Philippians 3: 12-16

12 I don’t mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection. But I press on to possess that perfection for which Christ Jesus first possessed me. 13 No, dear brothers and sisters, I have not achieved it, but I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, 14 I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us. 15 Let all who are spiritually mature agree on these things. If you disagree on some point, I believe God will make it plain to you. 16 But we must hold on to the progress we have already made.

Today we continue sermon series on the Seven Deadly Sins. Our aim in this series of sermons is to understand more clearly why these sins were considered particularly important for Christians living the early centuries of the church and throughout the last 1600 years of the Christian church. We are going to look at how it is that we wrestle with these sins today and how we might untangle ourselves from these vines which can choke out our lives. Mostly we want to discover the virtue in the grace which leads to life and moves us in the opposite direction of these deadly sins.

As we begin I want to invite you to take out of your bulletin your Message Notes and your Meditation Moments. My prayer each week will be that there will be at least one thing that you will want to remember from the message and there is a place for you to write that down and take any other notes that you'd like to take. I pray each week that the Holy Spirit would speak to each person who gathers for worship in this place and when you feel a nudge I encourage you to jot down what it is you feel like God might be speaking to you.

Continued on the backside of the front page you will find our Meditation
Moments which give you a chance to read further in the Scriptures about what it is we are going to be talking about each week. I encourage you to take some time each morning or evening to read a bit of Scripture and to reflect upon what it might mean for you and spend some time in prayer either individually or with your family or in a small group. If you are watching at home or online you can simply pull out a piece of paper and pen or pencil to use take notes and you can download this resource off our website after you are done.

I want to start by being very clear about why we are doing this sermon series. I will begin with a confession and let you know that I have struggled personally with every single one of these sins and I will be using first person when I talk about sin during this sermon series. My intent is not the point a finger at you or make you feel bad but simply to remind you that there are struggles that all of us have which can lead to pain and hurt and heartache and they often begin with these sins that we are going to talk about over the next few weeks. I will never forget the wisdom of a preaching professor I had when I was in seminary who told us that the best sermon that we preach are the ones that we preach to ourselves and so I will be preaching as much to myself as to any of you during this series of sermons.

**SLIDE      Inferno**

The second reason I wanted to launch this series of sermons this summer is because the number one best-selling book on the New York Times bestsellers list for the past few months has been the new book by Dan Brown entitled, *Inferno*. You might recall that Dan Brown is the author that wrote the best-selling book and movie from a number of years ago, *The da Vinci Code*. Both books are historic al fiction and I have spent several sermons clearing up some of the misconceptions about the Bible that come from *The da Vinci Code*. In his most recent book Brown uses images from Dante's *Divine Comedy* as part of the mystery thriller story and in particular talks about the seven levels of hell which correlate to the seven deadly sins that are in Dante's epic poem. I don't have time to go into all of the images and whether or not much of Brown's historical documentation is accurate regarding the Inferno but many people are asking questions about the seven deadly sins because of the popularity of this book and so I thought it would be helpful for us to look at that together as people of faith.

**SLIDE      The Seven Deadly Sins**

With that in mind let's take a look at where these seven deadly sins originally came from. The modern concept of the seven deadly sins is linked to the
works of the 4th century monk Evagrius Ponticus. He and his fellow monks began to name those things that they most struggled with as they try to pursue the Christian faith and become faithful followers of Jesus. At first they named eight deadly sins and they were things that the monks thought about and pondered over in their secret thought lives. The monks found that they shared the same common struggles with these sins.

It was in the same century that Pope Gregory I said that these deadly sins were not unique to those in the monastery, but recognized that all Christians struggle with them. He noted that these sins were the root sins of all of the other sins which spring forth from them. He used the metaphor of a tree with seven primary branches going out in different directions and those were the seven deadly sins. All of the other sins were branches off of those main seven sins.

The church then began to teach people about these seven deadly sins as a way of understanding the things that could choke the life from you. These things will keep you from God and ultimately destroy you. The sins were categorized and put in an order typically from the least deadly and progressing to the most deadly which was always seen as the sin of pride. The order, starting with the least deadly that we will begin with next week goes like this.

SLIDE

Lust
Gluttony
Greed
Sloth
Wrath
Envy
Pride

Notice that the first two on the list are "physical" sins that have to do with the body and the second group of five are what are seen as "spiritual sins" which had to do with the spirit or the mind. The monks and Pope Gregory believed that the spiritual sins were actually more dangerous than the physical ones. Pride was considered the most deadly and we will end this sermon series with that topic.

I told you last week I would let you know what the 8th deadly sin was that was dropped off of this list. The Latin word was...

SLIDE Tristitia = sorrow/despair/despondency

(Sermon preached by Jeff Huber – August 3-4, 2013 – page 3)
This was later rolled into the idea of sloth but it also was difficult for many in the church to look at sadness as a sin, and that would especially be true today since we know there is something in brain chemistry that can cause depression. We’ll talk more about that in a few weeks, but let’s remember a few other things we talked about last week.

**SLIDE**  
**What is sin?**

In order to fully appreciate this list we have to begin with the fundamental question: What is sin? That is a great question to ask because the Bible doesn’t give one distinct definition of sin. You will find several different Hebrew and Greek words which are translated into the English word "sin." There is one particular Hebrew word and one particular Greek word which are most often behind the English word "sin" when you read your Bible.

**SLIDE**  
**Hamartia = "miss the mark"**

In the Greek the term hamartia was used most often and it is an archery word from the Greco-Roman world. When the archer would draw back the string with an arrow in the bow and let go and the arrow strayed from its target and didn’t hit the target, hamartia occurred. It "missed the mark." This is a term in the Greek New Testament which is most often used for sin and it literally means, "missing the mark."

John Wesley is the founder of Methodism and our heritage in this church springs forth from his teaching about the Christian faith. Wesley would talk about sin and brokenness between us and God and between us and our neighbor or simply a brokenness inside of ourselves. It wasn’t just about a list like the seven deadly sins but it was more about what happened as a result of our actions or thoughts and do those things that we do or thought processes that we have separate us from God or each other. If that happens then there is sin and it is meant to simply describes the relationship that can happen between us and God in us and other people.

**SLIDE**  
**Why were these sins called deadly?**

We also talked about why these sins were called deadly. Several years ago there was a movie that came out called *Seven* starring Brad Pitt and Morgan Freeman. In the movie a maniacal killer roams the streets killing a string of victims in a series of gruesome murders. The detectives are stumped until he realized that the perpetrator is killing his victims as a sort of sick punishment for their having committed one of the seven deadly sins. The murders are terrible and the

*(Sermon preached by Jeff Huber – August 3-4, 2013 – page 4)*
crime scenes are horrible. The movie is dark, somber and sinister. The movie depicts the seven as bloody and spectacularly bad. If only this were true and that the seven deadly sins were committed by maniacs or madmen like Hitler or Mao Tse tong.

But what impresses me the most about the seven deadly sins is how ordinary and unspectacular they are. They are mundane and all too human foibles of the human race in general, not just sins of the few utterly depraved. Maybe there is something in us that wants to believe that "sin" must apply to someone other than ourselves. That's why we make movies about the seven deadly sins and depict them in this way but the truth is they are not. These sins are where we live and this is who we are.

One of the reasons these seven were picked as deadly sins is not because they are mortal and will lead to some gruesome death, but because they sneak up on us and take us over before we even are aware of it.

The deadliness of these sins is found in the reality that they are very ordinary and pervasive in human life, all with their roots in basic, from-infancy human nature. Because of this we fail to see how terribly they warp our humanity.

One of the things about the deadly sins is that they are all a distortion of something that is a good part of God's plan for our lives. This is true of the deadly sin we will talk about today.

**SLIDE  Lust**

God's will is that we have sexual feelings and urges. God made them and they are good things as they help us become attracted to one another as partners. But what happens with lust is that the good drive which God gave us is distorted. We begin to miss use that good gift of God in ways that are harmful to us and stray from the target or mark and caused brokenness.

We were on vacation earlier this month and one of the places we spent time was in Lake City, Colorado. My wife and I like history and so we spent some time at the museum in Lake City and we took one of the tours offered by the historical Society which was a tour of the cemeteries in town. Here is a picture of the first place that we stopped.

**SLIDE  Lake City cemetery gate 1876**

You will notice that it was built in 1876 and one the first things that we learned is that there are actually two cemeteries in town. This was the first
cemetery and it was built for the poor, gamblers, saloon keepers, criminals and those who were not White. There is another cemetery up the road for the "good folks." We got to hear a number of stories about people buried in both cemeteries and what I discovered is that the "good folks" had as many sins as the other folks buried in the not-so-good cemetery.

Last week we looked at a number of the people buried in this lower cemetery so I thought this week we would take a look at some of the people buried in the upper cemetery...the good folks so to speak!

SLIDE Louis Estep Headstone

Louis Estep was shot and killed on June 10, 1896 at Clara Ogden’s Crystal Palace Brothel in Lake City by Jessie Landers. Jessie was actually not a man but was Louis’ fiancé. She had been molested several nights earlier by one of Louis’ friends, Frank McDonald. She entered the brothel and fired several shots at Frank and inadvertently shot her fiancé. She was so distraught that she turned the gun on herself and attempted suicide. Jessie survived but was sentenced to 5 years in prison in Canon City and she died shortly after serving her prison term—some say of a broken heart.

SLIDE Lust

This is just one way that lust becomes a deadly sin. As we mentioned earlier, each one of these seven deadly sins begins as a good thing but when it becomes distorted and pushes people away from God or away from each other as authentic human beings, we have sin or brokenness.

If you turn to the opening stories of the Bible you will find the story of Adam and Eve in the book of Genesis. That story ends with the man and the woman clinging to one another and becoming one flesh. That’s a euphemism for sexual intimacy. That was seen by God to be a good thing even a holy thing.

You come to a story later in Genesis about Abraham and Sarah and how they discover they are going to be parents in old age and Sarah laughs with joy. She says, "Will I have paradise again with my husband?" That word "paradise" was a euphemism for sexual intimacy.

In the Song of Solomon in the Hebrew Bible or the Old Testament you will find an extended poem in which the beauties and the virtues of intimate and erotic love is described right there in the middle of your Bible. This was seen as a good gift from God and not something to be ashamed of or to be treated lightly.

The problem is when that sexual drive or desire which God gave us is
removed from its grounding. When morality is separated from sexual desire is where we find lust beginning to appear. Covenant love is what God intends when two people have promised to love each other no matter what happens to your body or how wrinkled you get or how poor you are or what happens when you're sick, you will stay together forever. When you give yourself entirely and completely to another person within that kind of covenant there is something sacred and beautiful and profound. Sexuality becomes a spiritual part of our lives when it's connected to a commitment.

Sexual intimacy is meant to lead you in a place where you feel safe and secure and you feel bonded to one another. This is why sexual intimacy ends in tears or laughter or joy in the Scriptures. All of that was a part of God's good gift.

The days before birth control, everybody understood that this was the way in which we became a part of God's act of creation. It was seen as holy and sacred to be able to co-create with God as two people came together.

But it also was meant to be a way in which two people bond together. God designed our bodies so that in the midst of sexual intimacy certain hormones are released and wash across our body, including one called oxytocin which you may remember is the "cuddle hormone." It is the same hormone is released when a woman is nursing her child and it causes her to bond with that child. When the hormone is released in the midst of intimacy is meant to connect the man and the woman and bond them together.

The problem is that when we take this wonderful gift that God gave us and we decide that it's just primarily for instinct gratification, we begin to see it as a way to satisfy ourselves. We bond with a person and pull away as part of one night stand and it causes damage to our soul. We go with someone else and then pull away and again go with someone else and pull away. Several things happen in this moment.

First, the other person thinks there was a chance that you could bond with them and they may have begun that process. They gave themselves wholly to you and you gave yourself wholly to them but if you don't really mean anything by it then it causes brokenness. People are hurt and we begin to objectify others and make them into an object that we get to possess, that human being, a child created by God.

Secondly, we then lose the capacity to bond. Oxytocin no longer works the way it is supposed to work because we are so used to having a rush cross our brain. We literally don't know what to do it anymore.

(Sermon preached by Jeff Huber – August 3-4, 2013 – page 7)
All of these things trivialize sex and that lust causes damage. When sex becomes that thing that really is only used to bring us personal gratification then it kind of becomes like poison ivy. What happens when you scratch poison ivy? It makes you crazy and you have to itch some more. You keep itching and itching and the longer you itch you have to scratch harder and faster. Pretty soon you start tearing the flesh off your body as you are itching and you leave scars. What you really need to do is leave it alone and put the appropriate lotion on it. This is what begins to happen when we seek sex for our own personal gratification without any concern for the other or any deeper, holy purpose beyond ourselves.

I have heard story after story of friends of mine and people in the congregations I have served who have seen their lives fall apart when they gave in to lust. All of us wrestle with this at certain points in our lives but when we wholeheartedly give in to it, it can tear us apart and cause extreme brokenness which is why it is called a deadly sin.

I think of a young man who was going to seminary to become a pastor. He had tremendous gifts for preaching and sharing God's word. One day while he was going out to the trash he saw a stack of pornographic magazines in the dumpster. He looked at them and felt his heart beat faster. He had a desire to reach in and take them out the trash to thumb through the pages. But he said to himself that he was going to be a pastor, he would follow Jesus and so he walked away. He got back to his front door and something pulled them back to the dumpster. He took the magazines out of the dumpster and took them to his apartment. His wife wasn't home and so we began to look at them.

After looking at them and gratifying himself through the images he felt ashamed and so he went and threw them away in the dumpster again. After feeling bad for a day he came home from his classes the next day and he wondered if the magazines were still there. That night, when no one else was around he began fishing through the dumpster again. He had a flashlight and went through three days' worth of old garbage to try and find the magazines so he can pull them back out.

This became a pattern in his life and every time he would take out the trash he wondered if there were more magazines in the dumpster. He finally reached bottom when he crawled in the dumpster at night and sift all the way to the bottom to see if he could find one magazine. What happened to him? The itching and scratching had made him a slave.

This is what lust does to us. It takes the natural gifts given to us by God and
makes us a slave. I think of the young woman who came to my office when I was a youth pastor. She was very active in church and in our youth group and she made a commitment to save herself until marriage. She had heard in health class that every time you sleep with someone you sleep with everyone else they have ever slept with. She heard about all the precautions you should take. None of that seemed to apply to her until this moment. She discovered she had a sexually transmitted disease that might affect her ability to have children someday. With tears in her eyes she was trying to figure out how to take it back. She desperately was trying to figure out how to tell her parents and what it meant for her and her future.

For this young woman it wasn't an addiction and it wasn't itching and scratching, but it was simply the consequences of one moment and giving in to something that was not God's will for her life. It caused extreme brokenness.

Unfortunately, I have hundreds of these stories but let me finish with this last one. A man came to see me who became addicted to Internet pornography. It wasn't enough just to see the images or watch the videos and so he started to then call the chat lines. Pretty soon even that couldn't get him aroused and so he signed up to meet someone online for a tryst.

His wife finally caught on by finding receipts on their credit card and when she confronted him she fell to the ground in a fetal position. He looked at this woman that he truly loved, that he wanted to be a partner to for the rest of his life and realized he had destroyed her and their relationship. He realized that his very soul had shriveled up.

This couple was able to find healing over a long period of time and it truly was miraculous, but there will always be a scar for him and for her. This is what lust does to us.

In this series of sermons I want to try to paint a picture for you of the deadliness of the sin each week. I want to paint a picture for you so that when you feel tempted by this sin you will take a step back and maybe remember the picture. That is what we preachers try to do for people, so let me give you a picture today.

Several years ago we had mice taking up residence in our house. I looked into all the options for catching the mice and one of them that I found was a glue trap. This glue trap is very sticky and has a cent on it which attracts the mice. When the mouse steps onto the trap he finds himself stuck. They tried to pull free and they can't. They tell you on the direction that after you set the traps you
should listen because when the mice are caught they begin to squeak. I couldn't bring myself to use these devices because they seem so cruel as the creature tried and tried to pull free of the glue trap. The mouse will even begin to gnaw away at its own feet to try and break free. Since I'm the one who had to set the traps and take care of them afterwards because my wife wouldn’t do it, I chose the old-fashioned way and used these mouse traps that make it quick and clean.

When I think about lust and its power in our lives we find this thing that smells good and looks good to us on the surface, but we get stuck in this trap. We pull and we try to get away and we just can't quite break free. The creature dies a slow and painful death when they are caught in a glue trap and the same is often true for those caught in this broken place.

As your pastor I don't want that for you, and I don't want it for me. So let's look a bit and what the causes are for this struggle. How do we deal with this?

**SLIDE** How do we deal with lust?

The truth is that any of these deadly sins don't start when we act on our impulses. It starts with our thoughts. This is why Jesus says these words in the Sermon on the Mount from Matthew 5:27-30.

**SLIDE** 27 “You have heard the commandment that says, ‘You must not commit adultery.’ 28 But I say, anyone who even looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart. 29 So if your eye—even your good eye—causes you to lust, 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. 30 And if your hand—even your stronger hand—causes you to sin, 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 be thrown into hell.

Jesus doesn't really want us to poke out our eyes and cut off our hands. What Jesus is doing is using prophetic hyperbole which is when he makes a big sweeping statement to make a point. His point is that sin is serious business. Understand how dangerous this can be when you begin to go down this road and how damaging it can be to your soul.

Jesus reminds us in this text that the path starts in our hearts, long before we consummate a relationship with another person. It is the through life that we have to train first. Walter Wangerin is a Lutheran pastor and he wrote a book some years ago entitled, *As For Me And My House*. In the book he tells the story
of a time when he was attracted to one of his parishioners. He tells about how his wife was his wife and so when he came home from work he wasn't Walter the super pastor at the Lutheran church in his community, but he was just an ordinary husband with faults and foibles.

He went to church and he was super pastor Walter. This woman was attracted to him and every time she would see him he would say, "You're such a wonderful pastor." She said all of these kind things and made him feel really special. The relationship became a little more flirtatious and he found himself wrestling with these feelings. Walter never acted on them and he finally got his head on straight and realized that he was having "stinkin’ thinkin’.”

He wrote in his book that the danger came in the, "moment of the maybe." The danger is when you don't say "no" right away and instead you say, "I'm not going to act on this, but I wonder what it would be like if I did." He would play with that thought in his head and he realized that the longer that he played that over in his mind the more likely it was that he would actually act upon it. He had to stop the thoughts first.

James writes about this in James 1: 13-15.

SLIDE 13 And remember, when you are being tempted, do not say, “God is tempting me.” God is never tempted to do wrong, and he never tempts anyone else. 14 Temptation comes from our own desires, which entice us and drag us away. 15 These desires give birth to sinful actions. And when sin is allowed to grow, it gives birth to death.

Remember that temptation is not sin. We allow ourselves to be enticed and dragged away when we play with certain thoughts in our minds. It starts in our head and in our hearts and then we give birth to it and it grows.

Tony Campolo tells the story of a cowboy who came to faith in Christ. A few weeks after the man had given his life to Christ the pastor followed up and asked him how he was doing in his walk with Jesus. The old cowboy said, "Preacher, I feel like my heart is being torn apart. I feel like I have two teams of horses connected to my heart. One is pulling one way and one is pulling the other."

The preacher asked, "Well, which one is winning?"

The cowboy smiled and said, "To be honest, whichever one I say ‘Giddyup’ to that morning!"

That points to an important truth about sin. You can resist it. Resistance is
not futile. It is possible to resist evil and temptation and the Scripture tells us that when call upon the name of Jesus that those temptations have to flee from you.

But you have to decide and you have to act. You have to decide every morning who you are going to say, "Giddyup" to. The apostle Paul did this is his own life when he said these words in Romans 7.

SLIDE

21 I have discovered this principle of life—that when I want to do what is right, I inevitably do what is wrong. 22 I love God’s law with all my heart. 23 But there is another power within me that is at war with my mind. This power makes me a slave to the sin that is still within me. 24 Oh, what a miserable person I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin and death? 25 Thank God! The answer is in Jesus Christ our Lord.

One of the responses then to dealing with this struggle with our temptations is to say "giddyup" every morning to God. We do that by saying a prayer the first thing when we get up every morning. Something like this.

SLIDE

Lord, take my life. Help me to honor and glorify you. I want to follow you Jesus. I want to live in a way that honors you. Holy Spirit, live within me. Give me strength to walk the journey, and when I face temptation, Lord take over once more.

It begins with this decision of who is Lord in your life. Who do you belong to? Who are you ultimately seeking to live for? You will still be tempted. In fact, if you are not tempted in your daily life then you are not alive or you are not very honest. Temptation is something that we all wrestle with.

Take out of your bulletin this orange card if you wouldn't mind. This is something that I share with you in the past but I want to give it to you for this entire series of sermons. These are the five “R's” of resisting temptation. They are five words that begin with the letter "R" and if you actually work this process then it will be hard for you to succumb to the temptations that comes your way.

SLIDE

R — remember Who You Are

Remember who you are. You are a child of God and you belong to Jesus Christ. You have made a commitment to Jesus Christ and to others in your life. Perhaps you are somebody’s spouse or you are somebody’s child, but you most certainly are a child of God. So the first step when we are facing temptation is to remember that we belong to Jesus Christ. We ask the question: "Is this activity consistent with my identity as a child of God or as a follower of Jesus Christ?"
R – realize the consequences of our actions

So many times when we are tempted by something we get blinders on and all we can see is the gratification that we are going to have if we pursue this thing. We fail to ask, "What's going to happen after that? How will I feel after this act? After I have done this thing or acted upon this impulse, will I feel ashamed or proud? Will I seek to hide my actions or will I be willing to tell anyone about them, especially in a sermon? Will I feel more human or less human after I have done this thing? Will I hurt other people or will this bless other people?"

We ask these questions and we look at the consequences and we take an honest look at what life will be like after we plunge in. If I actually do this thing, how will it play out? If Pastor Walter had gone down that road and had a relationship with that woman he would've lost his wife, his dignity, his ministry, damaged the church and people's relationship with God and everything he believed in may have been sacrificed. But unless you look at all of those things ahead of you, you end up seeing that person or temptation before you. Realize the consequences of your actions before you jump in.

R – remove yourself from the situation

One man that I talked with when I was in the Denver area had a struggle with going to strip clubs. They were on his way home from work and when he got off at a certain exit he would see the signs and he would be tempted and more often than not he would give in to that temptation. He had to decide to take the long way home. He rerouted the way that he drove home and it took him 5 to 10 minutes longer, but that extra time saved his life, his marriage and his soul.

I can remember the story of a woman who was having an affair with her next-door neighbor. She sold her house and moved somewhere else because that was the only way to remove that temptation. It was the only way she could follow through on the promises that she had made to her husband. You have to ask a question like, "How much is this house worth to me? Am I willing to lose my spouse over it? Am I willing to destroy my family and break apart? Am I willing to lose my dignity in my soul?" Sometimes you have to sell the house or the farm.

R – dedicate and Recommit yourself to God in prayer

Rededicate and recommit yourself to God through prayer. A breath prayer is a simple and short thing that you say as a prayer to God that you have memorized. This can be very helpful when dealing with temptation. "Lord, you know I am struggling right now. You know the feelings I have in my heart. You
It's pretty funny because when you pray in the middle of temptation, it's sort of like taking a cold shower. It's very hard to pray and still have all the same feelings that you were having before.

I remember hearing a very famous preacher once talk about how difficult it was for him in the summertime in his community when young women would be wearing scantily clad clothing while they were running or riding their bicycles. He found himself simply praying to God to remove that temptation and one day he heard a very clear voice say to him, "That's my daughter. What if someone was thinking those thoughts about your daughter?"

There may even be a group of people like a small group that if you have that level of trust you can share what is going on inside of your heart. There may be a Celebrate Recovery group or 12 step program that we have here at the church. On Monday nights we have Celebrate Recovery and you have a chance to sit with people who share the same struggles that you share. They will ask you open and honest questions and you have a chance to get real.

Something happens when you actually tell somebody that you are struggling with this thing. When you confess your temptation the power seems to go away because part of the power of sin is its secrecy. When you confess that you will find the power begins to dissipate. This is why James says in James 5:16.

Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.

If you don't feel you have that level of trust with anyone or with a group then seek out a counselor who can begin to help you let go of that temptation. We have provided a list of counselors for you on the back table during this sermon series in case you need some ideas for where to begin that process.

Through the centuries the church found that it was important not just to name the deadly sins so that you can see where you might get off-track, but also to paint a picture of the will of God which is the target we are meant to pursue. 1 Thessalonians 4:3 captures well what is that is the target we are aiming for.

God’s will is for you to be holy, so stay away from all sexual sin. Then each of you will control his own body and live in holiness and honor—
Let me stop right there. Tony Campolo in his book on the seven deadly sins says that the real issue around lust has to do with maturity and control and the ability to make a decision. When we are children we have a hard time with this. Our children go to Fuzzywig’s candy store and they have a few dollars to spend and they can’t make up their mind. Then, when they finally do make up their mind they always want that thing they didn’t get.

Part of dealing with lust is recognizing that we are adults and we are meant to make a decision and then stick to it and have control over that decision. I cannot say the number of people who have come in to my office confessing to an affair only to discover that that piece of candy they thought would be satisfying isn’t really what they wanted after all.

One of the things that God dreams for us is that we would grow up as we age and we would exercise some self-control. We are to treat our bodies with honor and respect and understand that they are holy.

**SLIDE** 6 *Never harm or cheat a Christian brother in this matter by violating his wife,*

God may be disappointed when we hurt ourselves when we hurt someone else and misuse the gift of sexuality and turn someone else into an object to be owned or conquered, I think that is when the wrath of God begins to be revealed. When we treat people as objects and hurt people in the process then this is what the Scripture tells us about that.

**SLIDE** *for the Lord avenges all such sins, as we have solemnly warned you before. 7 God has called us to live holy lives, not impure lives.*

We are to pursue sanctification or holiness. This is our desire in our personal lives and is meant to be a daily walk. The reality is that this is a lifelong process and not just something you're going to fix and figure out today or even tomorrow. One of the challenges of this deadly sin is that we sometimes think that once we become a Christian it will be easy but the truth is that it becomes harder.

The apostle Paul recognizes this is why he says this in Philippians 3.

**SLIDE** 12 *I don’t mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection. But I press on to possess that perfection for which Christ Jesus first possessed me. 13 No, dear brothers and sisters, I have not achieved it, but I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies*
ahead, 14 I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us. 15 Let all who are spiritually mature agree on these things. If you disagree on some point, I believe God will make it plain to you. 16 But we must hold on to the progress we have already made.

The prize towards which we are moving is a gift that has already been given to us the love of God in Jesus Christ. Remember what Paul says about love.

SLIDE Love endures all things; lust endures very little

Love endures all things and I would add that lust endures very little.

Let me end with this word of grace. The truth is that if you are tempted with lustful thoughts then that just means you’re alive. If you didn't feel anything like that then I would be worried about you. There are moments in your life where you're going to find yourself attracted to somebody that is off-limits. That person will treat you special and your heart will flutter like it did in middle school. That's life. It doesn't mean you were supposed to go and have an affair with them or this is the long-lost love of your life.

You have heard it said before, "How can something that feels so right be so wrong?" Just ask the mouse who crawled on the glue trap. Just because something smells right and feels right when you first hop on doesn’t mean that it really is right or will lead to life.

Temptation is a common experience but it's what we do with the temptation that really matters. Are you sometimes going to make mistakes? You will in all areas of sin because you are human. The hope is that you don't make deadly mistakes or mistakes that take you to a place where people's lives are destroyed and there is brokenness that feels like it can never be repaired.

Our aim is that as we are growing in Christ we are setting aside those things and maturing and making better choices. But even after you have made mistakes, even terrible ones, there is grace for you.

Remember that Mary and Joseph were told, "You shall call his name Jesus for he shall save his people from their sins." Jesus would not have come if there was not the possibility or the need for us to be saved. He came to save us from our sins. We turn and we asked for his mercy and forgiveness and he extends that to us. We remember that Jesus was called a friend of sinners and Jesus hung out with people who made terrible decisions in the area of sexuality. He spent time with adulterous women and men and people who had done terrible things, but he
still loved them with a passion.

His desire was that they pursue holiness from that point on and if they missed it he would still love them. This was a man who forgave his disciples who abandoned him and told other people they didn't even know him.

I want to close with the story of King David. David was considered the Messiah during his reign and this paints a great picture of her how God looks at our sin and how God treats us after we sin. You might remember that David was staying in Jerusalem in his Palace while his armies were going off to battle. It was springtime and he was walking on his rooftop when he noticed in an adjacent house that if he got down to just the right angle he could look into the bathroom of Bathsheba who was radiant in her beauty.

The Scripture makes it sound like he just stumbled upon this but I'm pretty sure he was looking. He has even calculated the time that she takes her bath every day. This happened over a long period of time as David began to play with the "moment of the maybe." He knew that she was Uriah's wife. Uriah was a fighting man and he was off fighting the King's battles and was a friend of King David.

One day, after watching her carefully, he calls for his servants to fetch the woman who lives next door. He took her in the biblical sense and afterward he felt guilt and shame. As a man who had written half of the Psalms that we have, David knew that this was not God's dream for his life.

But the story goes from bad to worse when the woman comes to them several weeks later and says that she is pregnant. Uriah hadn't been home for a long time so the king sent for Uriah hoping he will come back and spend the night with his wife because he is so thankful for Uriah's service to the military. But Uriah is such an honorable man that he refuses to go home to his wife and instead sleeps on the King's front porch. I wonder how King David was feeling about this time?

When David can't get Uriah to sleep with Bathsheba he comes up with another plan. He sent Uriah back to the general with the note that is sealed by the King and it is Uriah's own death sentence. The general says to place Uriah at the front of the fighting force and then in the heat of the battle all of the soldiers are to retreat so Uriah will be left out and be killed in battle.

That's exactly what happens. David the hero takes Bathsheba as his wife since her husband was killed in battle and they have a child. David has not only committed adultery but murder. You would think that would be the end of the
story for David the king or "the man after God's own heart." David finally came to a place where he was broken and there were consequences to his sin. In his brokenness he wrote one of the most beautiful of all of the Psalms. He prayed this Psalm that I invite you to say together with me as we prepare for communion.

SLIDE

Create in me a clean heart oh God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from my presence, and take not thy Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of my salvation.

God did forgive David even here in this place of brokenness. If God can do that for David then God can do that with you.

Inside your bulletin is an index card that is blank. That is a place for you to write down your prayer confession. I find that if I write out my prayers as a letter to God than I can say things I don't think to say just speaking with my lips. I invite you to simply say something like this.

Lord, please forgive me for... Lord, help me my struggles with...

Then write down what it is you would like to say to God. If lust is not really an issue for you then why don't you think about what it is you are struggling with and you can write down your prayer confession for that. Let's take a next 60 seconds to turn to the Lord in prayer by writing out our prayers of confession.

Pause...

SLIDE

Communion

O God you know that some of us could fill pages and some of us struggle with what to say. Every secret in our lives is laid bare before you. You know the thoughts of our hearts, the moments of our maybe, the ways that we have compromised ourselves or strayed from your path. Forgive us O Lord. Forgive us Jesus. Create in us a clean heart and renew a right spirit within us. Restore to us the joy of our salvation. Help us to be faithful to those that you have entrusted to us and to love them well.

Make us pure in heart. Sanctify us and make us holy. Give us strength to exercise restraint and self-control. May we do we seek to honor you with our thoughts, our words, our bodies and our lives. Thank you for your mercy and grace of God. Forgive us now we pray, in your holy name. Amen.
“Lust”

Theme: The Seven Deadly Sins

Scripture: Philippians 3: 12-16

Things I’d like to remember from today’s sermon:

_____________________________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________________________

Meditation Moments for Monday, July 29 – Read Galatians 5:19-23 – This sweeping, incisive passage covers most of the issues we’ll address during this sermon series. (We will revisit these verses in the next seven weeks; reflect on where we have grown and on where we need God’s help for further growth.) On the one side, immoral, impure actions are destructive. On the other, we find the love and joy that God intends for us.

• As we begin this series, take time for honest, prayerful self-appraisal. Which items in verses 19-21 do you find in your life? Do you agree with Paul that these stem from our human brokenness? Which of the fruits of the spirit in verses 22 and 23 do you see growing in your life? Do you agree that these are godly characteristics?

• Which of the fruits of the Spirit do you see as helping to shield you from the impure actions listed in verses 19-21? How do you open your heart to God’s Spirit so God can grow that fruit in you? Have you recently done something that you wouldn’t have done in the past—because you have been with Jesus?

Tuesday, July 30 – Read Matthew 5:27-30 – Jesus clearly laid out the moral dangers lust creates. He said that lust is first an inner issue – a heart problem. Let’s be clear that Jesus did not condemn sexual desire. Genesis 2:24 says that it is a part of God’s good creation. Jesus rebuked times when we focus on another person just as an object for our pleasure, not caring about that person’s total well-being.

• The online Encarta® World English Dictionary defines lust as, “the strong physical desire to have sex with somebody, usually without associated feelings of love or affection.” Does this definition seem to you to fit with Jesus’ teaching? Why or why not? What do you believe Jesus might add to or subtract from this definition?

• Jesus had said it’s your heart more than your body that commits adultery. This makes it clear he wasn’t really telling us to mutilate our bodies in verses 29 and 30. What do you believe Jesus wanted his potent images to teach us about our inner life? What would you change in your day-to-day life to take Jesus seriously?

Wednesday, July 31 – Read 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8 – New Testament Christians lived in a world where lust and immorality were givens. In many Roman and Greek cities, “temples” sold the services of prostitutes! 1 Thessalonians is probably the earliest of Paul’s letters. He made it clear to his converts that God was calling them to break from their culture and live in new ways.

(Sermon preached by Jeff Huber – August 3-4, 2013 – page 19)
• Compare and contrast the attitudes toward sex in the Greek and Roman world of New Testament times with attitudes in our world today. How has our culture shaped your own attitudes and life story and those of people close to you? Do you believe that sex without love or commitment makes us happier or less happy?

• Notice the verbs Paul uses in verse 6, words that mean “harm” or “wrong” and “take advantage of.” In what ways does this cast light on the type of spiritual damage from an impure life that he is warning against? How does this language speak to the idea that prostitution or promiscuity are “victimless” activities?

Thursday, August 1 — Read Colossians 3:1-10 — Human resolve alone will not produce the inner purity God desires. Living a pure life is not a matter of “gritting our teeth” and just saying “no”. Our life, Paul wrote, is already hidden with Christ in God. Our outward actions flow from God graciously accepting and loving us. Inner renewal, not just outward conformity, is God’s calling for us.

• What are some practices you have found that help you set your mind on things above? What activities or settings seem to draw your attention away from God? How do you expect that your inner life might change as you more fully live out Christ’s love and grace, rather than religious rules or social pressures?

• Paul says that a Christian has taken off the old self and put on a new self. Can you see places where this has happened in your life? (This is often harder for those who have been “good” all their lives, but it matters for all of us.) Where does your “old self” still give you trouble?

Friday, August 2 — Read 2 Peter 1:3-9 — Peter says movingly that God’s forgiveness and divine love give us the inner power we need to escape the corruption that is in the world. Much like Galatians 5, verses 5 through 7 list the positive virtues God offers us. Add these things to your life, Peter says. They will keep you from an empty, barren existence.

• Peter makes the sweeping claim that God has given us everything we need for a godly life. Which of the positive qualities he lists in verses 5 through 7 do you find most appealing? How can you more completely connect with God’s spiritual power to add these things to your life?

• Peter calls on us to claim these positive qualities in increasing measure. Which of these qualities do you find already present in your life? Thank God for them! Then ask God to guide you to see any places where you could add an increasing measure of that virtue, to make your life and influence even better.

Saturday, August 3 — Personal Application: “The very first thing that we are to do with sin is not to point to it in others but...to confess it in ourselves.” (William Willimon, Sinning Like a Christian, p.30) “Confession” is not obsessive self-hatred. It’s the healthy habit of honestly accepting God’s grace to sinners (Psalm 32, James 5:16, 1 John 1:8-10). How have you felt the power of lust? Confess it to God openly. If it’s harming you or others, seek help. Visit http://www.fumcdurango.org/ministries/adult-ministry-durango-co/celebrate-recovery-durango-colorado or contact our Congregational Care phone, 970-403-9551.

Family Activity: Make a family ice cream sundae. You will need a large dish, favorite ice cream flavor(s), syrup, nuts, candy, whipped cream, and sprinkles. You’ll also need a bowl and spoon for each person. Read Colossians 3:12-14 aloud. Discuss each virtue and give examples. Read the passage aloud again as you make the sundae, following this “recipe:”

• God’s holy people, dearly loved—one scoop of ice cream per person
• Kindness—syrup
• Compassion—syrup
• Humility—nuts

(Sermon preached by Jeff Huber – August 3-4, 2013 – page 20)
• Gentleness—candy  
• Patience—whipped cream

As you eat the sundae, ask God to help you fill your life with goodness.

**Prayer:** Holy Spirit, show me what is in my heart. Replace anything displeasing to you and fill my heart with your love. Let that love motivate and penetrate all my thoughts, words and actions. I give you my heart and my life. Help me to have a strong desire to live in your grace and freedom. Amen.