion Questions

1. Describe the experience of the psalmist in Psalm 73:1-3 and 21-24. How did envy impact the psalmist's inner life with God? Think of a time when you felt envy towards someone or you felt desirous of someone else's misfortune (e.g. a fan of one team wanting to see someone from the opposing team hurt). Without naming names, describe the thoughts and feelings you experienced when you were envious.
2. Contrast envy with a healthy desire to improve at something that someone else excels at or to get something you lack but others have. What are some differences between healthy admiration for another person and envy toward that person?
3. Read Titus 3:1-7. What are some practical ways that God's love toward you in Christ makes you able to move beyond envy and malice and into a posture that is peaceable, considerate, gentle, and kind? What are some practical ways you can fight envy in yourself when it arises?
4. Have you ever felt someone was envious of you? How did this person's envy towards you impact your relationship? Describe that experience (again, not naming names). What might this person's kindness toward you have looked like?
5. Consider the instructions in Hebrews 13:5 to be content with what we have. How do gratitude and contentment help us to avoid envy and embrace kindness toward others?
6. During ministry time, ask the Holy Spirit to show you anywhere in your life where you are envious toward someone. Then take time to pray, repent, and hold that person quietly before God, asking God to bless them. Finally, pray grace over one another to avoid envy, walk in gratitude and contentment, and live with genuine kindness toward others.



A L E N T E N S E R M O N S E R I E S

3/26 – Anger vs. Patience

Sinful *anger* is the sudden or sustained burning desire to lash out at God or others or seek revenge when we feel hurt or afraid or our desires are not met. The Scriptures clearly leave room for righteous anger, which is not counted as among the deadly sins, and which involves a legitimate and strong sense of injustice regarding ourselves and others without a blind desire to strike back or lash out at the object of our anger. When we are sinfully angry – consider expressions like “blind rage” or “he saw red” – we find ourselves consumed by our own experience of hurt or fear, unable to see or hear others, and given only to “drawing blood” with our words and actions. “Crimes of passion” often result from unchecked sinful anger, and nearly all of us have been on the giving and receiving end of conversations full of words uttered only to hurt and extract revenge on us or others.

Sinful anger’s antidote and corresponding virtue is patience, a posture of heart that even in the face of hurt and fear is able to pause, seek God, maintain a heart of love, and act and respond in measured and redemptive ways. Throughout the Scriptures, patience is held up as a mark of wisdom and grace, a fruit of the Spirit that bears good fruit in ourselves and others. References regarding sinful anger, righteous anger (including the wrath of God), and patience are abundant in the Scriptures, but some good starting points for reflection and discussion include Proverbs 15:1, 15:18, 17:14; 19:11, and others; Matthew 5:21-26; Mark 3:1-6; Romans 12:14-21; Ephesians 4:1-6, 4:25-31, and 6:4, etc.; James 1:19-25, 3:13-18, etc.; and 1 Peter 2:21-25 and 3:8-12. As you pay attention this week to your own life, and to your feelings and words at times when you experience anger, and as you reflect on and discuss the Scriptures, may God meet you by his Spirit and give you grace to take small but real steps in cultivating patience in your own life and relationships. Left foot, right foot...



Discussion Questions

1. What comes to mind as you think about the differences between sinful anger and righteous anger? How would you define each?
2. How did your family settle disputes as you were growing up? Does this affect the way you approach conflict now? How?
3. Read Matthew 5:21-26. What is one thing that most stands out to you in this passage? How would you describe the Lord's standards regarding anger and patience?
4. Read Romans 12:14-21. What is one thing that most stands out to you in this passage? Pay special attention to the commands in verses 17-19 and verse 21, and the practical counsel in verse 20. Given these guardrails, what are some practical steps you can take in the heat of anger to practice patience and obey God in these things? How does the justice of God make you better able to do this?
5. We are called to keep our relationships healthy by being willing to relinquish pride and seek forgiveness and reconciliation. What are some steps you sense God inviting you to take to embrace these things in your own life and relationships?
6. What specific help do you need from the Lord to pursue reconciliation with people you are in conflict with (e.g. courage, forgiveness, patience, opportunity)? Take some time to pray for one another in your group for these things.



A L E N T E N S E R M O N S E R I E S

4/2 – Pride vs. Humility

Pride, the last of the deadly sins we will consider, and often considered among the most destructive, involves an inflated sense of ourselves, a distorted understanding of our own power and significance, a posture of inordinate independence in our relationship with God and others, and a sense that we are either beyond God's and others' help or have no need of it. Pride is in a sense the original sin of both the Devil and of Adam and Eve, in that all three acted on the idea that somehow they understood themselves better than God did, that they knew better than God what they needed and how to get it, and that life defined in their own terms was better than life defined and directed by God. Pride can lead us to both a posture of superiority or a posture of despair, an overestimation of either our own power and abilities or of our weaknesses and deficiencies.

Pride's antidote and contrasting virtue is humility, which involves a right understanding of ourselves in relation to God and others, a recognition of our own limits and needs as well as the graces and gifts God has placed in us, and a yielded willingness to seek God as we steward our gifts and acknowledge our weaknesses in the context of community. The biblical notion of the fear of the Lord, far from a fawning and groveling posture toward God, embodies a posture of humility, where we hold ourselves before God, mindful that we are but dust, but also confident of God's abiding love and its power in our lives (cf. Ps. 103:6-18). Paul's words in Romans 12:3 are key: "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" (Rom. 12:3, NIV). Texts and examples concerning pride and humility are abundant throughout Scripture, but a few good reference points are Proverbs 1:7, 9:10, 11:2, 16:18-19, etc.; Zechariah 9:9; the Triumphal Entry, with Jesus riding on the foal of a donkey, in Matthew 21:1-11 and the other Gospels; the Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector in Luke 18:9-14; the Lord's conversation with the disciples in Matthew 20:20-28 and Mark 10:35-45, etc.; Paul's instruction in Romans 12:1-8, and the important passage in Phil 2:1-13 on



the humility of Jesus, among many others. As you seek God to help you notice pride and embrace humility in your own life, and as you reflect on your own and discuss this with your group, may the Lord teach you in the ways of humility and gentleness so evident in Jesus himself, and give you practical steps forward in the ways of his grace. “Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary” (Gal. 6:9).

Read Philippians 2:1-13 and consider the following:

1. What does it mean in practice to value others above yourself (v. 3)?
2. How would you describe the posture and attitude of the Lord Jesus in this passage? How does God the Father respond to Jesus’s posture and attitude?
3. How does this passage challenge current popular definitions of success?
4. How is humility different from being a “doormat?” What light does Romans 12:3 shed on this question?
5. Consider a time when God revealed pride in your own life. How did you become aware of it? Who was involved in helping you become aware? What stirs in you as you remember this experience?
6. Who do you admire because they truly put others’ interests before their own? Briefly describe why you admire that person.
7. In your view, what do fear and trembling (v. 12-13) have to do with humility? What happens in God’s heart when you embrace humility in the way Jesus did?
8. Imagine yourself growing in humility. What would that look like for you? Share about how greater humility might change how you carry yourself in a current context in your life. What aspects of God’s character might you begin to reflect in that context as you walk more fully in humility? What is one specific way you sense God inviting you to model humility in that context this week?

