

The 7 Deadly Sins—and How to Overcome Them

Discussion 2 :: Dealing with Envy

Resource: ‘The Seven Deadly Sins’ by Graham Tomlin, Chapter 3, Envy.

Timing: 40-50 minutes, leading into ministry/response time.

The Point: The main idea of each section—feel free to add other Scriptures, stories, etc to support the ideas.

An Illustration: Living examples from your own lives. Suggestions are offered, but feel free to use your own.

The Application: Ideas for how to live out and apply the principles being discussed.

Recap last week’s discussion :: Dealing with Pride

The Point: Our culture insists that we value the quality of our lives bases on status, possessions and the like. God teaches us to live in a counter-cultural way by measuring our self-worth by who we are in Christ. We do this by:

- Recognizing our identity as image-bearers (Genesis 1:26-27)
- Cultivating self-awareness and confession (1 John 1:8-10)
- Replacing self-centeredness with other-centeredness (Luke 6:31)

The Application: Ask a couple of people to share their experiences with attempting to cultivate a posture of humility over the last week. How did it feel to try on these new attitudes and behaviours? Was life easier or more challenging as a result? (refer to the action steps that were suggested last week)

Ice-breaker—break up into groups of two or three and discuss the following question:
Who are today’s heroes or heroines—and why do you think our culture admires them?

Introduce this week’s talk :: Dealing with Envy

Graham Tomlin describes envy as “discontentment with our own lot, while at the same time looking at someone else’s and wishing it were ours.” In many ways, what distinguishes envy from other sins is that indulging in envious thoughts makes us feel despondent and without peace of mind. And yet, we are inundated with messages from the popular media telling us what we “need” in order to feel better about ourselves. As a result, we are constantly struggling to achieve, acquire or grab attention.

Some will argue that envy can actually be a positive attribute in that it can push us toward bettering ourselves or to move past our own complacency. However, living in such a constant state of striving can really only lead to disappointment as there will always be someone who we perceive as being better looking, having more talent or more possessions. We can fall into the trap of becoming dominated by what we don’t have.

This discussion will focus on the root of envy and how we can rid ourselves of unhealthy comparisons that usually result in ill feelings toward ourselves or others.

1. Pursue what God does rather than what the world does (2 Timothy 2:22).

The Point: God tells us to pursue things that will ultimately benefit ourselves—and *others*. Envy can make us believe or behave like looks, abilities and possessions alone will satisfy—often leading to being at odds with others.

Pursuing what God considers to be valuable leads to contentment.

- Choose to turn from worldly consumption (1 Timothy 6:11)
- Seek God first; our earthly needs will be provided for (Matthew 6:25-34)
- Pursue those things that unify rather than divide (Colossians 3:12-17)
- Think about—and then put into practice—those things that God teaches us are most important (Philippians 4:8-10)

An illustration: Describe a time in your life when you were striving for earthly things; contrast this with a time in your life when you pursued the things of God. Which was ultimately more satisfying—and why?

The Application: Each time you find yourself thinking, “I need...” note what it is you are really wanting. Is it something that pleases God or that blesses others—or is it something that is purely for your own enjoyment?

2. Be content with every circumstance (Philippians 4:11-12).

The Point: God promises us that because of him we have all that we could ever need. Envy can make us believe or behave as if we need more than what God offers us to feel satisfied.

Believing that God provides what is most important to us allows us to be satisfied with what we do have.

- God promises to be with us (Hebrews 13:5-6).
- God promises to provide for our physical needs (Matthew 6:25-34)
- God promises to provide for our spiritual needs (John 14:25-26)
- God promises true enjoyment in what he provides—not just in riches (1 Timothy 6:17).

An Illustration: When you consider your own life, would you say that you live more in the “wanting” or in the being “satisfied”? Why do you believe this to be the case?

The Application: Set aside some time to take an inventory of your life. On the top of a piece of paper write, “I have...” and begin to make a list of what comes to mind. Do the results surprise you—why or why not?

3. Admire others without the need to compare (1 Thessalonians 5:10)

The Point: God gives each of us gifts and talents that are meant for the good of all. Envy can make us believe or behave as if another’s talents or gifts are more desirable.

- Talents and gifts are given by God for the good of others (Ephesians 4:11-13)
- We are to look out for the interests of others, not just ourselves (Philippians 2:2-4)
- We are part of one body—and yet we were intentionally made with different abilities (1 Corinthians 12:12-27)
- We are to encourage everyone to use their God-given abilities and to resist the urge to compare (Romans 12:3-8)

An illustration: Describe how you are blessed by the gifts or abilities of someone you know.

The Application: Be intentional about praising others for their gifts and talents. Tell them how you (or others) are specifically blessed by their abilities. Decide to do this over the next two weeks—and consider sharing the results the next time we meet.

Ideas for ministry/response time during the pastorate evening:

Read the following statements, and give everyone a few minutes to consider what God might be saying to them. Instruct everyone to break up into groups of two or three—and then allow individuals to share one at a time. Pray for the person who shared before moving on to the next person.

- Ask God to show you areas of your life where you have not been content in spite of God’s provision. When you break up into groups, confess your discontent.
- Ask God to show you areas of your life where you feel that he has not been providing. When you break up into groups, share how you are feeling about your circumstances.
- Ask God to show you a person(s) whom you have been envious of—and why. When you break into groups, confess your envy.

Ideas for response during the week :: cultivating contentment

(be prepared to share some of your experiences next week)

- Choose one of suggestions from the “The Application” portion of this week’s talk and commit to doing it in the next two weeks. Be prepared to share your experiences and the results the next time the pastorate meets.
- Connect with the Social Transformation team at HTB to find out how you can come alongside those whose needs may be greater than yours. Opportunities include: the Homeless Night Shelter @ SPOS, the Wednesday drop-in, Caring for Ex-offenders and more... (socialtransformation@htb.org.uk)
- Ask God to show you the gifts and talents* that he has given you. Acknowledge that God is the giver of these abilities. Consider if you are using them to elevate yourself or others.

* we recommend *Now, Discover your Strengths*, by Marcus Buckingham, as a resource that might help