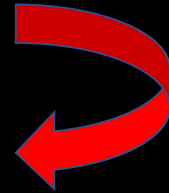




Seven Deadly Spins

Lent 2023 @ NLPC



What happens when we trade sound doctrine
for popular myths, for smooth words,
for prevailing and damaging messages in our culture
that deflect us from the truth and grace
offered by Jesus Christ?

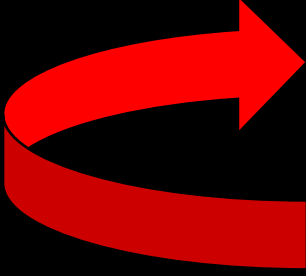
2023 Lenten Series at

North Lake Presbyterian Church
975 Rolling Acres Road
Lady Lake, FL 32159

Led by Pastors Jeff Hosmer and Shawn Smith

Date	Message	Preacher
Sunday, February 26 – Lent 1	The Myth of Individualism	Pastor Jeff
Sunday, March 5 – Lent 2	The Myth of Busyness	Pastor Jeff
Sunday, March 12 – Lent 3	The Myth of Progress	Pastor Shawn
Sunday, March 19 – Lent 4	The Myth of Prosperity	Pastor Jeff
Sunday, March 26 – Lent 5	The Myth of Spirituality	Pastor Jeff
Palm Sunday, April 2	The Myth of Dominance	Pastor Shawn
Maundy Thursday, April 6	The Myth of Maturity	Pastor Jeff

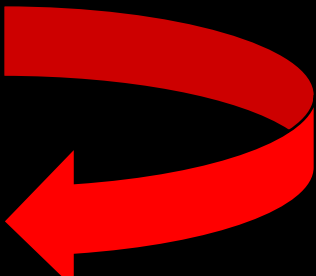
Messages available through North Lake website: northlakepc.org



Seven Deadly Spins

Lent 2023

Introduction



Seven hundred years ago Italian poet Dante completed his epic poem *The Divine Comedy*. He structured a major section of his poem using the seven deadly sins. These were not new with Dante; they went back perhaps another thousand years. Early Christian writers contemplated and classified which sins were most perilous, most likely to turn someone away from God, mostly likely to have soul-killing consequences. By the Middle Ages a somewhat standardized list of seven deadly sins had been compiled: lust, gluttony, greed, sloth, wrath, envy, and pride. They were often paired with seven corresponding virtues: chastity, temperance, charity, diligence, patience, gratitude, humility.

Because Lent was an ancient season for self-scrutiny, reflection, for grappling with temptations, and for confession, the seven deadly sins received more attention during the forty days of preparation for Easter. Today, we are still concerned with behaviors, actions, habits, and feelings that drive a wedge between God and us. Yes, we want to steer away from these sins and steer toward virtues. And we must confess to the Lord how we fall short, how we wobble back and forth between virtue and sin.

An inventory of our lives, measured by such sins and virtues, is appropriate and beneficial during Lent. But our focus through Lent 2023 is a bit different. While the series plays on this term, “seven deadly sins,” we will focus on Seven Deadly Spins. What happens when we trade sound doctrine for popular myths, for smooth words, for prevailing and damaging messages in our culture that deflect us from the truth and grace offered by Jesus Christ?

In worship on Sunday, February 12, we read how Paul warned Timothy about people who would have itchy ears.

For the time is coming when people will not put up with sound doctrine, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own desires, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander away to myths.

2 Timothy 4:3-4 MSG

Paul recognized how many of us seek voices and authorities that confirm what we already believe or want to hear. The great Apostle understood that many people will trade sound doctrine (or healthy teaching) for whatever suits their desires. He was concerned about those who “will turn away from listening to the truth and wander away to myths.”

Almost every New Testament epistle registers concern about false teachers, twisted truths, wrong opinions, and deceit that damages the soul. In 2 Peter 3, Peter commended Paul for his wise and solid teaching. But Peter also warned about teachers who were way off base.

Irresponsible people who don't know what they are talking about twist [the teaching] every which way. They do it to the rest of the Scriptures, too, destroying themselves as they do it. But you, friends, are well-warned. Be on guard lest you lose your footing and get swept off your feet by these lawless and loose-talking teachers.

2 Peter 3:16-17 MSG

Watch out! Steer clear of messages that distort the scriptures and lead to destruction. Keep your footing and stability by avoiding the wrong teachers.

Immediately after the warning comes the concluding verse of the letter. This is one of my favorite verses, and I put it below my signature in all my emails.

**But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.**

2 Peter 3:18 NRSV

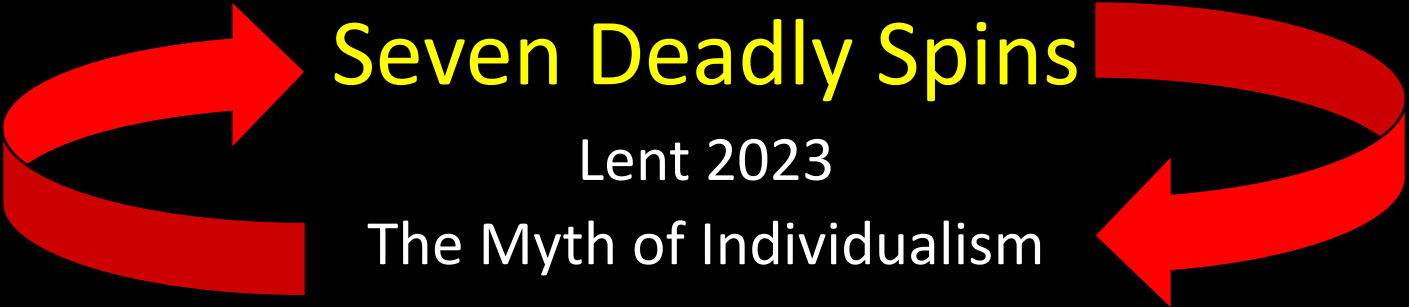
So, our fundamental purpose through Lent 2023 is not merely to identify and avoid Seven Deadly Spins. Our aim is to keep growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. True disciples are always trying to grow in this way and to glorify him. Furthermore, that grace and knowledge are wonderful correctives for the myths that pull us in the wrong direction.

The pathway to the Cross is not easy-going, but Lent is not supposed to be comfortable or convenient. And there will surely be some things you don't want to hear as we consider these Seven Deadly Spins in the weeks ahead:

- 1) Myth of Individualism
- 2) Myth of Busyness
- 3) Myth of Progress
- 4) Myth of Prosperity
- 5) Myth of Spirituality
- 6) Myth of Dominance
- 7) Myth of Maturity

May the Lord use these Lenten messages, reflections, and discussions to keep up us growing in the right direction, in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

Rev. Dr. Jeffrey A. Hosmer



Seven Deadly Spins

Lent 2023

The Myth of Individualism

Accompanying the message by Pastor Jeff on Sunday, February 26

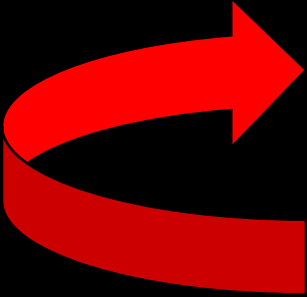
Each human being has a unique origin, story, and connection to God. We are individuals, whom the Lord knows and calls by name (“I have called you by name, you are mine” Isaiah 43:1). Our journeys of life overlap, intersect, and collide, but they are not identical. So we are individual persons responding to each other, to circumstances, and to God and His amazing grace.

Our individual existence is undeniable. Adam and Eve were individuals from the start, trying to figure out how they would relate to each other, to God, and the world around them. Individuals are the inhabitants of this world, the basic units of society. Our biblical faith attaches great value to every human soul, the ultimate container or expression of an individual. God forms us and knows us before we are born (Psalm 139:13-16). The Lord knows the number of hairs on our heads (Matthew 10:30). He regards us and treats us as distinct and precious individuals.

The myth of individualism starts with this truth of the intrinsic worth of the individual, but carries it to extreme forms of self-expression, self-help, and do-it-yourself religion. Americans have been associated with a particularly “rugged individualism,” rooted in frontier experiences that emphasized personal liberty and self-reliance. We have celebrated immigrants, pioneers, and self-made successes dotting our history. The assertive, unbridled, cinematic characters played often by Clint Eastwood tend to glorify individual decision-making, initiative, and action.

The gospel of self-help, ignoring or downplaying the role of God, is a lonely, insidious version of the myth of individualism. It is the opposite of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, who emphasizes our spiritual and organic connection with him in John 15:1-11. He is the vine and we are the branches; we are created to abide in him. Our discipleship, our fruitfulness, and our joy all mature to fulfillment when we are attached to Jesus. We reach our full potential in Christ, not in and of ourselves, not by the popular tenets of individualism.

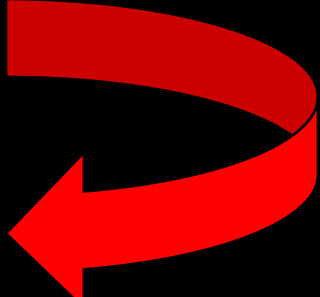
- 1) The popular Frank Sinatra song “I Did It My Way” might be considered the anthem of individualism. Remember or look up the lyrics of that song, and compare it with the verses of the hymn Amazing Grace. What differences do you see? What is the basis and the focus of your personal faith?
- 2) Paul devoted much of Ephesians 4 to cultivating the unity of the church. Read verses 1-5 (or if you prefer, all the way to verse 16) and consider how he tries to shape individuals into community. What are some of the important concepts or tactics for weaving individuals together, for overcoming a do-it-yourself approach to faith?
- 3) In a culture where individualism has created polarizing extremes and punctured a sense of unity, what role does the Christian Gospel have? How can the witness of the Church reach those who tend to reject any instruction or authority, including God’s?



Seven Deadly Spins

Lent 2023

The Myth of Busyness



Accompanying the message by Pastor Jeff on Sunday, March 5

Christian author and philosopher Dallas Willard said, “Hurry is the great enemy of spiritual life in our day. You must ruthlessly eliminate hurry from your life.”

Now wait a minute! I’m dashing from one meeting to another for the sake of the Lord. I’m continually checking text messages, emails, and voicemails, trying to do triage and keep up with replies. I’m marching double-time, hoping to cross off two dozen tasks on my daily TO DO list. I’m even hurrying to finish writing this page to meet the deadline for the Lenten study guide.

“Dr. Willard, with all due respect, do you comprehend what you’re asking me to change?”

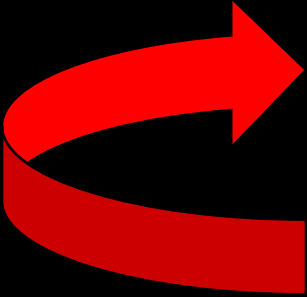
Yes, of course he understands. And he’s absolutely right.

Near the beginning of my sabbatical in 2022, I wrote in my journal: “Trying to become a new, unhurried version of myself. More margins, fewer items on the TO DO list, intentionally slower pace ... reading more, and time to explore a topic or take a mental detour.” That actually worked rather well during the sabbatical, but how quickly I revert to old patterns of busyness!

Frequently I hear a retiree say, “I’m so busy now I don’t know when I had time to work.” Families with children can barely keep up with the breathless pace of school and other activities. Some who grieve explain, “I’m much better off if I just keep busy.” And we can be busy with our phones or screens at such a rate we scarcely realize their prominence in our lives; the average user touches his or her phone more than 2600 times (typing, tapping, swiping) every day.

The myth of busyness somehow persuades us that our hope and redemption is tied to our achievements or how much we squeeze into a day.

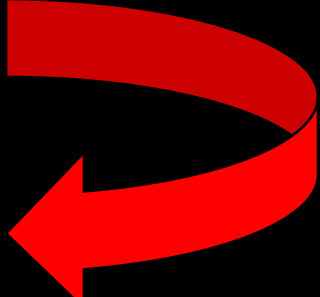
- 1) Luke 10:38-42 reports the famous visit of Jesus to the home of Mary and Martha. Eventually Martha interrupted Jesus and asked if he didn’t care that Mary was a slacker and left all the work to Martha. In what ways do you identify with Mary and/or Martha? How surprising was the answer of Jesus and what does it say about busyness and our work ethic? How do you feel about his reply?
- 2) James 1:11 says: **For the sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the field; its flower falls, and its beauty perishes. It is the same way with the rich; in the midst of a busy life, they will wither away.** How is busyness related to our socioeconomic status or lifestyle? How is busyness correlated to our stage of life?
- 3) When is your time for God? When does your soul breathe deeply and slowly? When are you marinating in the Word? How does your pace reflect faith in the Lord?



Seven Deadly Spins

Lent 2023

The Myth of Progress

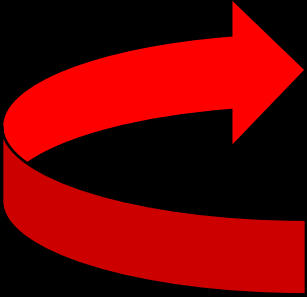


Accompanying the message by Pastor Shawn on Sunday, March 12

Throughout history, some have argued in favor of the belief that life is improving, evolving, or progressing toward the best version of humanity. Each year, we see new technological discoveries and scientific advances that may take us one tiny step closer to achieving the goal of human-social perfection. In Christianity, there are some who have taken this idea and applied it to their interpretation of scripture. Christian progress will read Romans 8:28; *“We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.”* and teach that God is using everything to build a perfect future here on earth. This teaching focuses on our personal improvement while neglecting language about confessing our sins and our need for grace from God through a savior.

- 1) Read Romans 8:18-39 out loud together. Pay close attention to what circumstances the Apostle Paul and other followers of Jesus are encountering at this time in history. What words does the Apostle use to describe creation? What role does Jesus play in this passage? Considering this reading, how might a Christian view their life, the role of Jesus, and God’s work in this world?
- 2) Read Ecclesiastes 9:1-12 out loud together. What stands out to you in this passage? Would you call the author a pessimist, a realist, honest, God-fearing, or something else? What does the author want us to understand about his estimation of human life and our endeavors? How does this passage critique the progress idea?
- 3) Was there something from the sermon you would like to discuss with others in the group? Do you read the bible as supporting the idea that life and society are progressing toward perfection in Christ? Why or why not? What passages do you see as supporting your point of view?

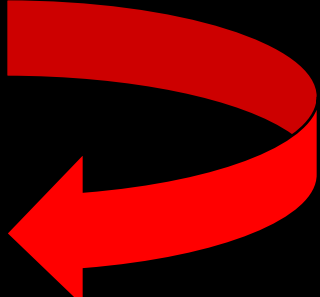
In the week ahead spend time reading Hebrews 12. Try to read it through once without making notes or pausing to form questions. Set it aside after you have finished reading it once and go about your daily tasks. On a separate day, read Hebrews 12 slowly, making notes about our life in Christ. Let your notes and questions lead your time of personal prayer.



Seven Deadly Spins

Lent 2023

The Myth of Prosperity



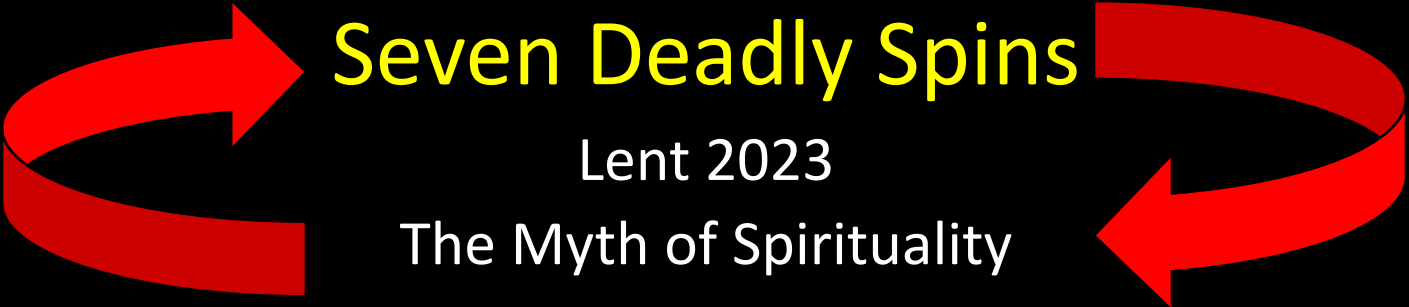
Accompanying the message by Pastor Jeff on Sunday, March 19

New York Times columnist Ross Douthat called for a revival of traditional Christianity in his 2012 book: *Bad Religion: How We Became a Nation of Heretics*. The thesis of his book is that “America’s problem isn’t too much religion, or too little of it. It’s *bad* religion: the slow-motion collapse of traditional Christianity and the rise of a variety of destructive pseudo-Christianities in its place.” Douthat devotes an entire chapter to what is often called the “prosperity gospel.” The author laments a “pray and grow rich” message that refashions “Christianity to suit an age of abundance ... in a marriage of God and Mammon.” This approach to faith legitimates the pursuit of worldly gain and our rampant consumer culture.

The gospel of wealth has taken many forms through the years, but the common conviction is that faithfulness and worldly rewards go hand-in-hand. In recent decades Christian bookstores (or online Christian booksellers) have large sections devoted to money and finance. The appeal is strong to those in an upwardly-mobile society who want to regard their money-making and wealth as entirely congruent with a Christian faith. This baptized ambition also means that many congregations scramble to be entrepreneurial, market-driven, and effective in selling their wares to religious consumers. Some mega-churches, broadcast and music ministries, publishers, and parachurch agencies now represent a colossal, multi-billion dollar Christian industry.

Healthy debates about the roles of private property, capitalism, and charity are essential in our culture that has enjoyed unparalleled abundance. Churches can and should participate in those conversations. However, the myth of prosperity is fundamentally incompatible with the teaching of Jesus and the weight of scripture. Praying doesn’t necessarily lead to growing rich; naming and claiming doesn’t produce millionaires. Furthermore, Jesus exhibits a remarkable, consistent, and passionate interest in the plight of the poor. He never equates discipleship with prosperity; in fact, he emphasizes the opposite and how costly it may be to follow him.

- 1) Jesus famously compared getting a rich person into the kingdom of heaven with getting a camel to pass through the eye of a needle. Read Matthew 19:23-26. Why do you think he made this comparison? What conclusions do you draw from this passage?
- 2) John counsels against love for this world and the things of this world (the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, the pride in riches). In 1 John 2:15-17 he tries to reorient his Christian readers to the love of the Father and the will of God. Like Jesus, he differentiates between what is transient or fleeting and what is valuable forever. What do you love that is durable or permanent? What can you let go of as non-essential?
- 3) Through history some followers of Christ have made vows of poverty as a step toward life in a monastery or a mission field. Why do you think that made sense for them? What connection do you see between your belongings and your belonging to Christ?



Seven Deadly Spins

Lent 2023

The Myth of Spirituality

Accompanying the message by Pastor Jeff on Sunday, March 26

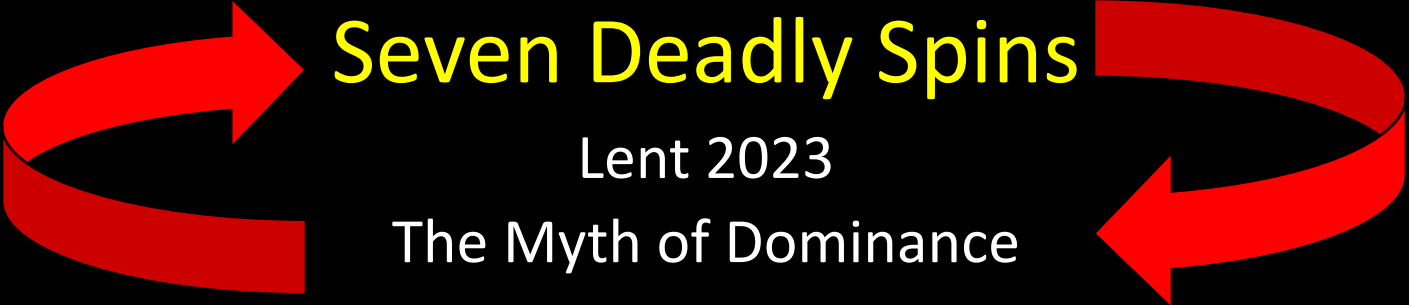
Julia Roberts starred in the 2010 film “Eat Pray Love,” based on the memoirs of Elizabeth (Liz) Gilbert. At age 31, with a successful writing career, an eight-year marriage, and a lovely home, she found herself in an emotional and spiritual crisis. Her quest for healing led to a contentious divorce, an unsettling romance, more pain and uncertainty, suicidal thoughts, and eventually travel to Italy, India, and Indonesia. Her journey led from a nominal Christian background to a praying at an ashram in India, to a medicine man in Bali known for his psychic readings.

Liz Gilbert typifies the shift away from a specific faith to some amalgamation or blend of wisdom and guidance. The popular myth of spirituality rejects institutional or organized religion, choosing instead a vague, mystical, self-designed version of soul-maintenance. Many approaches to spirituality, championed by such as Deepak Chopra and Oprah Winfrey, seek an illumination, a discovery of the divinity that lies within the Self.

This myth has its own dogmatic and ethical framework that focuses on therapy, seeks moral freedom, and elevates the Self to the grandest level. Gilbert wrote, “God dwells within you as you yourself, exactly the way you are.” Spirituality prefers an inner authority rather than any exterior authority. The ultimate source of her decisions and behavior comes from within. The impulse to leave her house, marriage, and plans to be a mother came from within: “it was merely my own voice, speaking from within my own self ... my voice as I had never heard it before.”

However, if the only voice we heed—or the primary voice of authority—is within us, we may be horribly deceived. We can push our conscience around like a wheelbarrow to do whatever we want. Discernment is best done with the counsel of others, in dialogue with the wisdom and faith handed down to us. Our quest is not merely spiritual, but also religious, a word with the same root as ligament, implying connection and commitment. We live connected and committed to God who is close enough to uphold us and transcendent enough to oversee all creation.

- 1) Jesus was teaching in a synagogue when he was confronted by an unclean spirit who had taken hold of a man. Jesus rebuked the spirit and commanded it to come out of the man. Read Mark 1:21-28. What is the importance of having a relationship with Jesus who teaches and heals with authority greater than anything inside us?
- 2) How would you distinguish spirituality and religion? If you were talking with someone who is skeptical or disdainful of organized religion, what reasons would you give for your participation in the Church?
- 3) Given the sins and failures of all Christians, given the undeniable and grim scandals of Church, how would you invite someone to walk past all of that into North Lake and/or into a saving relationship with Jesus?



Seven Deadly Spins

Lent 2023

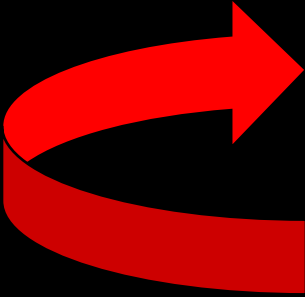
The Myth of Dominance

Accompanying the message by Pastor Shawn on Palm Sunday, April 2

Dominance is the idea that Christians are uniquely called to conquer all areas of public life (political, entertainment, education, etc.) for and in the name of Jesus Christ. Philippians chapter 2 verses 10 and 11: *so that at the name given to Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.* Christian dominance interprets these verses as a call to action for all believers of Christ to bring about this goal by passing rules and laws that enforce public is fully submitted to Christ as Lord.

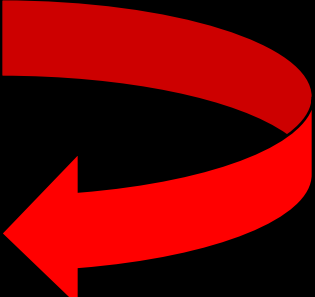
- 1) Read out loud together Philippians 2: 1-11. What is the Apostle Paul saying about humility, love, and the role of the Spirit of God? Considering all eleven verses do you believe that verses ten and eleven are a command to Christians to go and conquer all cultures and public life in the name of Jesus? Why or why not? What does public submission to Christ look like for you? Would it be the same in every country?
- 2) In the sermon Pastor Shawn referenced the scene from Matthew 26 where a disciple pulled his sword and cut off the ear of one of the people who had come to arrest Jesus. Jesus' response was that his disciples were not to take up their swords. Do you agree with Pastor Shawn's interpretation that this was a warning to Christians that they are not called to use violence and coercion to force the world into submitting to Jesus? Why or why not?
- 3) Read out loud together Romans 13. The Apostle Paul is writing to Christians who are submitting to the ultimate Lordship of Jesus in their life while living under the earthly rule of the Emperor of Rome. Several practices and policies within Roman culture and politics were sinful before God's eyes. What was the Apostle Paul's advice for Christians at that time? How do these words of advice align with what may have we have been taught about being a Christian today?

In the week ahead read Jesus' prayer for his disciples from John 17:6-26. Read it all the way through once without taking notes or asking questions. Set it aside and go about your daily tasks. The next day read through the passages again, but this time read slowly. Take your time with the prayer. What phrases, words, or thoughts stand out to you? Write them down. What questions come to mind? Write these down as well. Use what you have written as inspiration for your prayers this week as we walk towards the upper room, the cross, and the empty tomb.



Seven Deadly Spins

Lent 2023
Epilogue



We have arrived in Holy Week!

Here we worship in conjunction with the conclusion of the earthly life of Jesus.

Maundy Thursday – April 6 at 7 PM in the Sanctuary

We remember when Jesus shared his last supper with his closest followers. This is the origin of our sacrament of communion. We will also consider “*The Myth of Maturity*,” the last of seven spins in this series. The myth of maturity holds that the most experienced, or most veteran or responsible Christian leaders, live closer to Jesus than anyone else, and their faithfulness always shows in their lives. But we learn from Jesus’ final hours that his well-trained disciples faced temptations, failed, and fell away under duress. Maturity is no guarantee of faith-fidelity. We need his grace all the way to the end of our own lives.

Good Friday – April 7 at Noon in the Sanctuary

We commemorate his hours of suffering on the cross and the offering of his life for the forgiveness of sins (and spins) that separate us from God.

Easter – April 9 at all three Sunday services: 8:15, 9:30 and 11:15

We celebrate the empty tomb and his glorious victory over death.

For your final reflection:

You’ve been raised on the Message of the faith and have followed sound teaching. Now pass on this counsel to the followers of Jesus there, and you’ll be a good servant of Jesus. Stay clear of silly stories that get dressed up as religion. Exercise daily in God—no spiritual flabbiness, please! Workouts in the gymnasium are useful, but a disciplined life in God is far more so, making you fit both today and forever. You can count on this. Take it to heart. This is why we’ve thrown ourselves into this venture so totally. We’re banking on the living God, Savior of all men and women, especially believers.

1 Timothy 4:6–10 MSG