



## Part 4: Sloth | Pastor Joe Wittwer | May 10, 2009

### A. Fellowship Time (10-15 minutes)

1. Chitchat. Perhaps offer coffee, tea, or a cold drink with some snacks.
2. Pray (or invite someone to pray) to open the discussion.

### B. Review Time (Read the summary below to the group: 5-10 minutes)

When we think of sloth, we think “lazy,” but there’s far more to this deadly sin than just avoiding work. What is sloth?

#### 1. Sloth: laziness; spiritual apathy, indifference, and carelessness.

Sloth is laziness. It is “disinclination to activity or labor.” It is the couch potato syndrome. There’s no shortage of laziness, and there is no shortage of verses in the Bible urging us to get up off the couch and get to work, especially in the book of Proverbs. **Proverbs 6:9-11** *How long will you lie there, you sluggard? When will you get up from your sleep? A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest—and poverty will come on you like a bandit and scarcity like an armed man.* **Proverbs 10:4** *Lazy hands make a man poor, but diligent hands bring wealth.* **Proverbs 12:24** *Diligent hands will rule, but laziness ends in slave labor.* **Proverbs 19:15** *Laziness brings on deep sleep, and the shiftless man goes hungry.* **Proverbs 22:13** *The sluggard says, “There is a lion outside!” or, “I will be murdered in the streets!”* **Proverbs 26:14-15** *As a door turns on its hinges, so a sluggard turns on his bed. The sluggard buries his hand in the dish; he is too lazy to bring it back to his mouth.* So the Bible warns us against laziness, sloth, being a sluggard for good reason. Laziness can be deadly. Many marriages end because one or both partners are lazy. They know what to do but are too lazy to do it. **Proverbs 18:9** *A lazy person is as bad as someone who destroys things.* A lazy person can destroy a marriage, a friendship, a business, or a ministry. Laziness can be very destructive.

The fourth century desert monks considered sloth to be spiritual apathy, indifference and carelessness. The Latin word *acedia* literally means “absence of caring.” You lose your love for God and grow apathetic. Jesus put it this way in **Matthew 24:12-13** *Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.* We can be seduced by wickedness, by sin, and our love for God can grow cold; we can become bored, indifferent. Many people begin following Jesus with lots of spiritual passion and fervor. Then, over time, their love cools. They lose their first love, as Jesus said to the church at Ephesus: **Revelation 2:4-5** *But I have this complaint against you. You don’t love me or each other as you did at first! Look how far you have fallen! Turn back to me and do the works you did at first.* When are we most susceptible to spiritual apathy? It may be when everything is going well: **Deuteronomy 6:10-12** *When the LORD your God brings you into the land he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to give you—a land with large, flourishing cities you did not build, houses filled with all kinds of good things you did not provide, wells you did not dig, and vineyards and olive groves you did not plant—then when you eat and are satisfied, be careful that you do not forget the LORD, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.* Jesus said this to the Laodicean church in **Revelation 3:15-17**: *“I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth. You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’”* They became lukewarm when life was going well. They were rich, and didn’t need a thing -- not even Jesus. This is a very deadly kind of sloth. We fill our lives with good things, and we don’t need God anymore; our love grows lukewarm and then cold. We become spiritually apathetic. So how do we overcome it?

## 2. Diligence: steady effort; spiritual fervor.

*Effort:* Read together the following regarding effort: **Genesis 2:15, Exodus 20:8-11, Acts 20:35, Ephesians 4:28, 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12, 2 Thessalonians 3:10-11.**

*Passion:* Read together the following regarding Passion: **Matthew 22:36-40; Philippians 2:12-13, 4:4; 1 Timothy 4:15; Hebrews 6:11-12.**

Diligence is steady effort. It's putting your hand to the plow without looking back. It's keeping at it and not giving up. Here are two spiritual practices that build the virtue of diligence:

**Serving.** Consider at **Romans 12:11:** *Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.* Church services, Bible studies, and daily devotions will keep you hot for awhile, but eventually, you have to roll up your sleeves and serve somebody. If you don't, you'll soon be saturated with Scripture but bored and restless. Jesus said in **Matthew 25:40:** *"I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me."* When you feed the hungry, give a drink to the thirsty, take in the stranger, clothe the naked, visit the sick and imprisoned, you are doing that for Jesus.

**Celebration.** A second spiritual discipline that overcomes apathy and builds spiritual fervor is celebration. There is a good reason why God insisted that the Israelites gather at least three times a year for week-long celebrations. Life was hard, and regular celebration was God's prescription for avoiding apathy. Joy is the opposite of spiritual apathy, particularly a joy that comes from the adventure of knowing and following Jesus. **Philippians 4:4** says, *Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!* We rejoice in the Lord when we celebrate the goodness of God that is all around us, when we celebrate God's goodness in the beauty of creation. More than anything else, God's goodness is seen in the people in our lives. Celebrating God's goodness will fill us with real joy and keep us from apathy.

### C. Life Group Questions (select, revise, and add as desired: 20-40 minutes)

1. "Sloth" has several meanings (not including a slow-moving tree-dwelling mammal of South America). Generally speaking, how can either *laziness* or *spiritual apathy* be "deadly" as described in **Proverbs 18:9** above? Is Solomon just using exaggeration to make a point?
2. Now more personally, discuss an example or two from your own life where you've seen your own apathy or lack of caring affect your most treasured relationships, including your relationship with God. [Leaders, please follow Matthew 7:3 principles and gently keep your folks focused on the planks in their own eyes rather than the speck of sawdust in others!]
3. When do you find you're most susceptible to apathy? Is it mostly during good times or bad?
4. What are your tonics for laziness and spiritual apathy—how do you tend to counter them?
5. When has helping others put your own problems in perspective? Are you in regular service to others, and how would you like to serve?
6. What do you celebrate, how do you celebrate, and how could you do it more to fight apathy?

### D. Personal Application (1-3 Minutes)

- Each day this week, be intentional about serving someone in at least some small way out of your love for Jesus.
- Also be intentional about celebrating this week. If you don't already do so, set aside a Sabbath day this week. Don't work or buy anything--just enjoy the people in your life, some other part of God's creation, and God Himself.
- During your devotional time this week, journal about how you've been practicing and growing in the spiritual disciplines we've discussed thus far: confession, community, worship, submission, Sabbath, waiting, simplicity, fasting, exercise, serving, celebration.

### E. Prayer Time (As a whole group or subgroups of 3-4: 10-15 Minutes)

- Ask God to help you use your gifts to serve and use your imagination and time to celebrate.
- Pray for God to help you see if apathy is creeping into your important relationships, including your relationship with Him.
- Offer any other praises or requests that arose during the discussion.