

*Genesis 4:1–8 (NIV)*

Adam made love to his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain. She said, “With the help of the LORD I have brought forth a man.”<sup>2</sup> Later she gave birth to his brother Abel.

Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil.<sup>3</sup> In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the LORD.<sup>4</sup> And Abel also brought an offering—fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering,<sup>5</sup> but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast.

<sup>6</sup> Then the LORD said to Cain, “Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast?<sup>7</sup> If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it.”

<sup>8</sup> Now Cain said to his brother Abel, “Let’s go out to the field.” While they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him.

*Matthew 20:1–16 (NIV)*

“For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard.<sup>2</sup> He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard.

<sup>3</sup> “About nine in the morning he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing.<sup>4</sup> He told them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.’<sup>5</sup> So they went.

“He went out again about noon and about three in the afternoon and did the same thing.<sup>6</sup> About five in the afternoon he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, ‘Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?’

<sup>7</sup> “ ‘Because no one has hired us,’ they answered.

“He said to them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard.’

<sup>8</sup> “When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.’

<sup>9</sup> “The workers who were hired about five in the afternoon came and each received a denarius.<sup>10</sup> So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius.<sup>11</sup> When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner.<sup>12</sup> ‘These who were hired last worked only one hour,’ they said, ‘and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.’

<sup>13</sup> “But he answered one of them, ‘I am not being unfair to you, friend. Didn’t you agree to work for a denarius?’<sup>14</sup> Take your pay and go. I want to give the one who was hired last the same as I gave you.<sup>15</sup> Don’t I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?’

<sup>16</sup> “So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”

*We all seek a deeper and more sustaining relationship with God. What holds us back?*

*What draws us away from the one who made us and loves us?*

This week, we begin a new series, *Glittering Vices*, based on a book of the same name.<sup>1</sup> DeYoung’s is one of several recent books that lift up the Seven Deadly Sins for modern-day audiences. The notion of Seven Deadly Sins certainly permeates our culture, lending itself to books and movies. Nonetheless, such treatments are often trite and unhelpful, so much so that you might be wondering why we would even undertake such a series. Are we going to spend seven weeks just talking about all the stuff we do wrong? Is this going to be one big guilt trip? NO!!

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<sup>1</sup> *Glittering Vices*, Rebecca Konyndyk DeYoung, Brazos Press, 2009.

*Here's the question:* Do you ever feel like you don't have the relationship with God that you'd like to have or think you ought to have? Do you ever wonder what holds you back from being more like Jesus or from living a joy-filled life with God? If you are like me and every Christian I've ever known the answer is a resounding "Yes!" Indeed, Christians have struggled with such questions from Christianity's early days. Much of Paul's letters are taken up with these questions. Some early Christians even moved out to the desert, hoping that solitude would give them what they needed to come to a deeper and more genuine union with God.

As these Christians, sometimes referred to as the Desert Fathers, took a hard look at themselves, they came to understand that the problem was to be found within. They realized that they fell into certain bad habits that poisoned their relationship with God and everyone else. They wrote about these fatal habits and came to see that there are seven destructive habits from which spring the wreckage we make of our lives. It was true then; it is true still.

These bad habits came to be referred to as capital vices. "Capital" because they are deadly. "Vices" because they are habits, not mere transgressions. Thus, referring to the seven as "deadly sins" isn't really correct. Sins are individual transgressions, acts we undertake that do not reflect the love of God and others. But vices are habits, just as virtues are habits. Vices are patterns of behavior cultivated over long periods that harm us and those around us.

Here are the seven capital vices: Envy, Vainglory, Sloth, Wrath, Gluttony, Lust, and Greed. You may wonder why pride is not on the list, for it is included in nearly every list of the so-called "seven deadly sins" that one sees. For the Christians who gave us these insights into ourselves, the capital vices are like a tree. Each of the seven is a main branch on this tree, the root of which is pride. Pride is the fountain from which all the capital vices flow. We'll talk more about pride next week, when we consider vainglory, a word few of us hear anymore. But if any of the vices most characterizes our popular culture, it is vainglory.

Today, we begin our journey through these glittering vices with Envy.

*Envy: "Feeling bitter when others have it better"*<sup>2</sup>

One problem when it comes to these vices is that most of us tend to be pretty sloppy when it comes to using words. We interchangeably refer to *jealousy*, *covetousness*, *envy*, and *greed*, though the words mean different things. DeYoung helps us with this by providing a pithy explanation of envy: "feeling bitter when others have it better."

The key to grasping the potent danger of envy is the word, "better." Envy is grounded in the comparison between ourselves and another. In our mind, we come up short and begin to hate the other person for it. Perhaps we lack the talent or gifts of another or perhaps we aren't willing to put in the work or perhaps life got in the way or perhaps it was just luck. The reason doesn't matter, envy poisons our heart and we begin to tear the other person down -- so we fare better in the comparison. We can't be what they are, so we'll just knock them down.

De Young uses the cinematic masterpiece, *Amadeus*, to illustrate envy at work. Salieri is an eighteenth-century musician and composer of some renown. But then he encounters the famed Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and Salieri envies his gifts. He doesn't understand why God has given such gifts to a seeming buffoon and not to the much-more deserving Salieri. He grows to hate Mozart for it. Salieri strives to hide his envy, which is often the way, but the poison does its deadly work. He begins to tear down Mozart and even, possibly, kill him. That's envy at work. Jeff Cook<sup>3</sup> writes that envy can be summed up in three words: *Why not me!* Cook has it right.

Envy is the story of Cain and Abel. Cain, in essence, shouts "Why not me!" when God accepts Abel's offering but not his own. As in Salieri, Cain's envy gives birth to hatred and he murders his brother. To Cain, murder is the best, the only, way to eliminate the hated

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<sup>2</sup> DeYoung, p. 41

<sup>3</sup> Cook, Jeff V. (2008). *Seven: The Deadly Sins and The Beatitudes* (p. 52). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

comparison that consumes him. God has warned Cain that “sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it (Gen. 4:4). In Cain’s case, this devouring beast manifests itself in Cain’s envy of his brother.

Likewise with Jesus’ parable about the eccentric landowner, who ends up paying all the workers a full day’s wage, whether they worked ten hours or one. Those who worked the full day get exactly what they were promised, but they envy those who came later in the day. It all just seems so unfair to them, but only because they lack any appreciation of grace. As Cook puts it, they have rejected the good life God has given them (a fair day’s wage for a fair day’s work) and obsess over what God gives someone else. Though Jesus ends the parable there, you wonder what would have happened that evening. Would the envious workers have attacked the late-arrivers, seeking to make things “right”?

Envy is the enemy of love. As DeYoung puts it, “To love is to seek others’ good and rejoice when they have it. To envy is to seek to destroy others’ good and sorrow over their having it. The ‘greatest commandment’ instructs us to love God above all and our neighbors as ourselves (Matt. 22: 37– 39). Envy directly undercuts love of our neighbor.”

Even worse, envy undermines our love for God. Salieri is mad at God even more so than at Mozart. How could God give profound gifts to the silly fool and not to Salieri? In the end, Salieri burns his crucifix in the fireplace. We shout “Why not me!” and shake a fist at God.

As many wise people have noted, envy is the only one of the glittering vices that is no fun at all. Envy brings only pain. DeYoung again:

A poem by Victor Hugo recounts an opportunity granted to Envy and Avarice to receive whatever they wished, on the condition that the other receives a double portion. Envy replied, “I wish to be blind in one eye.”

The envious person resents another person’s good gifts because they are superior to his or her own. It’s not just that the other person is better; it is that by comparison their superiority makes you feel your own lack, your own inferiority, more acutely.<sup>4</sup>

### *Overcoming envy*

So what is to be done? How do we battle our feelings of envy borne out of our own self-hating comparisons with others?

Since envy is born out of comparison, seeking to value our worth by comparison to another, then overcoming envy is about coming to see that the worth that matters, true self-worth, lies in our worth before God. There is an abiding sadness in those who fail to grasp their worth in God’s eyes. Yet, God gave his only son so that we might live. Jesus went to that cross for the sake of us all . . . yes, for each and every one of us. We hear the words but we don’t absorb them and make them truly own.

Sure, I would love to have some of N.T. Wright’s gifts, but do I envy him? No. Would I want to be him? No. To feel otherwise would be to deny the gifts that God has given me, gifts that start with my wife, my family, all of you . . . envying Wright would be to reject what God has given me and obsess on what God has given someone else.

The next time you are tempted to value your worth in comparison to someone else, remember the words of the psalmist:

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,  
the moon and the stars that you have established;  
what are human beings that you are mindful of them,  
mortals that you care for them?

Yet you have made them a little lower than God,  
and crowned them with glory and honor.

(Psalm 8:3-5)

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<sup>4</sup> DeYoung, p. 42

## Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. You might begin by discussing the idea that these seven deadly sins aren't merely sins, but habits. How do we develop habits, good and bad? How can we "unlearn" bad habits?
2. Compare the ways you use the word "envy." How is envy different than jealousy, covetousness, or greed? Why would envy end up on the list of the Big Seven?
3. What are some of your own experiences with envy? Have you ever known someone who was undone by their envy of another?
4. How can we go about developing a more authentic appreciation of our worth in the eyes of God? Why do we so often value ourselves in comparison to others?

## *Daily Bible Readings*

Before reading each passage, take a few minutes to get a sense of the context. Your study bible should help. Jot down a few questions that come to mind from your reading of the passage.

<b>Monday, Job 5:1-7</b> Envy slays the simple.	<b>Tuesday, Proverbs 14:30</b> A heart at peace compared to an envious heart
<b>Wednesday, Psalm 37</b> Don't be envious of those who do wrong.	<b>Thursday, Galatians 5:22-26</b> The fruit of the Holy Spirit and envy
<b>Friday, James 3:13-16</b> Where you find envy, you find chaos.	<b>Weekly Prayer Concerns</b>

### Scott Engle's Weekday Bible Classes

Join us whenever you can. Each week's lesson stands on its own.  
This is very "drop-in." Bring something to eat if you like. Bring a study Bible.  
On occasion Scott has to cancel class, so if you are coming for the first time, you can check [www.scottengle.org](http://www.scottengle.org) to make sure the class is meeting.

#### Monday Evening Class – now studying 2 Samuel

Meets from 7:00 to 8:15 in Piro Hall

#### Tuesday Lunchtime Class – now studying Hebrews

Meets from 11:45 to 1:00 in Piro Hall

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### Scott's 11:00 Sunday Class in Festival Hall

This is a large, lecture-oriented class open to all ages.

#### Our Current Series:

*Ten Things You Don't Have to Believe to be a  
Jesus-lovin', Bible-thumpin' Christian*

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Scott's Weekly Bible Studies are available at [www.standrewumc.org](http://www.standrewumc.org). Just go to "worship" and then "sermons." You'll find the study with each week's recorded sermon. There is also a complete archive of the studies at [www.scottengle.org](http://www.scottengle.org)