**The Seven Deadly Sins and Their Remedies...**

The disorder introduced into our human nature by Adam’s fall from grace reveals itself especially through seven dominant vices known in the Catholic tradition as the capital sins. These are: pride, avarice, lust, anger, gluttony, envy, and sloth. We call them “capital” sins (from the Latin caput, “head”) because they are the sources or fountainheads of all the sins people commit, whether sins of commission or sins of omission. We call them “deadly” because they cause spiritual death; Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen liked to call them the “seven pallbearers of the soul.”

Spiritual growth is impossible unless we try to dig up the roots of our sins with the help of God’s illuminating and sanctifying grace.

**Pride**

The first of the seven deadly sins is pride, defined as inordinate self-esteem or self-importance. Pride is the prolific source of countless sins, including presumption, hypocrisy, disobedience to lawful superiors, hardheartedness to subordinates, acrimony, and boastfulness. Some of the ways in which sinful pride manifests itself are: exaggerating one’s own talents, attributing to oneself qualities one lacks, magnifying other people’s defects, putting other people down, ingratitude, and failing to attribute one’s gifts and talents to God.

We know from Sacred Scripture that pride is the bottleneck of all graces (Jas 4:6); that it is self-ruinous (Lk 14:11); that God hates it (Prov 8:13) and punishes it (Prov 16:5); and that it deprives one’s good works of merit in God’s sight because it makes one perform them with a wrong intention (cf. Mt 6:1-2).

Humility, or poverty of spirit, is the opposite of pride. Just as pride is the foundational sin, so humility is the foundational virtue and thus ranks first among the Beatitudes (Mt 5:3). The virtue of humility makes us indifferent to worldly power, prestige, and riches, so that we might keep our focus on God, who alone is our supreme joy.

“Learn of me,” Jesus tells us, “because I am meek and humble of heart” (Mt 11:29). Imagine our divine Savior in His Passion, undergoing the cruelest torments yet uttering no complaint and showing no resentment (cf. 1 Pt 2:23). Then pray: From the sin of pride deliver me, O Lord.

**Avarice**

Avarice, also known as covetousness or greed, is defined as the immoderate desire of earthly goods, especially those that belong to others. Of the Ten Commandments, two regulate not only our external actions but even our internal desires. These are the ninth and tenth commandments, both of which forbid avarice (“You shall not covet…”).

Saint Paul calls avarice the “root of all evils” (1 Tim 6:10). Robbery, theft, fraud, parsimony, and callousness toward the poor all stem from avarice. But there are more subtle forms of avarice that may blind us to the sinfulness of our actions. Some people imagine that just because they found some money or personal belongings, the items belong to them (“Finders keepers!”). Unscrupulous contractors put in time not required for the job at hand or use inferior materials at a higher price. Gambling, playing the stock market, and purchasing goods on credit are not in themselves sinful, but they become sins if a person risks loss so great that he cannot pay his debts and support his dependents. Advertisers convince us that we must have the latest fashions or models, when we could just as well continue to use our serviceable appliances, clothing, cars, smartphones, etc.

Saint Francis de Sales says that everyone claims to abhor avarice. We wax eloquent when we explain how we must have the necessary things to get along in the world. But we never think we have enough, so we always find ourselves wanting more. How often do we include avarice in our examination of conscience or bring it up in confession?

We can enjoy the goods of this world, but we must be on guard not to become unduly attached to them and thus fall into idolatry (cf. Eph 5:5). God alone is our supreme happiness. Of all people, Christians should not be overly concerned with earthly goods, for our heavenly Father has care of us (cf. Mt 6:31-32). Does this mean we should neglect our duties and occupations? Certainly not. It means that, while attending to our affairs, we must not neglect the affairs of the soul. “Seek first [God's] Kingdom and His righteousness,” Our Lord promises, “and all these things shall be yours as well” (Mt 6:33).

Mercy is the virtue that opposes avarice. Peter Kreeft writes in Back to Virtue that avarice is “the centrifugal reach to grab and keep the world’s goods for oneself,” whereas mercy is “the centripetal reach to give, to share the world’s goods with others.” Mercy is the antidote to the greed that poisons the soul.

“Learn of me,” Jesus tells us “because I am meek and humble of heart” (Mt 11:29). Imagine our Savior, whose Passion depicts a progressive impoverishment. He is abandoned by most of His disciples, then stripped of all honor and finally of life itself. Then pray: From the sin of avarice deliver me, O Lord.

**Envy**

Of the seven deadly sins, envy is the only one that gives us no pleasure at all, not even fleeting satisfaction. Envy is defined as sadness over another’s happiness, blessings, or achievements, such that we should want to see the other person deprived of those goods, and we are happy when he has actually lost them. Like all sins, envy proceeds from the foundational sin of pride, which cannot tolerate a superior or a rival. It takes many different forms, including annoyance at hearing another person praised, depreciating the good reputation of others by speaking ill of them, and desiring to eclipse others even by questionable methods.

Envy poisons our whole being. Because Cain was envious of his brother Abel, he “was very angry, and his countenance fell” (Gen 4:5). Because the sons of Jacob envied their brother Joseph, “they hated him, and could not speak peaceably to him” (Gen 37:4). Because Saul was envious of David, he “eyed David from that day on” (1 Sam 18:9). “Jealousy and anger shorten life, and anxiety brings on old age too soon” (Sir 30:24).

Saint Paul places envy among the works of the flesh and declares that “those who do such things shall not inherit the Kingdom of God” (Gal 5:19-21). He bids us “conduct ourselves becomingly as in the day, not in … quarreling and jealousy” (Rom 13:13). In private matters, envy produces angry words (1 Cor 1:11) and harmful deeds (Jas 3:16). In public matters, it breeds war, symbolized in the Apocalypse by the rider on the red horse who was given power “to take peace from the earth, so that men should slay one another, and he was given a great sword” (Rev 6:4; the sword stands for war). Among Christians, discord born of envy can lead to the sin of schism, or separation from the universal Church, which is what the Apostle feared would happen in the Christian community at Corinth (1 Cor 11:18-19). And envy can make priests and vowed religious resent their celibacy when they see happily married people.

Generosity is the opposite of envy. Whereas envy brings only sorrow and pain, generosity is the seedbed of joy. This should come as no surprise since we are created in the divine image. We are truly happy insofar as we are conformed to God the Holy Trinity, whose very essence is self-giving love and receptivity. Saint Anselm of Canterbury teaches that our ultimate joy in heaven will be increased by the absence of envy: “If anyone else whom you love as much as yourself possessed the same blessedness, your joy would be doubled because you would rejoice as much for him as for yourself.”

“Learn of me,” Jesus tells us “because I am meek and humble of heart” (Mt 11:29). Imagine our divine Savior before Pontius Pilate, delivered up out of envy by the chief priests (Mk 15:9-10). Then pray: From the sin of envy deliver me, O Lord.

**Anger**

Fourth on the list of the seven deadly sins is anger, or “wrath” in Old English. What most people mean by “anger” is often not a sin, but simply an emotional response to a perceived injustice, wrongdoing, or annoyance. Such was Our Lord’s anger at the moneychangers in the Temple (Mk 11:15-19).

Just as it is wrong to be angry without cause, so it is wrong not to be angry when there is cause. Peter Kreeft illustrates the point in Back to Virtue: “To be angry at the lawyer who got the drug pusher free on a technicality is not sinful, especially when your son is lying in a coffin after an overdose from that pusher.” A more common example of anger that is not sinful but righteous is that of a parent at the misconduct of a child, provided the parent’s response is not excessive. The parent still loves the child but is angry at the child’s bad behavior.

Alas, Original Sin has invaded every corner of our soul. Consequently, anger is often a violent, inordinate desire accompanied by hatred or vengefulness. If anger is unreasonable and therefore too strong for the occasion or the person at whom we are angry, it can be a mortal sin. Whereas righteous anger wills what is good (justice and correction), sinful anger wills evil (“Damn you!”). As a capital sin, anger easily gives rise to many grave sins, including murder: “For the stirring of milk brings forth curds, and the stirring of anger brings forth blood” (Prov 30:33). “Pitch and resin make fires flare up, and insistent quarrels provoke bloodshed” (Sir 28:11). God warned Cain when Cain grew angry because God favored Abel and not him; but instead of heeding God’s advice, Cain nourished his resentment and finally murdered Abel (Gen 4:6-8).

The Epistle of Saint James cautions: “Everyone should be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath, for the wrath of a man does not accomplish the righteousness of God” (Jas 1:19). And Saint Paul exhorts: “Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun set on your anger, and do not leave room for the devil” (Eph 4:26).

Meekness is the virtue that helps us to control anger. “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the land” (Mt 5:5). The essence of meekness is not weakness, but the combination of strength and gentleness, the ability to use force when necessary and the gentleness to forego it.

“Learn of me,” Jesus tells us “because I am meek and humble of heart” (Mt 11:29). Imagine our divine Savior, the Suffering Servant whose mercy Isaiah prophecies: “A bruised reed he shall not break, and a smoldering wick he shall not quench” (Isa 42:3). Precisely because Christ loved sinners, He rebuked them (often scathingly!), but was always ready to suffer harm rather than inflict it. Then pray: From the sin of anger deliver me, O Lord.

**Lust**

Since the sexual revolution of the 1960s, Western culture has said that sex has no intrinsic relation to procreation, or even to love and intimacy. Not surprisingly, then, these intervening years have brought permissive abortion, no-fault divorce, legalized prostitution, the mainstreaming of pornography, and the redefinition of marriage to include same-sex couples. Behind this devaluation of sex is the deadly sin of lust, which the Catechism of the Catholic Church defines as “disordered desire for or inordinate enjoyment of sexual pleasure” (no. 2351).

The Catholic Church has always taught that sexual pleasure is morally permissible only to married people and only when they use it in the way the Creator intends. Regrettably, Christian morality in general and Catholic sexual morality in particular are often seen as arbitrary rules imposed by the Church to keep people from enjoying life’s pleasures. Pope Saint John Paul II’s “Theology of the Body,” based largely on the Book of Genesis, casts traditional sexual morality in a fresh light. George Weigel provides a fine overview of the pope’s approach in The Truth of Catholicism. In sum, the only sex worthy of men and women made in God’s image is sex that expresses complete and irrevocable self-giving, not a use (or abuse) of another for fleeting gratification. The self-giving that defines real love implies openness to the gift of new human life, just as God’s love “burst the boundaries of God’s inner life and poured itself forth in creation.” It is immoral to divorce sex from commitment (as in fornication and adultery) or from procreation (as in contraceptive and homosexual acts).

Sodom’s destruction was divine punishment for sexual vice (Gen 19:24-25). Our bodies are temples of the living God (2 Cor 6:16), and we should control them “in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like heathen” (1 Thes 4:3-5). Impurity should not even be mentioned among Christians, never mind practiced (Eph 5:3-4). Lust enslaves the will, destroys love of prayer, weakens faith, hardens the heart, and fills the conscience with dissatisfaction.

The opposite of lust is chastity, a species of that blessed “purity of heart” (Mt 5:8) and one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:22-23). Sexual feelings, fantasies and desires will ebb and flow as naturally as the appetite for food and drink; these are perfectly natural and human. The chaste person subordinates these to God’s will. Chastity is a life’s task requiring reliance on prayer and, for Christians, the grace of the sacraments. It demands common sense, too. When Jesus said the desire for adultery is itself adultery (Mt 5:28), He was following the Jewish tradition of “building a wall around the Torah (Law),” that is, forbidding a less serious offense so as to avoid a more grievous one.

“Learn of me,” Jesus tells us “because I am meek and humble of heart” (Mt 11:29). Imagine our divine Savior, who loved selflessly even to the point of surrendering His life for sinners (cf. Phil 2:8). Then pray: From the sin of lust deliver me, O Lord.

**Gluttony**

Eating and drinking are necessary for our self-preservation. To facilitate these two functions, God has attached a certain pleasure to them. The pursuit of this pleasure as an end in itself, however, is the deadly sin of gluttony. Most people identify gluttony with eating or drinking excessively. They are correct, but gluttony takes other forms too: fussiness about the quality or presentation of one’s food; eating too hastily, too hoggishly, too sumptuously, or too often. Father Benedict Ashley, O.P., in Living the Truth in Love, explains that “individual acts of gluttony are not ordinarily seriously harmful and therefore are venial, but habits that seriously harm health (at least in the short range), if not corrected, are mortal.” Of course, in assessing the gravity of any human act, we must remember that subjective factors such as chemical dependency or neurotic compulsion can lessen the degree of guilt.

As one of the seven deadly sins, gluttony paves the way for more grievous offenses. Drunkenness caused Noah’s disgrace (Gen 9:20-27), Lot’s incest (Gen 19:30-38), and the decadence both of the pagan Persians (Est 1:6-10) and of the Jewish priests and prophets (Isa 28:7-8). Esau sold his birthright for a bowl of pottage, a kind of bean stew (Gen 25:29-34). Gluttony was the cause of liturgical abuses within the Christian community at Corinth (1 Cor 11:21). Saint Paul calls gluttons idolaters “whose god is their belly” (Phil 3:19).

Because man is a unity of soul and body, the Church has always insisted that the body must be disciplined as well as the soul. “Scripture’s cure for gluttony is not dieting but fasting,” writes Peter Kreeft in Back to Virtue. “Fasting, in addition to reducing weight, reduces gluttony and, best of all, is a form of prayer. It is recommended to us on the very highest authority, that of our Lord himself.” Saints Augustine, Jerome, and John Cassian are but three of the many Church Fathers and spiritual writers who extolled periodic fasting. Latin-rite Catholics are obliged to fast on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday, and for one hour prior to receiving Holy Communion. Yet even when not fasting, we should remember Saint Josemaría Escrivá’s advice in The Way: “The body must be given a little less than it needs; otherwise, it will turn traitor.” How much more progress we could make in the spiritual life if only we accompanied our prayers with sacrifice! “The day you leave the table without having made some small mortification,” the saint warns us, “you will have eaten like a pagan.” (Talk about food for thought!)

“Learn of me,” Jesus tells us “because I am meek and humble of heart” (Mt 11:29). Imagine our divine Savior, forty days and forty nights in the desert, faint with hunger from fasting. When tempted by Satan to turn stones into bread, He rejoins, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” (Mt 4:3-4). Then pray: From the sin of gluttony deliver me, O Lord.

**Sloth**

The last of the seven deadly sins is sloth, which Saint Thomas Aquinas defines as disgust for virtue, a languor of the soul which deprives it of the power to do good. “Pride may be the root of all evil,” observes R. R. Reno, “but in our day, the trunk, branches, and leaves of evil are characterized by a belief that moral responsibility, spiritual effort, and religious discipline are empty burdens, ineffective and archaic demands that cannot lead us forward, inaccessible ideals that, even if we believe in them, are beyond our capacity.” This is sloth.

Medieval writers often speak of sloth as a waning of confidence in the importance and power of prayer. Saint Bernard of Clairvaux speaks of a sterility and dryness of his soul that makes the sweet honey of psalm-chanting seem tasteless. Dante, on the fourth ledge of Purgatory, describes the slothful as suffering from a “slow love” that cannot uplift, leaving the soul stagnant under the heavy burden of sin. The ancient monastic spiritual writers, recalling Psalm 91:6, nicknamed sloth the “noonday devil” who tempts monks to sadness and despair. In the heat of midday, as the monk tires and begins to wonder whether his commitment to prayer and solitude was a mistake, the demon whispers, “Did God really intend for human beings to reach for the heavens? Does God really care whether you pray or not?”

To us moderns, the whispering voice says, “God is everywhere. Couldn’t you just as well worship on the golf course as in a church?” Or “God accepts you just as you are. Why change?” In our sloth, we avoid any spiritual discipline, Christian or otherwise. Missing Mass on Sundays and holy days of obligation, laxity in prayer, disregard for the Church’s laws of fast and abstinence, a tendency to follow the lines of least resistance — these are all manifestations of sloth.

An indolent soul is barren in good works (Prov 24:30-34) and easily falls prey to the devil, “for idleness teaches much evil” (Sir 33:27). As motionless water soon becomes stagnant, so the Christian who lives idly will soon become corrupt. Remember Our Lord’s emphatic warning about the slothful servant and foolish virgins (Mt 25:1-30), and His promise to spew the lukewarm out of His mouth (Rev 3:16).

Hungering for righteousness, or likeness to God, is the beatitude that remedies sloth (Mt 5:6). God alone satisfies the deepest desires of the human heart. Sensuality, technology, money, and power are just a few of the false gods that leave us ultimately empty. Seek the true God and you will find Him (Mt 7:7-8), and in finding Him you will have the joy that overcomes sloth.

“Learn of me,” Jesus tells us “because I am meek and humble of heart” (Mt 11:29). Imagine our divine Savior on His way to Calvary. Three times He falls under the weight of the heavy load; yet instead of giving up, He gets up with renewed resolve to fulfill His mission. Then pray: From the sin of sloth deliver me, O Lord.

**7 Leadership Blind Spots That Drive Your Team Crazy**

By [Carey Nieuwhof](https://careynieuwhof.com/author/carey/)

If you lead, you are more than aware of the incredible responsibility you have toward others. Leadership, by definition, is not a solo sport. You’re leading others, and how you do it ultimately determines how effective you are as a leader. It also means you need to become exceptionally self-aware of your weaknesses. If you think about it, the leaders you’ve probably liked the least have been the least self-aware. In my view, self-awareness is a leader’s best friend. (Here are [4 things self-aware leaders know that others don’t](https://careynieuwhof.com/2014/10/what-self-aware-leaders-know-others-dont/).) As a shortcut, here are 7 common things leaders do that drive their team crazy. I know this because I have done the first 5 at different points in my leadership.

**1. Underestimating How Much Work It Takes**

You’re in an incredible position of trust as a leader. When you say things, your team does its best to make them happen. But some leaders are notorious for underestimating how much time a task will take. Sometimes leaders fall into the trap of thinking they can be like God and simply speak things into being: And the leader said, “Let there be a fourth weekend service” and it was so.Of course, the leader hasn’t properly estimated the impact this is going to have on the parking team, the guest services team, the kids ministry team, the student ministry team, the production team or the music team.

Underestimating how much work something takes can seem like an initial advantage because it makes seemingly impossible things happen. But it can also be incredibly demotivating to your team when you significantly underestimate how much work something will take. Often leaders are afraid to ask how much work something will take because they fear leaders will say no. If you have a good team, that’s almost never the case.

They just want to know that *you*know and appreciate the effort and will allocate the budget and the staffing the proposal needs. And if you don’t have enough budget or staffing, often your team will say yes anyway and make it happen. They just need your encouragement and understanding of what it will cost them.

If this describes you, next time take the time to sit down with your team and think through how much work it will take to get you there. Then plan for it. The fix can be that simple.

**2. Impulsive, Emotion-Based Decision Making**

I asked my amazing assistant what I do that drives her the most crazy. This was her pick. Yep, leaders are passionate. Even impulsive. They are used to creating something out of nothing. Sometimes that’s good, as in *Hey, why don’t we launch two campuses at once? Or hey, why don’t we start a podcast and see if anything happens?* Often, the impulsiveness and emotion are driven from a place of discontent with the status quo. That is, after all, the impetus to change. I may be bothered by something I think needs fixing immediately. I may be discontent about a situation I think the entire team needs to address immediately. But not all discontent is holy.

Sometimes my discontent comes from having a bad day, or being moody, or just deciding something on the spur of the moment. And then I almost always reverse the decision the next day or the next week. Or bump what was priority #1 down to priority #32 because it just isn’t as important anymore. That’s frustrating for people.

I’ve gotten better at this, but when my assistant senses it’s happening, she’s become great at asking “So are you serious about this or is this just how you feel in the moment?” Often that shakes me out of the moment, and I’ll say “Right…I’m probably just upset about something. Let me sleep on it.”  Or I’ll ask her what she thinks (or check with some other leaders) and they’ll tell me I’m just worked up about something and I need to relax. Just because you’re upset about something as a leader doesn’t mean it should become the top priority of the organization.

**3. Being Indecisive**

I’ve seen indecisive leadership sink more than a few ships. Your job as a leader is to make decisions that make things happen. That doesn’t mean you make decisions all by yourself. The best leaders always involve a team in their decision making. But you still need to make a decision.

What makes decision making hard at a senior leadership level is that it’s only the toughest decisions that make it to you. All the easy decisions already got made long before they reached your desk. And that can lead to delay. Delay leads to paralysis. And paralysis leads to stagnation and decline.

Delayed decision-making demotivates your team. So make a decision, and create a process for making sure decisions get made regularly and quickly. Sure, every once in a while, you need to take a long time to make a decision. But far too many leaders use that as an excuse. Decide.

**4. Being Too Decisive and Not Valuing Input**

Every problem has a flip side, and the flip side of being indecisive is being too decisive. Some leaders make instant decisions without any input from anyone else, and that is also frustrating to their teams. I think it’s a good practice for every senior leader to be a part of something they don’t lead.

I work with a couple of organizations on the side where I’m not the senior leader or where I sit on the board. It helps me realize what it feels like to *not*be the senior leader. So, I know that I really appreciate it when CEOs ask for my opinion, when they value my input when they seek my counsel. Even if I disagree with their decision, I know they consulted others, and that gives me confidence in their decision. As Andy Stanley has so aptly said, leaders who refuse to listen will eventually be surrounded by people who have nothing significant to say.

**5. Creating an Unsustainable Pace**

You can be tempted to burn the midnight oil as a leader. Most great leaders do at one time or another. But leaders can also create an unsustainable pace for their team. Your team feels guilty about going home long before you do. And when you’re pounding out emails at 11 p.m. and 5 a.m. 7 days a week, it makes your team feel lazy. It also makes you look incredibly unhealthy.

I have a very strong appetite for work, but I’ve let my team know what my expectation for *them*is.  Just because I work long hours (on a variety of things) doesn’t mean everyone has to. One of a leader’s chief responsibilities is to create a sustainable pace for their entire team.

**6. Working Too Few Hours**

Sometimes leaders end up working too few hours. That’s perhaps even more demotivating than working too many hours. Always work as hard as you expect your team to work. Even harder (but see above). Leaders who phone it in have no place in real leadership.

**7. Expecting Others to Put In More Than You’re Willing to Put In**

Leadership requires your all. If your organization requires donations, contribute—sacrificially. If your organization requires volunteers—volunteer for something, even though you get paid for your staff role. Never expect more from your team than you’re willing to personally put in. That doesn’t mean you should always be first in and last to leave. You have to focus on roles in which you can contribute most. But it does mean you should be willing to go the extra mile. When a leader is working less passionately fewer hours than their team, the team loses both passion for the mission and respect for the leader.

**4 Temptations That Leaders Face**

By Dan Reiland October 19, 2020 [Leadership](https://churchjobfinder.com/articles/categories/leadership)

It’s troubling to see a gifted and talented leader give up a lifetime of ministry for a moment of temptation. We all face temptation, and saying no is not always easy. None of us as leaders will escape this challenge. But how you handle your temptation will determine, to a great degree, the effectiveness and longevity of your ministry.

[James 4:7-8](https://www.sermoncentral.com/bible/new-international-version-niv/james-4-7-8?passage=James+4%3A7-8) helps us know what to do. *Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you.*

*Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.*[*Matthew 26:41*](https://www.sermoncentral.com/bible/new-international-version-niv/matthew-26-41?passage=Matthew+26%3A41)

How you handle temptation will determine the effectiveness and longevity of your ministry.

Let’s begin with three important questions:

* **What is your greatest temptation?** If you know it, you can fight against it.
* **Do you have a safe friend or two with whom you can be honest?** Confession is good for the soul and accountability helps keep you honest.
* **Do you know that God is on your side?** [God does not condemn you or me for our struggles, but He does want us to fight to live a holy life.](https://twitter.com/intent/tweet?text=God+does+not+condemn+you+or+me+for+our+struggles%2C+but+He+does+want+us+to+fight+to+live+a+holy+life.&url=http%3A%2F%2Fdanreiland.com%2F4-temptations-that-leaders-face%2F&hashtags=&related=&via=danreiland)

I will admit that I’m not sure all temptation is from the devil. I’m not convinced it’s all spiritual warfare. I think some of this is part of being human and imperfect, and we can take credit for it ourselves. I don’t need to start a theological debate. If you prefer to make temptation a wholly spiritual issue by asserting that we are spiritual beings, I’m good with that. If you choose to make it fully a spiritual thing by taking it back to Genesis chapter 3, I can handle that too. My purpose here is to offer practical helps. **Temptation seems to be naturally grouped into four categories for church leaders.** If you know the potential temptation, you are more likely to see it coming and proactively resist what tempts you. That’s the goal here. Let’s name the temptations, own what is ours and intentionally resist.

**1) Pressure Temptations**

As your ministry grows, gains complexity and the demands increase, pressure rises. [When pressure rises and your margin decreases, you can be an easy target for pressure temptations.](https://twitter.com/intent/tweet?text=When+pressure+rises+and+your+margin+decreases%2C+you+can+be+an+easy+target+for+pressure+temptations.&url=http%3A%2F%2Fdanreiland.com%2F4-temptations-that-leaders-face%2F&hashtags=&related=&via=danreiland)Here are three common examples. Are any of these danger zones for you?

* **Loss of integrity.** For example, you can be tempted to over-exaggerate something in a message you teach. Or perhaps you might bend under financial pressure to use monies designated for one thing for a completely different purpose.
* **Cut corners.** Time pressures, for example, might cause you to knock out a sermon on Saturday night and show up on Sunday morning soundly unprepared.
* **Inappropriate anger.** Pressure in your life can cause leaders to be impatient, harsh, or even angry with others with no legitimate reason.

**2) Power Temptations**

I’m happy to say that this temptation seems to be less common in the local church than perhaps 20 years ago. That’s a good thing, but it still lurks about and is a real possibility for any of us. Here are three common examples. Are any of these traps for you?

* **Manipulate people.** Using authority or position to control or take advantage of people rather than serve them.
* **Live under different standards.** Rising “above the law” so that the leader lives by a different set of rules than others are held accountable to.
* **Become a controlling person.** All leaders exercise control for the good of the organization. This is very different than a leader becoming a controlling leader and holding people down or even getting dangerously close to oppressing the people.

**3) Purity Temptations**

It’s difficult to escape the dominant presence of the Internet and all the temptations that lie within. Nearly anything is available with the ease of a click. This is a huge temptation. But not all purity temptations are online. The following are three common examples.

* **Thought life not in check.** Temptation begins in the mind. Scripture says to take every thought captive, but we know that is not always easy. [Philippians 4:8](https://www.sermoncentral.com/bible/new-international-version-niv/philippians-4-8?passage=Philippians+4%3A8) says: whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.
* **Marital faithfulness in question.** We all know stories of friends who have lost their marriages and, in many cases, lost their ministry too. It’s heartbreaking and can happen to anyone. This temptation is never worth it!
* **“Innocent” flirting.** A wise counselor once said to a group of us pastors, “Young men, beware of innocent flirting, for there is no such thing.” How true! What starts innocently, even while working together in ministry, can end in disaster.

**4) People Temptations**

This last category is not often included within the topic of temptation. It is therefore overlooked, even though it is likely among the most common of temptations that a church leader will face. We work with and serve people every day, and these common temptations are always with us. Here are three common examples:

* **People pleasing.** This often finds its origin in a genuine heart to serve others. But sometimes that can slowly slip into behavior that is less than genuine, and a performance-orientation can begin to take over, instead of being purpose driven.
* **Critical spirit.** Even the most loving of pastors and volunteer church leaders can lose perspec-tive under all the demands of ministry. Then instead of loving the heart becomes critical.
* **Lack of forgiveness.** Leaders get hurt too. When hurt enough the heart can become hardened and forgiveness is hard to find.

People pleasing, a critical spirit and lack of forgiveness are common temptations a church leader will face.

**The 5 Temptations of a Struggling Leader**

By [Carey Nieuwhof](https://careynieuwhof.com/author/carey/)

Most leaders I know are struggling in some area of their life or in their leadership on a regular basis. The last few years have put that struggle into hyperdrive. Whatever has been left in the leadership landscape has been twisted so badly it’s unfamiliar, and leaders have been left scrambling to find the skills and strategies they need to make progress. Maybe you’ve read material about how to be aware that you’re struggling or how to get out of it.

But what almost no one talks about is the temptations that come to leaders who are struggling. While ‘moral’ temptations are part of the equation, it’s more nuanced than that. It’s so easy to get addicted to making progress or at least maintaining the status quo that you’ll be tempted to cheat in ways that seemed unthinkable even a few years ago.

I’ve been through more than a few seasons of struggle—personally and in leadership. And regardless of the source, when you’re in a slump, you’re tempted to cheat in a way you simply aren’t when things are going better. I’m going to run this post through a set of temptations church leaders face, but you could imagine similar dynamics in almost any endeavor. After all, human nature is human nature. Here’s what you’ll likely be tempted to do when you hit a season of struggle:

**1. Move the goal posts**

Soothing yourself by moving the goal posts is a terrible leadership strategy. This is a deep temptation for performance addicts and leaders who are used to leading growing organizations. What do you do when charts and graphs that used to give you dopamine hits start to show decline instead of progress? An early reaction is to stop looking at them. And that stinks.

Many leaders who track their progress when their organization is growing become immediately tempted to stop tracking it when the growth stops. That’s a mistake. Even worse, some leaders will start moving the goal posts.

*Well, I know we used to track how many new people we reached, but that’s not really important is it? Quality over quantity, I say.*

So, let’s be honest, you never used to say that. Ever. And everyone around you knows it. When you pretend the things aren’t growing don’t matter anymore, you’re setting yourself up to grow even less in the future. Soothing yourself by moving the goal posts is a terrible leadership strategy.

**2. Redefine the mission**

Another temptation you face when you’re struggling as a leader is to redefine the mission. Worse than moving the goal posts and changing how you keep score, this means you’ll be tempted to just ignore the aspects of the mission you can’t seem to conquer.

This happens in many ways, but two predominant ways it surfaces in the church is when leaders say they’re about discipleship or when they claim faithfulness.

Example? ***We’re about discipleship, not evangelism around here.*** Translation: We’ve stopped trying to reach people.

***It’s not about being successful, it’s about being faithful.*** Translation: Well, true, faithfulness is critical, but faithfulness is not synonymous with failure, nor are success and faithfulness mutually exclusive. The best way to get off mission is to redefine the mission, especially when it comes to church.

**3. Blame everyone but yourself**

Poor leaders blame. Great leaders take responsibility. It’s so easy to blame other people, and it’s so easy to do the moment things stop going the way you hoped. Here’s a partial list of things leaders blame when things go south:

* COVID
* Lockdown
* The economy
* Nice weather
* Bad weather
* The church down the street
* Your city/region
* Culture
* The White House
* The Supreme Court
* Their staff
* Their board
* Anything but themselves

Often when you blame others, the dynamic at play is you’re in too much pain to blame yourself. Deep down, most leaders know they’re at least in part responsible. Blaming others is a clear sign of weakness, not strength in a leader. Poor leaders blame. Great leaders take responsibility.

**4. Imagine yourself in a new job (or career)**

When you’re struggling as a leader, it’s completely natural to want to escape. You start to imagine yourself in a new job—*any*new job will do—and think about how much easier it would be if you did *that*rather than what you’re doing now. The challenges with that line of thinking, though, run deep.

First, that new job is going to have its own share of difficulties. No work is effortless. Every team has its dysfunctions. And often the reason the grass looks greener on the other side is that you haven’t gotten close enough to see the brown blades interspersed with the green blades, not to mention the root rot.

Second, you bring yourself everywhere you go. This also means you bring all your unresolved pain, challenges, unhealth, and unresolved issues with you. In many ways, leaving a job you’re unhappy with is like leaving a marriage you don’t like anymore. You imagine this new partner is going to be perfect, which is completely not true (see above). And second, you bring all of your dysfunction into whatever you decide to do next.

There are definitely times you might be called to leave. No one stays in a job forever. You want to quit on a good day, not a bad day. And seasons of struggle are filled with bad days. If you’re not thinking clearly (and you’re not when you struggle), then you’re likely to make a decision you’ll regret later.

And because pain isolates, you probably haven’t discussed this carefully with wise people. You may be the only one who thinks leaving is a good idea. And if you’re the only one who thinks it’s a good idea, it’s probably not a good idea.

**5. Slide into a new way of medicating your pain**

When stress and life overwhelm you, you will either choose to respond to it in a healthy way (self-care) or an unhealthy way (self-medication). Usually, when I ask busy leaders how they’re doing personally, they admit they don’t take great care of themselves. This is surprisingly true of church leaders too. Often more true actually than it is of business leaders.

When you don’t take great care of yourself, guess what you end up doing in almost every single case? You end up self-medicating—you soothe the pain with anything from alcohol to sex to overeating and over-medicating to burying yourself in more work. You can also self-medicate by over-exercising. The list is endless. Self-medicating simply involves doing anything you can to numb the pain without actually addressing the pain.

When stress and life overwhelm you, you will either choose to respond to it in a healthy way (self-care) or an unhealthy way (self-medication). The alternative to self-medication is self-care. And while the choice is yours, self-care is so much healthier than self-medicating. But here’s the stinger: If you don’t intentionally choose self-care as a leader, you’ll end up self-medicating.

Naturally, the key to getting out of the struggle begins with recognizing you’re in it. Understanding what your temptations are makes it easier to avoid making the struggle worse.