

Spiritual Poisons, part 6, PROCRASTAS.....
November 20, 2016



Have you ever gotten to the end of a day and been disappointed in yourself because of what you did not do that day? So you determined that the next day was going to be different. You said, "Tomorrow I'm going to jump out of bed when the clock goes off, and stick to my morning schedule, spend time in prayer before I leave, and stay focused all day on what needs to be done." Maybe you said that to yourself or even prayed it to God. You finally dropped off to sleep ready for a new you.

In the morning, the alarm clock went off. You smashed the snooze button out of habit. You remembered, for just a moment what you said last night and... you closed your eyes and went back to sleep. The determination you held so tightly the night before, you let go of in the morning.

Why is that? Why do we so easily give in to our current physical and emotional state instead of doing what we know we ought to do? Why do we do this even when we know we will pay for it later?

C.S. Lewis, the great Christian thinker tried to answer that question. Elise Snickers was a college student pursuing a career in psychology when she wrote a letter to Lewis to ask the question: **"Can personal sin be avoided — or “cured” — by proving to a patient the un-reasonableness of the sin? In other words, can a discovery of the stupidity of a sin be its cure?"** Put another way, can we use logic to prevent sin and overcome temptation?

Lewis used two illustrations in his answer. The first concerned why we sleep late. **"A man's reason sees perfectly clearly that the resulting discomfort and inconvenience will far outweigh the pleasure of the ten minutes in bed. Yet he stays in bed: not at all because his reason is deceived but because desire is stronger than reason."** His desire, his current desire is stronger than reason.

The second illustration was about a woman in a disagreement with someone else. He wrote that the woman knows that if she says what she is thinking of saying, something sharp that will hurt the other person, the disagreement is going to turn into an argument. And she does not want to be in an argument. **"Yet she says it: not at all because her reason is deceived but because the desire to score a point is at the moment stronger than her reason."**

Lewis goes on to explain that people are all day long making choices between what will prosper us or hinder us, help us or hurt us. And we often choose what will hurt us. We do this because we get some kind of instant gratification from our "anger, lust, sloth, greed, vanity, curiosity, or cowardice". We choose this even though we know it is not God's will. We choose this even though we know it will hurt us in the end. He concludes that logic will not keep you from sinning. Logic will not keep you from hitting the snooze button. Logic will not convince you to leave home early enough to arrive at your destination on time. Logic will not convince you to keep your mouth from saying hurtful things.

That is why we hit the snooze button and go back to sleep. It is because we are not primarily creatures of reason and logic. We are primarily creatures of desires. It is only when our desire to be on time is greater than our desire to stay in the warm bed, that we will make ourselves get up the first time the alarm goes off.

We need more than self-control. We need different, stronger desires.

This series of sermons has been about sins of the heart. Such sins do not stay in the heart, but work their way out into sins of the hands, the feet, the mouth, the eyes, the ears, and the loins. If we work on these heart sins, it will prevent the outward sins that grow out of them. This is necessary work for becoming a holy people. This is necessary work for being a people faithful to our God.

The subject this morning is one that hits many of us. The subject is sloth. We don't use that word much these days, except for a certain, slow-moving mammal. But it is a word that can describe people too. It is translated various ways in different English Bibles. You might read it in your Bible as sluggard, slothful, slacker, or lazy. Let me give you a definition for sloth.

sloth = negligence; avoiding what needs to be done

There are two forms of sloth. The first is idleness. We see idleness condemned in various places in the Bible, such as this one.

Ecclesiastes 10:18 (NIV) If a man is lazy, the rafters sag; if his hands are idle, the house leaks.

Wilmer Atkinson (**Wilmer Atkinson - Farm Journal**) observed idleness often in his travels. Wilmer Atkinson founded the Farm Journal in 1877. By 1915 he had 1 million subscribers. It has served North American farmers well for the last 139 years. Mr. Atkinson would drive around the country once a year on vacation and look for ideas for the magazine. In his autobiography, he tells of one sight that always disturbed him.

"... I was surprised and vexed at seeing from the car windows so many farmsteads where gates were off the hinges, broken wagons lying around, manure piles in plain sight, where ploughs had been left standing in the furrows, where buildings were leaning or tumbling down, where it seemed as though nobody lived and nobody cared for anything."

This was the cause of the invention of a comic strip that ran in the magazine for 30 years called **Peter Tumbledown**. In the comic, he teased the farmer who would let things slide. His hope was to encourage greater care of the farm and family, to combat carelessness and indifference, even among those who rented their farms. I have an excerpt from one of the magazines about Peter Tumbledown.

Peter Tumbledown lounged in the Tumbledown house
by the side of his tumbledown stove,
while the cheap hired man milked the Tumbledown cows
that were kept in a Tumbledown grove.
For the Tumbledown boys, who were willing young men,
had fled from the place in alarm,

when the thought came to them that they might have to spend all their lives on a Tumbledown farm.

Idleness is not the same as resting. Idleness avoids work. Resting we do after work. There is a time to rest from work. But the idle make resting their primary activity. The idle do not rest FROM work, they avoid work altogether. There is a difference between avoiding work and resting after work.

Idleness is sin and can lead to other sins. Some of you will remember King David from your Bibles (2 Samuel 11-12). God once described David as a man after God's own heart. That means that David was zealous for God's honor. David was devoted to living for God. People would see this in the decisions David made as their leader and they admired him for this. David was a man of great integrity and high moral character.

And yet, this same David somehow committed adultery and murder. As we examine the facts of David's failure we see that sloth played a part. Each spring, David normally led Israel in it's military campaigns. But this time he stayed home. So David did not have his usual companions to hang out with. They were all off at war. He did not have much to occupy his time and he was bored. He found himself wandering the palace looking for something to do, something to amuse himself. He ended up on the roof, as most roofs were flat. It was from there that he looked down and saw a woman bathing herself in the privacy, she thought, of her own home. David lusted for this woman and had her brought to him. Being the king no one refused him. And everything went down hill from there. Idleness played a key part in his sin.

The first form of sloth is idleness. **The second form of sloth is procrastination.** The reason this is different from idleness is that many people who procrastinate would not be called idle. They are busy, busy people. They are accomplishing all kinds of things. Most of US are busy people. We are overloaded with things we are trying to accomplish. We aren't sitting around doing nothing. We are not sleeping the day away like the idle people Solomon describes in the books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes.

An example of procrastination is in the Bible book of Haggai. After the Israelites were allowed to return to Jerusalem from Babylon, they were supposed to rebuild the temple of the Lord. But they procrastinated. So God sent the prophet Haggai to confront them.

Haggai 1:2-4 (NIV) This is what the LORD Almighty says: "These people say, 'The time has not yet come for the LORD's house to be built.'" Then the word of the LORD came through the prophet Haggai: "Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while this house remains a ruin?"

They were busy people. They were busy with their farms and their homes, while the house of the Lord lay in ruins. They were putting off the Lord's work that needed doing. This procrastination was sin. Procrastination can have bad consequences.

When I was a senior in high school, I got into a work release program. I only needed a few classes to graduate. So I left school early each day and went to my job. Because of this program, I was able to get a permit to park on campus. For some reason they got

their permits all messed up and decided to reissue the permits. I was informed that I would need to go to the office and get a new permit.

I did,... eventually. By that time all the new permits had been issued. I did not get one. So when my parents let me drive the family car to school, I parked it on the public road in front of the school. Unfortunately it was out of sight of the school, with no homes or businesses in sight. One day, someone broke a window, jacked up the car with its own jack, and stole two good tires on the rims. My father was not happy. I wasn't either, as I lost the use of the family car to drive to school. And I lived over a mile from the school.

I wish I could say that I learned my lesson from that experience. Unfortunately it took more than that one experience to convince me not to procrastinate as much. Many of you could tell similar stories, I know. We all know that sloth can have bad consequences.

The Antidote for Sloth: Grow a great heart desire to serve God. As C.S. Lewis said, we need new desires. I will explain what a heart desire is in a few moments. Jesus addressed this desire in His Sermon on the Mount.

Matthew 5:6 (NIV) Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness...

Some would say, 'Oh, yeah, I'd like to be right with God.' But they just wish they were right with God. They don't hunger for it. They don't thirst for it. We need to hunger and thirst to serve God. We need a GREAT heart desire to serve God. Only then will we be able to defeat sloth in us.

How do you develop such a desire? 1. You pray for it.

In his book on Biblical productivity, C.J. Mahaney writes, "My tendency is to charge into the day intent on getting stuff done, attacking my to-do list motivated by self sufficiency rather than by humble dependence upon the grace of God revealed in the gospel. And given the active presence of pride and self-sufficiency in my life, it is imperative for me at the outset of each day to devote time to humbling myself before the Lord and acknowledging my dependence upon him for all that awaits me."

([Biblical Productivity](http://www.cjmahaney.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Biblical-Productivity.pdf) C.J. Mahaney, Copyright © 2010 by Sovereign Grace Ministries)
<http://www.cjmahaney.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Biblical-Productivity.pdf>

Mahaney points us to the verses that remind him of this.

Proverbs 3:5-7 (NIV) Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and shun evil.

To develop such a desire, you pray for it. **2. You feed it.**

The things we really want, we go after. Some things we want, but not very much. That is why we don't go after them. How often have you or a friend said, "**I wish I knew how to _____,**" and then you did nothing to make it a reality?

You did not want it very much. It was just an idle wish. It was a weak desire in your mind, rather than strong desire in your heart. If it was in your heart, you would do something to make it a reality.

For example, the only people who learn to play a musical instrument are those who have a strong heart desire to learn to play. That is because it takes a lot of work to practice. Those who simply wish to play, will not do the work to learn to play. They quit when the practicing gets old and tedious. Those who really desire to play keep at it until they succeed.

Sports is the same way. People who succeed at sports play a lot. Michael Jordan talks about how many basketball shots he made in the driveway while he was growing up even after supper, shot after shot after shot.

The more you work at it the stronger the desire becomes. The stronger the desire becomes, the more you work at it. You pray for it. You feed it.

3. When the Holy Spirit speaks, obey. Most of the things the Spirit tells us to do can, and should, be done now. Many of these have to do with reaching out to each other, listening to each other, or helping each other. Make that phone call NOW! Write that card or email NOW! Visit that person NOW! Stop and pray for that person NOW! Put that errand on this week's schedule NOW!

You may be hard-working and never a procrastinator when it comes to your job, your home, or your family. But, **Are you a procrastinator of spiritual things?** Is there a good to be done in your relationship to God, to your church, or for your soul that you are not doing? When the Spirit speaks, obey now. Pray now. Open your Bible now. Reach out now. Prepare for your ministry now. Don't trust your memory to do it later. Don't say to yourself, "I don't feel like doing it now. I'll do it later." You won't feel like doing it later either. Some things we never FEEL like doing. That is why we avoid them.

What has the Spirit been telling you to do that you keep putting off? Will you repent of this today?

If you are going to succeed in the battle against the sin of sloth you have to grow a great heart desire to serve God.

Invitation

We're going to pray and then we're going to sing. We're going to sing several verses of sing #307, Just As I Am. Verse one reads this way: "**Just as I am, without one plea, but that Thy blood was shed for me. And that Though bidd'st me come to Thee, O lamb of God, I come! I Come!**"

What that means is that you are telling Jesus you are ready to be saved by Him. He has invited you to come. And you are responding to Him this morning.

You are not coming to him with a good life or good deeds or good character. You are coming on only one basis, that He died for you. That is the only basis upon which He will receive you.

You cannot trust in you your goodness. Your goodness is not good enough. No one is good enough. That is why Jesus needed to die. Jesus will only receive you if you come trusting in His death for you.

The second verse says, in part, "**Just as I am, and waiting not to rid my soul of some dark blot.**"

People have told me they would come to Jesus after they deal with some sin. "I can't come like this! I have to clean up my life first."

But this is just another effort at trying to be good enough. Jesus wants you to come just as you are. You have to humble yourself before Him and come now, trusting only in His death for you. Come this way and He will receive you.

Verse 5 says, "**Just as I am, Thou wilt receive, will welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve. Because Thy promise I believe, O lamb of God, I come.**" (leave slide up during the prayer)

If you will come believing in Him, He will clean you up. You don't have to clean up first. Come as you are and He will do the cleaning. Come believing this morning.

Let's pray.