Theme: The Seven Deadly Sins
“What is Sin?”
Sermon preached by Jeff Huber
July 27-28, 2013 at First United Methodist Church, Durango

Romans 6:12-18 and Ephesians 2:1-10

12 Do not let sin control the way you live; do not give in to sinful desires. 13 Do not let any part of your body become an instrument of evil to serve sin. Instead, give yourselves completely to God, for you were dead, but now you have new life. So use your whole body as an instrument to do what is right for the glory of God.

14 Sin is no longer your master, for you no longer live under the requirements of the law. Instead, you live under the freedom of God’s grace.

15 Well then, since God’s grace has set us free from the law, does that mean we can go on sinning? Of course not! 16 Don’t you realize that you become the slave of whatever you choose to obey? You can be a slave to sin, which leads to death, or you can choose to obey God, which leads to righteous living.

17 Thank God! Once you were slaves of sin, but now you wholeheartedly obey this teaching we have given you. 18 Now you are free from your slavery to sin, and you have become slaves to righteous living.

1 Once you were dead because of your disobedience and your many sins. 2 You used to live in sin, just like the rest of the world, obeying the devil—the commander of the powers in the unseen world. He is the spirit at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God. 3 All of us used to live that way, following the passionate desires and inclinations of our sinful nature. By our very nature we were subject to God’s anger, just like everyone else. 4 But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so much, 5 that even though we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by God’s grace that you have been saved!) 6 For he raised us from the dead along with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ Jesus.

7 So God can point to us in all future ages as examples of the incredible wealth of his grace and kindness toward us, as shown in all he has done for us who are united with Christ Jesus. 8 God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can’t take credit for this; it is a gift from God. 9 Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. 10 For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.
Today we begin a new sermon series on the Seven Deadly Sins. I understand that when many of you saw the video promotion for this sermon series last weekend it caught you a bit off-guard, especially the worship leaders who clearly should've warned! 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. This week you will get to read several sections of the book of Romans which is a great letter from the apostle Paul and helps us wrestle with the idea of sin and what it means for our lives. 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 since its release 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 historical 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. There were a group of monks in the monastery the fourth century that 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 ponder 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 the first 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
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.

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."

It's important to remember that God is the one who is defining the “Mark” that we are to hit. It's not like we are just straying from the path but the idea is
that God has a will and he dreams for our lives as human beings. God has a path that he longs for us to take which leads to life and either we choose intentionally to leave that path or we accidentally do it because of our humanness. In either case we miss the mark and when we do that we are not being fully and authentically who God created us to be.

If you wanted a very simple definition of the word "sin" that would be simply to go counter to the will of God or to miss the mark when it comes to following God and God's path. If God's will is that we would love God with all of our heart and soul and mind and strength to love our neighbor as we love ourselves, then sin would be to will and/or push God away. Sin would be to hurt our neighbor or even to hurt ourselves.

One helpful way to look at this is to think about the ideal parent. As parents we set limits and boundaries for our children, not so they will miss out on life but so they can have life abundant that will be safe and hopefully filled with joy. Our parents were not trying to rob us of great experiences by setting up rules. They were trying to make sure that we were safe and protected and able to experience life to the full. This is the very same reason that God gives us his will and it is designed to bring you peace and joy and hope and life. When we stray from that path and move beyond the boundaries that God desires for us we often find ourselves missing out on the very things that we desire. We find that there is a brokenness between our relationship with God, our relationship with one another, and even within ourselves.

This is the way that John Wesley talked about sin. John Wesley is the founder of Methodism and our heritage in this church spring 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.

Some talk about God being angry with our sins, and I think that can be true when we hurt each other. But most often I think the response of the Father to his children when they stray from the path is disappointment. There is disappointment because he doesn't want to see us hurt. There is disappointment because God knows the path we are going to take is going to cause pain. I have

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experienced this as a father with my own children where I have cried because a decision that my children have made have the potential for long-term consequences that could hurt them. I wasn't angry as much as I was disappointed and sad because I wanted the best for them and I thought they were heading in the direction which would not result in the best for their life.

Certainly at times God becomes angry with human sin but that is when we have really wounded someone else or he witnesses us killing one another and pushing God away in the process. However, I think most often God experiences disappointment and sadness because his will is a path that would lead to life and light and joy in peace and when we don't take it God's heart aches for us.

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

Let's talk for a minute 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 crime scenes or 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 seventh 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. I have read several books and preparing for this sermon series and one of them is this book by William Willimon entitled, Sinning like a Christian: A New Look at the 7 Deadly Sins.

William is a Bishop in the United Methodist Church and he was inspired to write this book while watching the process of himself being elected as a Bishop and noticing how much sin was involved in this process of selecting leadership in
the church. He writes this in his book.

*When one sets out to do good things among good people in a good organization, sin is never far away. In my last church, some years ago, I wrote a book about sin and evil. But that book depicted sin in a rather large, cosmic, systemic manner. I am now, after the election of bishops, more impressed with the rather mundane, ordinary, petty nature of our sin, just the sort of sin that is named in the seven deadly sins.*

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. When I was a kid we used to sneak off and try to get a peek of the Playmate of the Month in Playboy magazine that were stored under my best friend's father's bed. It seemed fairly innocent until you recognize that those same lustful urgings today lead us to addictions that can destroy marriages and even prevent people from being in healthy, intimate relationships.

One of the things that strikes me 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. 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 all have to eat and God designed our bodies consumed food. We are supposed to get hungry and feed ourselves. The problem is that when we allow gluttony to take over we eat and we eat and instead of sustaining ourselves we actually hurt ourselves. We shorten our lives and make ourselves sick, and in the process eating or consuming becomes the central focus of our lives. I can tell you that I have over eaten on more than one occasion, especially when the food is good but even when the food is bad.

The Bible encourages us to work in order to make a living and to be useful in the world. But when the making of money and the having of money becomes the primary objective of our lives, instead of finding joy we find brokenness and pain and we find ourselves consumed with greed. Relationships are torn apart and we are separated from God because we thought that our lives consisted in the abundance of our possessions.

Do you see how that works? We take something that is good and we
overindulge or move in a different direction with it and it causes sin.

**SLIDE**   **The Sin of Idolatry**

The other thing that is interesting to note about the seven deadly sins is that in the end each one of them is really about the sin of idolatry. With the seven deadly sins we end up taking that object and it becomes the primary focus of our lives. That said; sex, food, money, someone's else's stuff or revenge becomes our God. That thing becomes the primary objective in our life over God unto you to the very last of the sins which is pride and that case we become our own God and we experience extreme narcissism where we put ourselves first above everything and everyone else, including God.

You remember that the first commandment in the 10 Commandments is that, "You shall have no other gods before Me." The reason this is so important is because in that right relationship with God and within the will of God we find true peace and joy and contentment.

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 cemetary. Many of the graves in this cemetery are unmarked because they were prostitutes, such as this grave site.

**SLIDE**   **Unmarked Grave**

We are going to look at several of these graves and the stories behind them throughout this sermon series but the one I want to introduce you today is this one that you find on the video screen of Benjamin House.

**SLIDE**   **Benjamin House Headstone**

Benjamin died at the San Juan central saloon on October 23, 1876 of lung...
congestion and was the first person buried in this cemetery. He was 28 years old and the reason that he posthumously was given a white military headstone is because he served in the 8th US Cavalry in the Civil War which means 15 or 16 years old when the war ended. In Lake City, Benjamin was a professional gambler whose specialty was the game of faro. He was well loved by many people in town but when he died the pastor of the only church building in town refused to hold his funeral because he was a "sinner." The Rev. George Darley agreed to preach his funeral and he did so at the gravesite because his church had no building at the time. He wrote in his journal these words about the funeral.

As I was pacing the floor of our new unfinished church, in came big, dark-browed Charlie, the chief barkeeper of our wickedest town of the San Juan. He said, "Mr. Darley, Benjamin is dead, and we want you to preach the funeral because the other pastor won't have nothing to do with him."

I replied, "I will do so with pleasure," to which Charlie replied, "Don't be too hard on him." My answer was, "I never touch a dead dog. If I can't say anything good about him I say nothing." I began pacing again for this was in the afternoon and next morning at 10 o'clock was the funeral. My eyes filled with tears as I thought of the fate of him who dealt faro till midnight, Saturday, and was dead Monday morning.

As we sat expecting a crowd, in came a tall, wild-eyed Mexican dance house woman. Charlie sat her down the way back, but she came forward and raised the cloth from the glass covering his face and looked at him. She wept and then returned to her seat, the only woman present...a lone beautiful creature among 75 dissolute and daring men.

The pallbearers were all over 6 feet. They wanted to take part at the ceremony at the grave, and asked about the propriety of throwing in their white gloves. I assented that it would be proper. At the grave I read the Scriptures, brother prayed, the pallbearers buried their mourning gloves and his girl, who stood by me weeping, reached down a little jeweled hand, gathered a handful of dust and cast it into the grave. I pitied her as I learned she had tried to poison herself after she heard of his death.

On our return from the grave on the banks of the Gunnison River, the six great pallbearers climbed into the express wagon, drawn by four horses that had been his hearse. The front axle broke, and all six fell out on their heads and at the horses' heals.

After we got back, fast and curious came the compliments on the sermon
and thanks for services rendered. They stared at the preacher that could say a kind word of a gambler. One said one kind of thing and another said another, but Charlie shouted, "Mr. Darley, that was an everlasting good sermon that you preached, and I'll take your hat when you preach again and fill it so full of greenbacks that you can't put it on your head!"

Thus ended a strange day. It won many who will hereafter listen to the Gospel, because Benjamin got a good sendoff!

One of the problems that we struggle with as humans is simply being honest that each of us struggles with sin and brokenness and our lives. It is not just about gamblers and dance hall girls and prostitutes and those buried in the lower cemetery in Lake City, Colorado. It's about us, the children of God who find ourselves extraordinarily human.

Let me show you a few others who you can find in this cemetery for the second class citizens of the Lake City community in the late 1800’s and early 1900’s.

SLIDE Alfred Pedersen Crib Grave

Alfred Pedersen was the infant son of Mr. and Mrs. Pedersen and died when he was six weeks old. He died on August 13, 1882 and his father was a furniture builder and so he built an outdoor crib to surround his son's grave and it stands to this day along with the marker bearing his name. The tree that you see inside the crib was just a small plant when Alfred was buried.

SLIDE Pearl Cooper Grave

This is Pearl Cooper's grave. Pearl was buried in the cemetery because she was African-American. She died on June 17, 1900 at the age of 13 years old after being dragged from her burro while on her way to school near Lake City.

SLIDE Williams Gravesite

That brings us to this gravesite of the Williams family. They were also African-American and Willis Williams was the head of their household who fought in the Civil War and then moved his family to Lake City in the late 1800s. He was a former slave and was called "Nigger Willis" until he died on October 5, 1901 at the age of 70. These words were written about Willis Williams. "By his happy, cheerful nature he became well-liked by our people, and his absence from the streets will be noted." Willis is buried next to his wife and mother who also died in Lake City in the early 1900s.
Betts and Browning Gravesite

These are the gravesites of George Bets and James Browning who were proprietors of the infamous San Juan Central Brothel and Dance Hall on Bluff Street in Lake City. They were caught by County Sherriff trying to break into someone’s home and Betts killed the very popular Sherriff Campbell. The two were caught the next day and an angry mob of citizens then took them and hanged them from the Oceans Wave Bridge on April 27, 1882. Betts’ last request was that his mother and friends not be told the manner of his death. The two men were left hanging for two days while the local school children could all be brought to see them. As the children were exposed to the gruesome site they were warned, “This is what happens to sinners!”

Coburn Headstone

The last one I want to show you today is the headstone of Hugh Coburn and his family. Hugh died in his sleep on September 25, 1951 at the age of 75 years old. He was a minor, or Packer, and the Hinsdale County Sheriff for many years when he saw numerous violent crimes. He was noted for his sympathy to those who were jailed, and he often played cards with the inmates and brought them special food. He could’ve been buried in the cemetery with the nice folks up the hill but he actually told people he wanted to be buried in the cemetery with the gamblers, prostitutes, Mexican and African-Americans. It was written in the local paper that, "Grasses now growing in the streets of Lake City…and it will soon grow over Hugh Ammons Coburn, for he will be buried in the tiny cemetery on the Hill where scores of old friends and enemies now lie in unmarked graves."

His story made me wonder: Which cemetery do you think Jesus would’ve chosen to be buried and if he died in Hinsdale County, Colorado? I think that he would be buried in the cemetery with the gamblers and prostitutes and the victims of violent crimes and people so unimportant their graves were unmarked. This tells us something about the heart and the character of God, because when God walked on this earth in the flesh he hung out with the sinners and those who would’ve been buried in the second class cemetery of life.

The heart of God is that he cares about those who are far away from him and who are living in broken relationships among the rubble of life. I just don’t think that God is sitting around waiting to wag his finger at us when we mess up and tell us how sinful we are. I think more than anything else, God is wooing us and longing for us to know his grace and mercy.

I went to the University of Colorado in Boulder and during the school year I
was active at the Wesley Foundation which was the United Methodist campus ministry across from the football stadium. During the school year we had worship services every weekend but in the summer, if we stayed in Boulder, we would have to worship at a local church because there were no services at the Wesley Foundation. One of the summers I stayed in Boulder I checked out several churches until I stumbled across the Second Baptist Church just around the corner from my house. I went in with some trepidation because I didn't know anyone at this church and as I walked in I very quickly noticed that I was the only white person in the building.

I was quickly surrounded with big smiles and handshakes and even hugs from people I didn't know who welcomed me into the "House of the Lord." That summer I learned to raise my hands while I worshiped and close my eyes and respond to the preacher, "Hallelujah," and “Amen Brother!” I also learned that when people began to say, "Bring it on home brother," it meant that it was time for the preacher to wrap up the sermon!

But what I loved most was how they started each worship service when the preacher for the day would get up and stand in front of all of us and shout out, "Good morning Saints!" Then we would all respond, "Good morning!"

Then without missing a beat the worship leader would reply, "Good morning sinners!" And we would all shout out, "Good morning!" It seemed much easier to admit that you had sinned if you could do it as a group, but it also did something very important which would allow us to accept a part of us often kept hidden. I was a student at the University of Colorado in Boulder and I can guarantee you that each week I struggle with every one of the seven deadly sins, especially with college girls walking around in tube tops and short jean cut-offs...yes it was the 80s!

One of the reasons that I think we struggle most with sin is because were a bit embarrassed to be honest but unless we are willing to simply put it out here and say openly that, "this is where I struggle," then we are in danger of being sucked in by one of these seven deadly sins which will sneak up on us.

This is why the apostle Paul wrote these words in the letter to the people of the church in Rome as they struggled in a culture where there was lots of sexual promiscuity and worshiping lots of other gods.

**SLIDE**: 12 Do not let sin control the way you live; do not give in to sinful desires. 13 Do not let any part of your body become an instrument of evil to serve sin. Instead, give yourselves completely to God, for
you were dead, but now you have new life. So use your whole body as an instrument to do what is right for the glory of God. 14 Sin is no longer your master, for you no longer live under the requirements of the law. Instead, you live under the freedom of God's grace. 15 Well then, since God's grace has set us free from the law, does that mean we can go on sinning? Of course not! 16 Don't you realize that you become the slave of whatever you choose to obey? You can be a slave to sin, which leads to death, or you can choose to obey God, which leads to righteous living. 17 Thank God! Once you were slaves of sin, but now you wholeheartedly obey this teaching we have given you. 18 Now you are free from your slavery to sin, and you have become slaves to righteous living.

I want to suggest to you that when we are dishonest and we try to hide those secret stores of sin, we begin to struggle with sin because it becomes our master. When we act like we have to do everything just right and get everything just right and live under what the apostle Paul calls "requirements of the law" that is when we struggle the most with sin. We are meant to live under the freedom of God's grace. God's grace is a free gift that is given to you and you just can't do anything to earn it. You can't live in just the right way, but instead you simply open yourself up to that free gift. Paul reminds us that we can't just go on sinning because of that but instead we live in response to the fact that God made us to love us and God sent Jesus Christ to show was how much we are loved.

Paul gives us a great image when he talks about becoming a slave to sin because the reality is that when these seven deadly sins that we are going to talk about sneak up on us we build ourselves a little prison and we become a slave to that thing, whether it's sex, food, money or whatever. The good news is given to us by Paul in that last verse where he says that now we are free from our slavery to sin and instead we can live in God's grace forever.

Just because you struggle with sin doesn't make you a bad person, but it does make you human. We have such a hard time admitting this and sometimes I know that some of you have come from churches were you have felt beaten up by this truth. I want to be clear that the purpose of this sermon and this series is not to beat you up but to help set you free by being honest about the fact that all of us struggle.

Alexander Solzhenitsyn who spent time in the Russian gulags for opposing communism once said:

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"The line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy a piece of their own heart?"

The truth is that we humans, from the moment we are born, demand with our crying and dependency on someone else to feed us and change us and cuddle with us, are pretty self-absorbed. We think the whole world should be about us from the moment we are born and the way we are wired, but if we continue to live that way throughout our entire lives we cut ourselves off from God and from others. There is this brokenness that each of us struggles with.

But the very first thing that we are to do with sin is not the pointed out in others but rather to confess it in ourselves. Sin is not the defining aspect of humanity, nor is it the chief concern of our life with God. Our life with God enables us openly to confess our sin and to begin again, to get up, to go on, to resume our journey with God.

God does not command us to do impossible things. With God's grace we can be more than conquerors through Christ who loves us. The main reason to spend all this effort talking about sin is so that we can name it, claim it, and move on to more significant lives than if we had lied about ourselves. We investigate sin, spirit in the faith, admit reality and its ravages, so that we may be on our way to fulfillment of God's great promise to God's people that Paul writes in the letter to the Ephesians.

4 But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so much, 5 that even though we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by God’s grace that you have been saved!)

8 God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can’t take credit for this; it is a gift from God. 9 Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. 10 For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.

Paul announces the good news that we have already been forgiven. When we truly hear the gospel it leads to recognition and confession so that we can be set free.

The Seven Deadly Sins

Let me close with a story. For 15 years George had the Midas touch. Every
business venture, every deal he closed, every store he opened, turned into pure gold. His name was synonymous with success. He had a beautiful wife and three beautiful children, and life seemed good.

But the day he walked into my office, he looked like a broken man. A few weeks earlier a part of his world had come tumbling down. His wife had discovered he had been sexually involved with an employee and his wife had confronted him. The confrontation led to a confession that there had been many women over the past decade. He also was caught cheating by the IRS and had not been honest in several business dealings.

"I want you to know," George began, "that I have appreciated the church very much. I admire your preaching and your leadership." He then began to tell me a story.

When he finished I asked George several questions. Finally I asked, "You have been here in church almost every Sunday. You know the commandment regarding adultery and stealing. Did you see what you did was wrong?"

He stared straight ahead before he answered. "No. I do now, but I have lived almost free of guilt these past years. I'm not sure I totally understand myself, but I guess I just didn't think the commandments applied to me. I figured I could just do what I wanted because they were silly rules."

George went into counseling which I referred him to and then a few months later he came back to see me. "I appreciate the help I received from my counselor. But something is missing."

I asked him if he knew what that something was and he shook his head slowly. "No. No, I don't. I feel like I am making progress, but I feel worse now than I did when we began. I made a terrible mistake. I hurt my wife, my children, and my friends. And I have told them so. Still, I have a terrible emptiness."

We prayed together and when he came back a month later he said, "I’ve continued to see the counselor. I continue to mend some broken fences. We haven’t talked all that much, but I think my wife knows I feel terrible about the mistake I made. The kids are okay. I have made some progress that making things right at work and with business partners. I may be the only one who is getting better. I've done what I could and it doesn't seem to be enough."

We then talked about the difference between making a mistake and committing a sin. We recognize that he didn't just make a mistake, like a simple mathematical miscalculation. He knowingly broke his wedding promise to his wife.
and broke several promises to business partners. He moved beyond the bounds of what God expected of him and he acted as if he was immune to the commandments to be faithful and honest. By his own admission he saw himself above the law. He sinned against both God and his wife and even himself.

George was then pretty honest with me and said he really hadn't come clean fully because he didn't know where to begin. We talked about the power of confession and just putting it all out on the table so we can let go. We read Psalm 51, "Create in me a clean heart God and renew a right spirit for me. Cast me not away from your presence oh Lord, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of your salvation and renew a right spirit within me."

George then began to just let it all out, the pain and tears and deep emotion were released. I laid my hands on his head and I said, "Name of Jesus Christ, who said, ‘Whatever you forgive on earth will be forgiven in heaven,’ I declare the entire forgiveness of all your sins."

George began to weep some more and he began to recognize that his real problem with separation from God and from his wife and children. He needed to name his sin and confess his adultery in a very specific way.

One of the reasons we hesitate to talk about sin is because we think it's too negative. We think about condemnation and we don't want anybody wagging their finger at us. But repentance is not a matter of giving up the good things of life, but rather a turning that leads to God. Confession, which may include a painful inventory, ultimately leads to wholeness and health. This is why the Scriptures tell us in 1 John 1:8-9 these words.

**SLIDE**

8 If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth. 9 But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness.

My prayer through this sermon series is that you'll discover freedom from these things which can put you in a prison and make you a slave. A good place to start is for each of us to be honest and to bring those things to God that we need to confess. So as we close let's take a few minutes of silent prayer and bring to God those things that weigh heavy upon our hearts and that caused brokenness between us and God in us and other people and even us and our true selves.

**SLIDE**

Prayer

(SILENCE)

If you're willing, will you now join me in this unison prayer of confession?

Healer of broken hearts, we bow in awe before you, because we are too ashamed to stand. We struggle with sin and we often don't know what to do about it. Help us today to be honest and to turn our hearts to you by confessing those things which have caused brokenness between us and you and between us and others and even brokenness inside of ourselves. God, help us to repent and turn and go in a new direction with you.

Now, hear this declaration of forgiveness.

In his letter to the church at Ephesus, the apostle Paul wrote these words of reassurance: "4 But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so much, 5 that even though we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by God’s grace that you have been saved!) 6 For he raised us from the dead along with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ Jesus."

Receive the forgiveness of God in Jesus Christ, are resurrected Savior. Let us respond with the words on the video screens.

Hearing these words of joy, we say in unison: Thanks be to God! Amen.

“What is Sin?”

Theme: The Seven Deadly Sins

Scripture: Romans 6:12-18 and Ephesians 2:1-10

Things I’d like to remember from today’s sermon:
Meditation Moments for Monday, July 29 – This study guide is designed to allow you to dig deeper into the themes of the sermon. Study these passages with a friend, a Bible study group or on your own. We will be inviting you to read selections from Paul’s masterwork – the letter to the Romans. Don’t worry if you do not understand everything you read – this is a hard book to understand – but savor the parts you do understand! The Book of Romans elaborates on the themes from Sunday’s sermon as we take a fresh look at what sin really is, how it affects our lives, and how God’s grace is available to all.

Intro to the Epistle and the Human Condition
The book of Romans is considered to be Paul’s finest work. It is as close as Paul comes to writing a systematic theology. This letter has been seen as the finest epistle in the New Testament.
- Let’s begin by reading Romans 1:16-17. Here Paul gives us the summary of the entire letter and of the gospel he preached – that we are saved and justified – made righteous – not by our own works, but by our faith in God and God’s work in Christ. Look over your notes from the weekend’s sermon to refresh your memory on the Christian path of salvation.
- In the rest of today’s reading we will see how Paul lays out the Christian understanding of the human condition and how we all struggle with sin – separation from God and from others. He begins with the “serious sins” that many of us may not commit, and then, just about the time we are ready to condemn other “sinners” he begins to enumerate our broken places, demonstrating that all of us are born with leanings toward sin. Read Romans 1:18-2:11. These verses are meant to demonstrate our need for God’s mercy in Jesus Christ. Before we leave today’s reading, let’s end on a hopeful note by looking at the good news in the light of our human condition. Read Romans 3:21-24. How have you experienced God’s saving grace in your life? Can you name a time when you felt loved by God?

Tuesday, July 30 — The Benefits of Christ’s Death for Us
Let’s take a look at the impact that faith in Christ has on our lives. Read Romans 5:1-11.
- These are powerful and profound verses. Notice the result of suffering when someone is a believer found in verses 3 and 4. Suffering produces bitterness in many – but when we are in Christ, and trust him, it can have a very different impact. Notice verse 8 – one that is worth committing to memory. While humanity had turned its back on God, God was reaching out in love and willing to pay a tremendous price to deliver us. This is God’s prevenient grace – his work before we ever turn to him.
- Do you ever find yourself trying to earn God’s love? Why do you suppose we do that? End your time today in prayer, asking God to help you simply receive the free gift of grace he has offered to each of us.

Wednesday, July 31 — How Now Should We Live?
Some of Paul’s critics claimed that he was teaching that people could live any way they wanted – they could even sin – and not worry about it, because we are saved based upon our faith, not our works. These critics said that if God’s grace is seen most clearly in his forgiveness of our sins, then perhaps Paul would have us sin all the more, so we could see more of God’s grace!
- In chapter 6 Paul confronts those criticisms and reveals them to be absurd. The value of this chapter for us, in part, is to remind us that once we have been set free from sin by Christ, we are being changed inside by the Holy Spirit and should be turning away from the sin of our past. Read Romans 6. What speaks to you most clearly from this chapter?
- Have you ever felt a “slave” to something? As we look at the Seven Deadly Sins over the next 7 weeks we will be talking about how we can become enslaved to things like money, sex, food, other people’s stuff, our own pride and many other things. Notice that all of these things are good but when we obsess over them and

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become a “slave” to them it can become destructive in our lives. What is the solution to this problem of becoming enslaved according to Paul in Chapter 6 (see verses 20-23)?

**Thursday, August 1 – Our Struggle with Sin**
The verses you will read today are a powerful picture of how we struggle with sin. Some believe Paul is writing about his life before Christ. Others see this as a picture of how even believers can struggle with sin.

- Read Romans 7:7-25. Once more Paul is demonstrating our human condition and our absolute need for God’s grace in Christ. Notice that the Law serves only to convict us, and in some ways, to even provoke our sinful nature. Have you ever been told “no” to something, only to find that the act of someone telling you “no” made you want to do or have the thing all the more?
- Can you relate to these verses in Romans 7? Notice verse 24 – this is the gospel answer. How can you invite God into your heart to fill that place that is empty? (i.e. Make a commitment to read the Bible and pray daily; Find a small group or fellow Christian to encourage you when you are struggling; Attend worship each week to remember who you are and whose you are; Listen to encouraging music; etc.)

**Friday, August 2 – Life in the Spirit, Sanctification and Glory**
You have a real treat today – for today you will read some of the most powerful verses in all the Bible – so many worth memorizing! Enjoy this feast for your soul!

- We begin by remembering the struggle Paul noted in yesterday’s reading – the struggle with sin we all face. Here, in chapter 8, Paul gives the answer. There is no condemnation for those in Christ! And, we have the power of the Holy Spirit available to help us in our struggle to become the people God wants us to be. Read Romans 8:1-17. What role is the Holy Spirit meant to play in our lives?
- Read Romans 8:18-27. Take another look at verse 18 – this is one that could be committed to memory. How is all of creation groaning under the weight of human sin? How does the Holy Spirit help us as described in verses 26-27? Read Romans 8:28-39. One can almost hear Paul shouting these verses – they are filled with hope, power, and victory. Which of these verses speak most clearly to you?

**Saturday, August 3 – A Living Sacrifice to God**
Today we’ll read Paul’s encouragement which is really his way of saying that when we accept Christ into our heart we are making a commitment to be Jesus Christ to all of creation.

- Read Roman 12. What do you think your part in the body is? What might God be calling you to do or be so you can be a living sacrifice for others or your family? If you are wanting to discover more fully how you might become part of this body, we encourage you to contact our Equipping and Missions Director, Jake Forsythe at the office 970-247-4213 or via email, jake@fumcdurango.org.
- This passage encourages us in verse 9 to not just pretend to love others but really to love them. Have you ever found yourself pretending to love someone? As an individual, or with a group or your family, think of someone you have struggled to love and think of ways you might choose to love them this week. Close with a prayer asking God to send his Holy Spirit to fill you and give you strength to choose love.