

WISDOM FOR
Fighting Sin

A FIVE-WEEK
DEVOTIONAL STUDY

Amy DiMarcangelo


P U B L I S H I N G
P.O. BOX 817 • PHILLIPSBURG • NEW JERSEY 08865-0817

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Where relevant, Scripture quotations from the New Testament use the ESV's alternate, footnoted translation of *adelphoi* ("brothers and sisters").

Italics within Scripture quotations indicate emphasis added.

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Introduction

Why Am I Like This?

W*HY AM I LIKE THIS?* Are you ever perplexed by that question? I know I am.

When we love God and desire to grow in holiness, it's frustrating to face the sin still present in our lives. We want to be gracious, but we're often irritable. We want to steward our time well, but we often waste it. We want to be servant-hearted, but we're often selfish. We want to be humble, but we're often proud. We want to bear the fruit of the Spirit, but we often bear envy, bitterness, and lust instead. We want to love others as Christ has loved us, but so often, we don't.

Why are we like this?

Why do we find it so difficult to obey God, even though we genuinely desire to? Why is sin still so tempting, even though the Spirit dwells in us? The conflict between who we are and who we want to be is perplexing.

We're not alone in this tension. The apostle Paul writes,

For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. . . .

Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? (Rom. 7:18–19, 24)

This is a vivid description of *indwelling sin*, the reality that even though Christ has saved us from sin’s penalty and reigning power, we aren’t yet freed from its presence. Though the Spirit indwells us, we battle the lingering remnants of our fleshly nature on a daily basis.

However, while Paul aptly captures this tension, his cry “Who will deliver me from this body of death?” isn’t one of despair. Rather, it is a hope-filled cry with a resounding answer: “Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (v. 25).

It is through Jesus Christ that we are both justified and sanctified. *Justification* is a once-for-all act of grace—a gift—by which our sin is pardoned and we are clothed in Christ’s righteousness. Our forgiveness and acceptance before God are based not on our performance but on his.

Sanctification is an ongoing work of grace by which we are progressively made holy. Though we continue to battle indwelling sin, we are no longer enslaved to it. Through our union with Christ, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, we are able to grow more and more into his likeness. This too is a gift, because fighting sin isn’t about sacrificing joy but about finding it in Christ.

If you feel perplexed by your sin and wonder, “Why am I like this? How long will I struggle with these temptations? Who will deliver me?” there is hope for you. True wisdom for fighting sin isn’t found in ten-step strategies or a stricter set of rules—it’s found in your Savior. Jesus is your mighty and gracious deliverer. He has set you free from sin’s reign, and he will empower you to follow him.

Why Am I Like This?

Over the next five weeks, we will seek Christ as our wisdom in this war against sin. We'll consider the weightiness of sin (week 1), a necessary foundation for grasping the unwavering hope we have in Christ (week 2). Then we'll see how Christ empowers us to fight temptation and pursue righteousness (weeks 3 and 4). Finally, we'll reflect on our identity in Christ and how it profoundly transforms our lives today (week 5).

This devotional is designed to be interactive and includes personal and group discussion questions to prompt further reflection and application. I pray it leaves you encouraged and equipped in your fight against sin.

With you in the battle.



Week 1

Call Sin What It Is



Day 1

The Rebellion of Sin

[The serpent] said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?" And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'" But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." So . . . she took of its fruit and ate. (Gen. 3:1–6)

DURING FAMILY DEVOTIONS one evening, one of my children remarked, "Mom, it's so dumb that Adam and Eve sinned just to get a piece of fruit. I never would have done that. The world was perfect! Why would they ruin it for something so small? And why did God forbid it in the first place? It was just fruit."

It was just fruit. My child's misunderstanding of Genesis 3:1–6 has probably echoed in our own minds more than we'd care to admit. We often fail to grasp the nature of God's instruction and Adam and Eve's rebellion. It was never just about fruit.

God is generous, and he created a good world for Adam and Eve to enjoy. He made them in his image and entrusted them with the mandate to fill and rule the earth. Adam and Eve received unique purpose and dignity, but they were still creatures. They were called to submit to their Creator. This submission shouldn't have felt burdensome because God is good and his rule is good! He designed Adam and Eve to flourish in the world he had made. Had they trusted God's nature, they wouldn't have believed that he was depriving them.

So, Satan undermined their trust in God. He invited Eve to question God's command and the reason behind it. Then, with the seed of distrust sown, he enticed her with the idea that she could be like God. She wouldn't have to trust God to define good and evil; she could define it herself. It wasn't just the deliciousness of the fruit that lured her but the promise of what it would deliver—she could be her own god, make her own rules, and secure her own happiness. So she ate. And Adam, who'd passively watched the interaction, ate as well. Their disobedience was an act of cosmic rebellion, a rejection of God's good rule.

This is the nature of all sin—big and small. It's our way of seeking independence from God and living by our own authority. We might recognize this in “big” sins like murder and adultery, but do we sense the seriousness of gossip and gluttony, arrogance and anger too? For Adam and Eve, it wasn't *just* a bite of fruit. And for us, it's not *just* a harsh word or little white lie. Whether we're doing what God forbids or neglecting what he commands, our sin ultimately stems from a distrust in him and a rejection of his good rule.

This problem isn't just outside the church. It's happening in the church—in *us*—as well. We pick and choose which parts of Scripture we want to obey. We're willing to submit some parts of our lives to God, but not others.

The Rebellion of Sin

Yes, God! I'll serve my family. But don't tell me how to use my money.

Yes, God! I'll care for the poor. But don't tell me how to express my sexuality.

Yes, God! I'll boldly share the gospel. But the spiritual fruit of gentleness isn't for me.

Yes, God! I'll stop gossiping. But don't ask me to forgive the person who sins against me.

In various ways, we try to arbitrate what is important and what is not-so-important. But sister, it's not up to us to decide. In his Word, God communicates everything we need to know for life and godliness (see 2 Peter 1:3). Will we surrender to his authority? Will we obey his good rule? Our loving Creator is worthy of our trust. Let's submit our hearts to him and pray with the psalmist, "You are good and do good; teach me your statutes" (Ps. 119:68).

Wisdom Principle

All sin is rebellion against God and a rejection of his good rule.

Reflection Questions

1. In what areas do you struggle to trust that God's rule is good?
In what ways has that distrust caused you to rebel against his authority? *(space continues on next page)*

Call Sin What It Is

2. Looking back, where have you seen God's goodness reflected in commands that didn't seem good at the time? How can that help you trust and obey him when you don't understand the "why" behind his commands?

Day 2

The Danger of Denial

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves,
and the truth is not in us. If we confess our
sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins
and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If
we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar,
and his word is not in us. (1 John 1:8–10)

DOES ANY OF THIS FEEL FAMILIAR?

- You gossip about that frustrating person at church. But instead of confessing, you think, *I'm just telling the truth. If they don't want me talking about them, they should stop being problematic.*
- You yell at your daughter. But instead of confessing, you think, *She was being so disrespectful. Anyone would yell in response!*
- You fudge numbers at work. But instead of confessing, you think, *It's no big deal. Everyone does it.*
- You watch a sexually explicit movie. But instead of confessing, you think, *It's fine—it's not like I was watching porn.*
- You waste hours scrolling through social media. But instead of confessing, you think, *I'm just relaxing. Rest is godly!*

- You're unwilling to inconvenience yourself to serve others. But instead of confessing, you think, *I'm just good at setting boundaries.*
- You get a little drunk with friends. But instead of confessing, you think, *We were just having fun. Nobody got hurt.*
- You grumble and complain about your salary or your apartment or your family or your church or your fill-in-the-blank. But instead of confessing, you think, *I'm just being honest.*

We are natural-born blame-shifters and excuse-makers. This has been our story since the fall. After eating the forbidden fruit, Adam blamed Eve, Eve blamed the serpent, and the rest of humanity has followed suit. We are experts at deflecting culpability.

Even after salvation, the temptation to deny our sin remains. We do this in subtle and countless ways. We call our judgmental spirit “discernment.” We call our pride and arrogance “confidence.” We call our greed “stewardship.” We call our loose tongues “honesty.” The list goes on.

God empowers us to fight sin—but to fight it, we must first identify it and call it what it is. Yet even this step is difficult! Because of our indwelling pride, we struggle to admit our wrongs. This puts us in a precarious position: If we say we have fellowship with God but hide our sin away in the dark caverns of denial, we aren't walking in the truth. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and effectively call God a liar.

Sin is toxic to our souls. It lures us away from the One who gives life, then stumbles and strangles us. And since sin thrives in the darkness, Satan would love for us to ignore it, excuse it, or blame it on others. He doesn't want sin exposed for what it truly is.

The Danger of Denial

That's why this warning in 1 John is so urgent and necessary. It's dangerous to live in self-deception—to believe we haven't sinned when we have. Such denial keeps us from seeking the help of the only One who can rescue us from sin's noxious grasp.

Every time the Spirit convicts us of sin, it is an act of rescuing grace—for godly sorrow leads us to repentance (see 2 Cor. 7:10). When we repent—turning away from sin and back to Christ—he conforms us more and more into his likeness.

As we learn to live under the lordship of Christ, let's be quick to acknowledge when we fall short. We can do so without fear because God is faithful to forgive us! The gospel allows us to face our sins because Christ has already paid for them. We don't need to hide behind flimsy walls of excuses. We don't need to self-justify or shift blame. We can call our sin what *it is*, trusting that God will be faithful to who *he is*.

Today, be honest about your sin. Whether you are guilty of anger, selfishness, lust, or pride, Scripture calls you to confess it and to trust in the blood of Jesus to cleanse you. Ask the Spirit to reveal any sins you may be blind to, so that you can turn from them and fix your gaze on Christ. God exposes us, that he may restore us. He convicts us, that he may cleanse us. He lays us bare, that he may forgive us. God is so good and gracious—let's walk before him in truth.

Wisdom Principle

If we deny our sin, we deceive ourselves and dishonor God.

Reflection Questions

1. In what contexts are you most tempted to deny your sin? How does that denial usually play out (for example, making excuses,

Call Sin What It Is

blame-shifting, rationalizing, ignoring it, calling it something else)?

2. What is the relationship between confession and repentance? How are they distinct? Why are both necessary in your fight against sin?

Day 3

The Outcome of Confession

Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy. (Prov. 28:13)

ONE EVENING, MY DAUGHTER CONFESSED that she'd been sneaking candy. She brought me upstairs and nervously revealed a pile of empty candy wrappers she had hidden in her bed. It's worth mentioning that she's been diagnosed with nonconvulsive epilepsy and is on a strict diet to keep her seizures under control—so her sin carried weighty consequences. Though her sneaky indulgences saddened me, I was grateful for her honesty and met her confession with mercy. I commended her humility and assured her that my love for her hadn't changed. As I tucked her into bed and gave her a kiss, she sighed, "I'm so glad I confessed, Mom. I know if I kept hiding it, it would've gotten harder and harder to tell you." She's right.

We're all tempted to conceal our sin at times. As Adam and Eve hid in the garden, our shame tempts us to hide from God. We feel too embarrassed, too discouraged, and too proud to fess up. It's easier to convince ourselves that we'll never do *that* again. To pretend it never actually happened. To believe we're not actually entangled. Confessing

sin is scary, especially when it's necessary to bring our sins to light before others. We fear what will happen if we do.

It's true that we may face consequences. Today's proverb isn't a guarantee that if you confess, nothing bad will happen. After all, we most often conceal sin when the stakes are high. If you confess that you lied to your boss, you may get fired. If you confess hidden sin to your husband, he may struggle to forgive you. If you confess an addiction to your pastor, he may remove you from a ministry position. Even the confession of "smaller" sins can result in broken trust, fractured relationships, and humiliation. Just as my daughter's broken diet worsened her seizures, our sin leads to consequences.

But sister, know this: Hiding sin may seem like the easier route, but it actually keeps us from receiving the help, healing, and hope we need to be sanctified. Hiding sin only ends up hurting us (and others) more, entangling us in webs of lies and pride and even addictions. Concealing sin won't make us prosper—it'll make us prisoners.

It is through confession that we find freedom! Despite the potential consequences, it is *always* better to confess. First to God and then, when the situation warrants it, to others (either those we've sinned against or those equipped to help us). Why? Because our God delights to show us mercy.

One reason we find it so difficult to trust in God's mercy is because *we* struggle to forgive others. We are often quick to anger and slow to show mercy—but God is not like us. He revealed himself to Moses as "the LORD, the LORD, a God *merciful* and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness" (Ex. 34:6).

You don't need to hide from a God like this! It's not hard for him to be merciful and gracious—it's who he is. Though you or others may be surprised by your sin, he never is. Because of Jesus's atoning work

The Outcome of Confession

on the cross, you don't need to fear punishment. Jesus has already taken the ultimate consequence for your sin and extended his mercy to you instead. Though the earthly consequences of sin are real and sometimes painful, God will never fail to show you mercy. He will meet you with compassion. He will deal gently with you. Even his hand of discipline stems from his love—he is treating you as his treasured child (see Heb. 12:4–11).

God is eager to show you mercy. So, don't conceal your sin from him. Confess it—first to God, then to others. Run to your loving Father and trust him to be who he says he is—merciful and gracious and abounding in steadfast love for you.

Wisdom Principle

When we confess our sin, God meets us with his mercy.

Reflection Questions

1. What factors make you most afraid to confess your sin? What lies are you believing about God in those times?

Call Sin What It Is

2. In his book *The Bruised Reed*, Puritan Richard Sibbes wrote, "There is more mercy in Christ than sin in us." That beautiful claim can be hard to believe, though. When you struggle to trust in God's mercy toward you, what Scriptures can you call to mind?

Week 1 Discussion Questions



1. Describe the nature of sin. Why is it important for us to allow Scripture to shape our understanding of sin rather than culture, personal preferences, social norms, and so on?
2. Which feelings and desires are you tempted to pursue even though they are contrary to God's will? How might reflecting on his attributes strengthen your faith to fight temptation and walk in obedience?

Week 1 Discussion Questions

3. Why is it crucial to continually dwell on the good news of the gospel when you're confronted with your sin?

4. Think of a time when you acknowledged and confessed your sin. How did you experience grace as a result?

5. Do you believe God *delights* to show you mercy? Why or why not?