

## Seven Deadly Sins Series Discussion Guides February - March 2024

### Week 1 - Seven Deadly Sins | Greed



#### Teaching Text

##### **Luke 12:13-21**

Someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.” Jesus replied, “Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?” Then he said to them, “Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.”

And he told them this parable: “The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest. He thought to himself, ‘What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.’ “Then he said, ‘This is what I’ll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store my surplus grain. And I’ll say to myself, “You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.”’

“But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’

“This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God.”

## **Sermon Recap**

This Sunday, Pastor Jon Tyson kicked off our Lent series focused on the Seven Deadly Sins, starting with greed. Scripture addresses greed with striking frequency, and Jesus warns us to watch out for the ways greed will destroy our spiritual lives. Greed is ultimately the opposite of Godly contentment: it's centered around possession, hoarding, covetousness, and comparison.

Greed, as it's portrayed in Luke 12, is foolish, as it fails to account for Biblical reality. The greedy heart has no concern for others, is blind to the brevity of life, and does not keep God as a reference point from whom blessings flow. Jesus reminds us that life does not exist in accumulating an abundance of possessions. We must order things rightly, govern them well, and be rich toward God instead.

Greed is difficult to root out of our hearts for multiple reasons: entitlement; poverty; status; and even its multi-generational nature. Greed is a lack of trust in God and our attempt at constructing our own safety nets. When we participate in this lifestyle of greed, we have an impoverished vision of the Kingdom of God. In Scripture, the Kingdom is compared to a pearl of great price, hidden treasure, and the bottle of expensive oil broken by Mary of Bethany. True wealth consists of these treasures stored up in Heaven.

To overcome greed, we must approach with warfare to fight it and medicine to treat it. Like Zacchaeus in Luke 19, we must have some measure of financial repentance, and go to war against whatever accumulated our greed. Then, we must have financial transparency, sharing with someone trusted how much we make and how much we give. We also must freely give and share what we have, remembering that the Kingdom of Heaven is communal and bent toward serving others. Lastly, the medicine to treat greed includes gratitude, savoring (or being fully present), and contentment.

As we allow the Lord to search us for the condition of greed, we remember that Jesus warns us against greed so strongly because He desires our freedom. True freedom – to love, give, serve, and seek the Kingdom first – is true wealth.

## **Discussion Questions**

### **Connect**

1. What is something that contributed to your spiritual well being this week? What made you feel more alive, more whole, more loved?

### **Character**

Ask someone to read Luke 19:1-10 aloud. Then, ask the following questions:


1. What words, phrases, or specific parts of the story stand out to you?
2. What do you notice about Jesus' character in this passage?
3. What do you think about Zacchaeus' act of financial repentance? Have you ever done or been convicted to do something similar? What might repentance of greed look like in your life?

### **Consider**

1. In the sermon, Pastor Jon said, "Money is central and not incidental to your spiritual formation." What ways do you think money is forming you, whether consciously or unconsciously?
2. Did any defensiveness rise up in you during Pastor Jon's talk? Why do you think talking about greed and possessions can cause so much discomfort?
3. Is there someone in your life with whom you share financial accountability, where you are transparently sharing how much you make and how much you give, in order to increase in generosity? Why or why not? Is this something you could implement in your life?
4. Pastor Jon talked about the medicine for greed and the source of true freedom being gratitude, savoring, and contentment. How can you practically apply one of these medicines in your life this week?

### **Cover**

Make room and ask the Lord to search your hearts individually. Ask the Holy Spirit: Do I have the condition of greed? In what way has New York gotten to me? Break into groups of two or three, confess, and pray for the Lord to help you walk in true freedom.



# SEVEN DEADLY SINS

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## Teaching Text

### *Ephesians 5:15-21*

*Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is. Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.*

## Sermon Recap

This week, Pastor Suzy Silk continued our sermon series on the Seven Deadly Sins with a teaching on gluttony versus living a Spirit-filled life. Historically thought of as an obsession with food or drink, gluttony is better described as an excessive desire or obsession with something that is never satisfied. In our modern culture, this often looks like seeking after comfort and pleasure through more money, higher status, sex, social media, or other temporary sources as a way to satisfy our deepest desires. This led Pastor Suzy to pose the question: “What are you filling yourself up with?”

Gluttony is driven by the lies that 1) the world can give us lasting and sustainable pleasure, 2) that we should seek comfort and pleasure above everything instead of embracing suffering like Christ did, 3) that “just one more” won’t hurt us or others, and 4) that the Lord Himself is not enough for us. At its core, gluttony stems from a heart of distrust and dissatisfaction with what God has provided. In Numbers 11, we see the Israelites raise their dissatisfaction with the manna God provided and cry out for the meat they had when they were slaves in Egypt. God provided meat, but they had to leave His presence to retrieve it, and their cravings and indulgences led them away from the Lord to their eventual death.

We often end up over-consuming when we seek comfort and pleasure outside of intimacy with God. In Ephesians 5:15-21 verses, the apostle Paul lays out two commands: to not give in to drunkenness (or excess) and to be filled with the Spirit. We can combat gluttony by pursuing self-control through tempering the cravings of our flesh and allowing our deeper desires to lead us, evaluating what is excessive or acceptable for this season of life, creating helpful limits, and redistributing energy, time, and resources back towards the Kingdom of God. Self-control must then be paired with a commitment to cultivate gratitude for what the Lord has already given us. Finally, we have to acknowledge that our desires are still present, redirect them towards our Creator, and allow them to be met in Him rather than the world around us. We are invited to not only hunger for the Lord, but to feast on Him for all our days. We are called to be filled with the Spirit of God, who desires to satisfy us with Himself.

## **Discussion Questions**

### **Connect**

1. What is something that made you laugh this week?

### **Character**

Ask someone (or multiple people) to read Number 11:4-34 aloud. Then, ask the following questions:

1. What words, phrases, or specific parts of the story stand out to you?

2. What do you learn about God’s heart in this story?

### **Consider**

1. What are you currently filling yourself up with when you are in need of comfort or are seeking pleasure?

2. Which one of the lies about gluttony in the recap above do you find yourself believing most often?

3. In the Garden, God gave Adam and Eve the freedom and choice to eat from any tree they wanted, except for one. This boundary was set in place to protect them, yet despite God's provision with all the other trees and fruits, they chose to want more than what they were given. Have you ever crossed a boundary that was set for your good? What were the consequences?

4. To grow in self-control, Pastor Suzy provided these questions from Saint Augustine: *Are you consuming in a way that contributes to or at least maintains your overall health and well-being? Is your desire to consume (whatever gives you pleasure) taking precedence over the good of others? How is your consumption of this thing contributing to or detracting from the specific call God has on your life in this season?* Take time to think through these questions with the Holy Spirit as individuals, then if you are comfortable, share with one another.

#### **Cover**

Spend time confessing and repenting of any gluttonous habits that came to light during your time together. Then, pray that the Holy Spirit would come and fill you up, and increase your ability to hunger for the Lord.



## Week 3 - Seven Deadly Sins | Lust



### Teaching Text

#### Matthew 5:27-30

*“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.”*

### Sermon Recap

This week, Pastor Jon Tyson continued our sermons series on the Seven Deadly Sins with a teaching on the destructive power of lust, and how Jesus calls us to become people of love and integrity in Him. Although we can lust over things like money and power, in Matthew 5, Jesus addresses lust in the context of strong sexual desire. Pastor Jon urged us to consider that walking in the way of Jesus includes pursuing a counter-cultural sexual formation.

Jesus' teaching in Matthew 5 is one of His clearest teachings on sexuality. Lust is a deep craving in the human heart, and His language indicates lust is an intentional repeated gazing, with the purpose of self-centered pleasure. Spurred by this intense desire, lust can hold intense power over us as it distorts relationships, normalizes sexual sin, and dehumanizes the people around us. However, Pastor Jon pointed out that the core issue is not desire itself, but the disorder of desires in our hearts. More than our behavior, Jesus is concerned with the holiness in our hearts and how we treat others. Throughout Scripture, the human body is revered as holy and honorable, and even becomes a temple for the Holy Spirit after Christ ascended into Heaven. Dignifying one another by respecting our shared humanity is not only a weapon we can wield against the power of lust, but a calling from God as image bearers. To reorient our desires we must allow God to cut out the culprit, our sinful hearts, and accept His gift of total heart transformation offered through Jesus. Once we receive this heart, we can learn to be people of love through the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit, and recover a sacred view of sexuality as a whole life covenant.

The enemy uses lust to destroy our relationships, lives, and the people we are becoming, and it requires urgent attention. Pastor Jon laid out a path to root lust out of our lives: 1) name the vice controlling your desire, 2) examine its source, 3) seek freedom from illusions, 4) lift your eyes away from shame, 5) behold Jesus' glory, 6) train for resistance from the enemy, and 7) live a life of love. In the fight against lust, Jesus offers restoration of humanity. His sacrifice wipes our sins away and transforms our heart's deepest desires. Today, we can ask God to cover us in mercy, fill us with His power to defy lust and choose a life of love, and embrace desiring Him, the only One who can satisfy, with our whole lives.

## Discussion Questions

### Connect

1. What's your favorite redemption story from a book you've read or movie you've seen?

### Character

Ask someone to read Matthew 5:27-30 aloud. Then, ask the following questions:

1. What words, phrases, or specific parts of this passage stand out to you?
2. What does the text reveal about Jesus' priorities?



## Consider

1. We were made for desire, but the brokenness in our world has caused God's original design for desire to become disordered. How do you witness disordered desire in your life or in the world around you?

2. Lust is often discussed as an inward focused sin, but consider the point Pastor Jon made: "God is concerned about the holiness in your heart AND the way you treat other people." Discuss how both the aspect of our own hearts and how we treat others are related to lust.

3. In Matthew 5:29, Jesus says, "If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell." Although we know He was speaking metaphorically, how does what Jesus is saying challenge your understanding of sin and the measures we should take to live a righteous life?

4. Pastor Jon named these tactics for fighting lust:

i. Name the vice

ii. Examine the source

iii. Freedom from illusions

iv. Beholding Jesus' glory

v. Training for resistance

vi. Live a life of love

How can we unite as a community and brothers and sisters in Christ to fight against lust, whether in our personal lives, or in the world around us?

## Cover

Take a few minutes in the quietness of your own hearts to ask the Holy Spirit if lust is invading your life in some capacity. Break into small groups and pray for freedom and redemption from lust.

## Week 4 - Seven Deadly Sins | Wrath



### Teaching Text

#### Matthew 5:21-24

*“You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, ‘Raca,’ is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell. “Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.”*

### Sermon Recap

This Sunday, Pastor Tim Brown unpacked the destructive power of wrath as part of our Lenten series on the Seven Deadly Sins. Anger often signals us to something that is wrong or unjust, but when we express our anger through violence or scorn, we lose God’s heart for ourselves and for others, and allow wrath to rage in our lives. However, Jesus calls us to confess anger like the sin that it is, and follow Him in the way of mercy, that freely forgives.

God's wrath is pure and righteous because He is holy, but in our broken humanity anger is often perverted by selfishness and our wounds. Pastor Tim illustrated wrath's ability to destroy through the story of the Columbine school shooting, where wrath drove the perpetrators to unspeakable violence, and an atmosphere of anger and a desire for revenge ripped through the community in the aftermath. This moment in time points to the larger complex issue of rage in the culture that is increasingly volatile. We also see anger actively moving in the church through corrupt leadership, our homes where anger can privately be normalized as an operating system, and ultimately in our hearts whenever we encounter pain, fear, disappointment, rejection, injustice, powerlessness, and even self-hatred. When left unattended, wrath can creep in and destroy us, but Scriptures warn us to guard our hearts, from which everything flows. When Jesus addresses anger in the Sermon on the Mount, He cuts straight to our hearts, and shows us a better way.

Jesus' response to anger was threefold. He radically redefined anger to broaden our understanding from external behaviors to internal conditions of the heart. The Law against murder was rooted in the idea that the act assaulted a bearer of God's image and stripped them of their humanity, but Jesus claimed that being angry at a brother or sister in your heart did the same thing. Then, He addressed the progression of anger from a feeling in the heart to speaking contempt over someone, and how this robs them of their God-given identity. Finally, Jesus explained that the consequences of unchecked anger will lead to judgment and put us on the path to hell.

We often only think of revenge or passivity as our responses to anger, but Jesus offers a third way. His antidote for anger calls for the aggressive elimination of sin within His enemies through willful submission to God. We must pursue reconciliation by treating anger like a sin and confessing it with immediate, radical, and even costly obedience to Jesus' command to repent. Jesus, full of mercy, was able to forgive His unrepentant murderers on the cross. This is the beauty of the Gospel, that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. So, when the world says to fight back, or to remain passive, Jesus invites us to follow Him in the way of patience and mercy, and usher more of His healing power into the world.

## **Discussion Questions**

### **Connect**

1. If you had to sum up your personality in a color, what color would you be?

### **Character**

Ask someone to read Matthew 5:21-24 aloud. Then, ask the following questions:

1. What words or phrases in this passage stood out to you?
2. What do we learn about God's character through His response to our anger?

### **Consider**

1. Based on the teaching this week, how can we determine when anger is a sin, and how do we differentiate it from righteous anger?
2. How is God's anger fundamentally different from ours as human beings?
3. What was Jesus' response to His murderers, modeled for us on the cross? How does this challenge you?
4. Where are the areas you've seen and experienced anger, or the destruction that it causes, the most?
5. In Matthew 5:23-24, Jesus says, *"Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift."* In light of our current cultural context and relationships today, how can we better emulate these instructions Jesus lays out for us?

### **Cover**

Spend time confessing and repenting of anywhere in your life where anger has started to take hold and cause destruction. Then, pray that the Holy Spirit would give us wisdom to restore our heart postures and relationships with one another.

Pastor Tim pointed out that throughout Scripture, we see God speak clearly to His followers, and He expects immediate, radical, costly obedience. If God is speaking specifically to your heart on this topic, what is He asking of you today?

## Week 5 - Seven Deadly Sins | Sloth



### Teaching Text

#### 2 Peter 1:3-11

*His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But whoever does not have them is nearsighted and blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their past sins. Therefore, my brothers and sisters, make every effort to confirm your calling and election. For if you do these things, you will never stumble, and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*

### Sermon Recap

This Sunday, Pastor Jon Tyson continued our Lenten series over the Seven Deadly Sins by exploring the often unnoticed dangers of sloth. Originally, the Desert Fathers' understanding of sloth was less akin to laziness and more in line with acedia: spiritual resistance to spiritual



progress. As followers of Jesus, we must push back against the spirit of acedia through the power we have received in the Holy Spirit and make every effort to persevere in our faith. Unlike lust or greed, which are disordered desires, acedia is something that is done against us. The spirit of acedia seeks to make us joyless and aimless by disrupting our ability to focus, exaggerating our concern for ourselves, stirring an aversion to our commitments, and convincing us to neglect life with God. The enemy is committed to sabotaging our spiritual progress on this side of eternity by discouraging and distracting us into a state of languishing. In 1 Peter 2:3-11, the apostle Peter sends an encouragement to the persecuted church to fight back and continue to grow into their full spiritual potential that is relevant for us today.

Pastor Jon broke down Peter's exhortation, and called us to recognize our spiritual resources, prioritize our spiritual progress, and remember the rewards we have in Christ. Through Jesus, we have been chosen and redeemed, given divine power and purpose, and sent out into the world to share this good news. We have inherited the precious promises of God, and the enemy's goal is to make us forget who we are and what is available to us in Christ Jesus. Christianity does not limit our horizon of possibility, but expands it beyond our wildest imagination. With these truths in mind, we must make every effort to continue increasing in our faith by actively pursuing goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, mutual affection, and love. Satan desires to make us ineffective for the Kingdom by keeping us in cycles of shame and apathy, but God intends for those who are sealed in the finished work of Jesus on the cross to reach spiritual fullness by going from glory to glory in Him. Acedia seeks to rob us of this vision, so we have to learn to anticipate resistance, and remember the rich rewards that will be ours in eternity.

We have everything we need to live a Godly life in Christ Jesus, but we cannot dismiss the importance encouragement can play in our ability to persevere. Community has the power to remind us of the story we are in, and help us hold our ground in the fight against acedia. Even when we are not in seasons of fruitfulness, we are called to lives of faithfulness that stand against resistance. To continue plodding along regardless of our circumstances, we must keep our eternal future in mind. When we cling to Jesus and His truth, we can endure despite spiritual resistance, and experience increasing fullness in Him.

## **Discussion Questions**

### **Connect**

1. What is your favorite part of the seasonal transition from Winter to Spring?

## **Character**

Ask someone to read 2 Peter 1:3-11 aloud. Then, ask the following questions:

1. What words or phrases in this passage stood out to you?
2. What do you learn about God's heart towards you in this passage?

## **Consider**

1. After Pastor Jon explained acedia, could you think of any moments where you encountered this spirit? What was it like?
2. Satan uses acedia to rob God's people of Jesus' vision for their lives and make them forget what Jesus has already accomplished on their behalf to keep them from reaching spiritual fullness. Do you tend to struggle holding onto the eternal vision in the midst of life's circumstances, or fall into forgetfulness and approach God based on your own merit?
3. What is a practical way you can prioritize your spiritual progress this week?
4. What truths or promises of God can help you 1) hold your ground, 2) plod forward with perseverance, or 3) fight back against the lies of acedia?

## **Cover**

Spend time praying God's promises over anyone in your Community Group that feels like they are being attacked by acedia right now.

## Week 6 - Seven Deadly Sins | Pride



### Teaching Text

#### Matthew 6:1-6

*"Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you."*

### Sermon Recap

This Sunday, Pastor Ralph Castillo continued our Lenten series on the Seven Deadly Sins with a teaching on pride. Pride runs rampant in our culture, in the Church, in our homes, and in our hearts, often without us noticing. Our current culture has a way of turning vices into virtues and

praising disordered loves. This can make it difficult to identify pride, especially in religious spaces, and can result in practicing righteousness as a way of being seen and honored by others.

In Matthew 6:1-6, Jesus compares the way of pride to the way of humility through the practices of giving and prayer. With giving, the way of pride says to announce your generosity to others so that they will be impressed with you, but the way of humility says to give in secret. With prayer, the way of pride says to pray publicly as a way of being seen by others, but the way of humility says to pray in your room with the door closed. Jesus also teaches that those who practice the way of pride will receive their reward in full, albeit a temporary, shallow, and lesser reward. However, those who practice the way of humility will receive an eternal reward directly from the Father.

When we choose the way of humility, and practice our righteousness in secret, we receive the better reward because the Father Himself is rewarding us. In Philippians 2:1-8, we see Jesus as the perfect example of humility, showing us how, in God's Kingdom, the way up is down. Jesus practiced the way of humility with His whole life, choosing to go lower and lower, even to death on a cross, and eventually received the Father's full, eternal reward.

Pastor Ralph left us with five practices to help us war against pride and cultivate humility. First, we're invited to practice our righteousness in private; second, we're encouraged to practice apprenticeship by accepting Jesus' invitation to rest from the exhausting way of pride; third, we can practice gratitude and recognize that the gifts we have been given are for humble service; fourth, we're invited to practice self-awareness by asking the Holy Spirit to search us; and fifth, we can practice prioritizing others with our time, talent, and treasure. In John 3:30, John the Baptist declares that, "He (Jesus) must increase, I must decrease." May we embrace the better way, the way of humility, and be set free from the deadly sin of pride.

## **Discussion Questions**

### **Connect**

1. What are your plans for celebrating Easter this year, and who can you invite to join you?

### **Character**

Ask someone to read Matthew 6:1-6 aloud. Then, ask the following questions:

1. What words, phrases, or images in this passage stood out to you?
2. From these verses, what do we learn about what God values most?


### **Consider**

1. What are some examples of things we might do in front of others to receive recognition? What is our reward?
2. Pastor Ralph says pride makes us turn not downward, but inward. What does that mean?
3. Why is it important to give in secret? What are some ways that you can practice giving or serving anonymously?
4. How was Jesus the "supreme example of humility"? What can we learn from His humility?

### **Cover**

Allow the Holy Spirit to search your hearts and reveal areas of hidden pride. Spend time confessing to one another, if there is space for this. Pray and ask Jesus to help you decrease so He may increase, to help you give and serve with true humility, secrecy, and love.





# SEVEN DEADLY SINS

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## Teaching Text

### *Exodus 20:17*

*“You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor’s.”*

## Sermon Recap

This Sunday, Pastor Suzy Silk closed out our sermon series on the Seven Deadly Sins with a teaching on envy. A prohibition against coveting, or envy, is included in the Ten Commandments, because it is a slippery slope that begins in our thoughts and quickly leads to death. We learn about the dangers of envy from several stories in the Bible. Envy led Cain to kill his brother Abel (Genesis 4), led Joseph’s brothers to sell him into slavery (Genesis 37:18-36), and what ultimately led the Chief Priests to call for the death of Jesus (Matthew 27:20).

Envy often begins in small, seemingly harmless ways. Envy also often begins with grief, as seen with the story of Solomon and the two grieving mothers in 1 Kings 2:16-28. One woman, mourning the loss of her infant son, claims another woman’s baby as hers. So stricken by grief, she tells King Solomon, “Go ahead and cut him in half. Then neither of us will have a baby.” Envy works itself out in this way—enticing us to believe that if we cannot have something, then our neighbor should not have it either. Pastor Suzy pointed out that desires for children, a spouse,

or property are not inherently wrong, but it is when we turn our desires towards what belongs to some else that we give in to envy.

Cain's story illustrates three ways to combat envy. We must first combat envy by being self-aware. God invites us to identify our emotions, examine the reasons behind them, and bring them into conversation with Him. We also combat envy by recognizing when it is nearby. The sin of envy is close to us, and we must always be on guard against it. If we are not drawing close to God, we will inevitably draw close to envy, especially when vulnerable, alone, or grieving. Finally, we combat envy by doing what is right. Instead of just fighting envy off, we must live in the opposite spirit. This looks like exercising gratitude towards the Lord for what we already have and trusting in His timing, and from this posture, we are able to demonstrate kindness and love towards our neighbors.

Holy Week reminds us that Jesus Himself demonstrated costly trust and costly obedience in the Father's plans for Him, and costly love towards even those who took part in His death. The blood of Jesus speaks a better word than the blood of Abel, because through His sacrifice, Jesus provides an eternal life and inheritance. We can choose to turn away from envy because we have the better thing—the presence of Jesus, now and forever.

## **Discussion Questions**

### **Connect**

1. What is something bringing you delight recently?

### **Character**

Ask someone to read 1 Kings 3:16-26 or Genesis 4:6-7 aloud. Then, ask the following questions:

1. What words, phrases, or images in this passage stood out to you?
2. In either of these stories, what do you learn about the heart of God?

### **Consider**

1. What areas of your life do you tend to harbor bitterness? (Key markers of bitterness include disappointment, anger/frustration towards someone who has what you want, sadness when you see another person's happiness, etc.)

2. In what practical ways does God engage with us in our anger or disappointment? How can we draw closer to Him when we feel envy rather than pulling away?

3. In the New Testament, we see that envy is a fruit of the flesh (Mark 7:20-23, Romans 1:29). Since we are called to live according to the Spirit rather than according to the flesh (Romans 8:3-4), how can we respond instead when we feel envy?

### **Cover**

Allow the Holy Spirit to search your hearts and reveal areas of grief that have shifted into envy. Break into groups of two or three, confess, and pray together. Ask for the Lord to increase your awareness of the ways He has blessed you through Jesus.

**Easter Sunday**

A decorative graphic for Easter 2024. The background is a light yellow. The word "EASTER" is written in a large, black, serif font at the top. Below it, the year "2024" is written in a similar font. The text is surrounded by a delicate arrangement of green vines with small leaves and several flowers in shades of blue, purple, and red. At the bottom center, the text "CHURCH OF THE CITY NEW YORK" is written in a small, black, sans-serif font.

# EASTER 2024

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## Teaching Text

### Luke 24:13-35

Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; but they were kept from recognizing him. He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?" They stood still, their faces downcast. One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, "Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?" "What things?" he asked. "About Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see Jesus." He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if he were going farther. But they urged him strongly, "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread,

*gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?" They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together and saying, "It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon." Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.*

## **Sermon Recap**

This Easter Sunday, Pastor Jon taught about how we come to believe in the resurrection from the story of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus from Luke 24. Believing in the resurrection of Jesus is a key belief for salvation, and the Apostle Paul goes so far as to say that if Christ has not been raised from the dead, then our faith is useless and futile. Pastor Jon laid out the three things it takes to believe in Jesus' resurrection: evaluating the historical facts, gaining a theological understanding, and having a personal encounter with the person of Christ.

There is a psychological honesty in the conversation the disciples have with Jesus on the road to Emmaus. They don't try to hide their disappointment or disillusionment from the unrecognizable Jesus, but explain that the man they believed to be the Messiah has just died, taking their hopes of redemption for Israel with Him. We cannot live without hope, and oftentimes, whenever we lose hope we will go back to the last place we had it. The disciples are returning to Emmaus because it was the last place the Israelites experienced freedom and temporary restoration under the leadership of Judas Maccabeus in the Maccabean Rebellion. Jesus shows up to interrupt them with a new and better hope to believe in, and that same surprising hope is offered to us.

First, we have to acknowledge and access the historical realities of the resurrection. There are countless alternative theories on what happened to Jesus' body, from faking death to secret twin brothers to a mass hallucination, but none of these really hold up. Additionally, Jesus did not return and go overthrow Rome, but appeared to women, met with His grieving friends, and shared meals with people. This is not the path of triumph human minds would craft to convince people someone rose from the dead. However, this story of resurrection has gone on to shape the last two thousand years of human history in the most profound way. Ten of Jesus' disciples went on to be martyred for their beliefs, the Roman Empire was brought to its knees by the Early Church, countless colleges, hospitals, and orphanages were founded in the name of Jesus, the eradication of slavery in the British Empire and so many other great moves of humanitarian effort came from groups of people who believed in a resurrected Savior.



Second, we need a theological understanding of Jesus as the Messiah. As He walks with these disciples, Jesus takes the time to unpack the Scriptures and prophets and reveal how they are all fulfilled in Him. He explains the need for the Messiah to suffer, and for the debt of sin to be paid through Him, before He could be glorified. When we consider the whole of the Scriptures, we find that everything comes together in who Jesus was, how He lived, how He died, and how He was always going to rise again.

Finally, we need a personal encounter with Jesus to believe in His resurrection. After He opened the Scriptures, the disciples urged Jesus to stay with them. Then, as they broke bread together, their eyes were opened to recognize Him. Jesus does not reveal Himself in the Bible study, but at the table. There have been people all throughout history who have nominally known about Jesus, but did not believe in Him until He revealed Himself in a way that met their deepest longings. Believing the resurrection is not solely about wrapping your mind doctrine, but about meeting with a person.

How something happens says a lot about what is being communicated. In this story, we see God's heart as Jesus walks with those who are walking away from Him through their doubt and questions, the vision He offers us of having hearts that burn for Him, and the invitation to true communion with the risen Lord. This is the available reality of the resurrection, Christ stands at the door and knocks, and whoever hears His voice and opens the door, He will come in and be with them, and they with Him forever.

## **Discussion Questions**

### **Connect**

1. What is your favorite Easter tradition, or what was your favorite part about Easter this year?

### **Character**

Ask someone to read Luke 24:13-35 aloud. Then, ask the following questions:

1. What words, phrases, or images in this passage stood out to you?
2. What do you learn about Jesus' concerns in this passage?

### **Consider**

1. In what ways does understanding the theological significance of Christ's resurrection deepen your own faith? How do you think we can encourage our friends who might struggle with the historical truth of the resurrection?

2. Pastor Jon explained that Jesus is actively walking with the people who are walking away from Him, and does not abandon us. Discuss the significance of Jesus walking with those who are walking away from Him. Has He ever done this for you?

3. Pastor Jon also mentioned that "the point" of believing in Christ's resurrection is to lead us to true communion. How have you experienced the impact of communion and community in your personal life, specifically living in New York City?

### **Cover**

Take a moment to consider the times when you've placed your hope in worldly solutions or figures, only to find disappointment. Then, pray together, asking the Lord to open your eyes to the countless blessings He provides through the resurrection of Jesus. Pray also for the salvation of the lost in New York who are currently placing hope in figures of this world. Pray they would have a personal encounter with Jesus, that the volume of Christ knocking on their door would increase, and that they would be saved.