I Give Up… My Weakest Link

"You were dead through the trespasses and sins in which you once lived…" Ephesians 2:1-2a

Very few of us would ever say we have a favorite sin… yet most of us know that there are things we do over and over again that hurt us or the people we love. These sins can seem built into our personalities and impossible to shake. But since God has saved us by grace through faith, we know that we can have both the power and freedom to shake off the sins that are killing us. We are made alive in Christ, which means even our most deeply rooted sins aren't unmovable.

Identifying these root sins can help us to live fully in Christ's abundant life. Our favorite sins are usually ones that do something for us—they get us something we think we want or need. They may have developed as a kind of protection or self-defense against the ways other people could hurt us—but now our armor has become a weapon.

Other peoples' hurt, and the broken relationships that result, often shines the best spotlight on our sins. What is killing you, your relationships, and your faith?

Step One: Think about a fight or tension that you keep having (could be with a friend, a spouse, a boss, or even yourself) that ends with hurt, not solutions. What is it about?

Step Two: Fights are rarely about the thing they're about. Can you identify the issue underneath? What need did you have that wasn't met? (Examples: the need to be loved, be respected, to have freedom, to have help.) Figuring this out can help you name the sin that popped out to "protect" you.

Step Three: Work through the chart on page 2. Several of the sins may apply to you (we all mess up in a hundred different ways) but look for the one that stings most. Although painful, it may be helpful to look for key words or phrases that others have used to accuse you, or that haunt you long after they've been said.

Step Four: Read up on your favorite sin in the chart on pages 3 and 4. Each suggests a spiritual discipline that can help you reclaim your life in Christ by proving to the sin that you don't need it's misguided protection. The riches of God's mercy and God's great love are enough for us.

These spiritual disciplines aren't magic. These deeply rooted sins may never go away fully. But part of our good works is quieting their insistent voices, so that we can move towards healthier, more compassionate, more loving relationships with others, with ourselves, and with our incredible God.

(Created by Rev. Carol Holbrook Prickett, Pastor, Crescent Springs Presbyterian Church, Crescent Springs, KY.

What happens most often in situations that hurt you or others?

All of these will hurt a little, but look for the one that stings worst.

Some of us go into overdrive when we're in the grip of our favorite sin (yelling, fighting, full of energy), while some of us go into a tailspin (avoiding, withdrawing, exhausted). Both major changes can tell us something is wrong.

Do you see any of these in your patterns of hurt? Have these situations ended badly for you with frequency?

It's like my feelings take over. I can get defensive in order to protect my feelings, even if it doesn't work.

I believe I'm being perfectly rational, even if it doesn't look that way in retrospect.

I feel like I'm not fully in control of my actions—like it's coming from somewhere deep inside me.

I can't stand it when I'm doing everything for everyone else and no one appreciates me.	*Pride*
I can't stand it when someone belittles my sucesses and skills.	*Deceit*
I can't stand it when I feel like I'm not being fully myself, like some other life would be better.	*Envy*
I can't stand it when I feel like too much is being asked of me.	*Greed* **Not just about money*
I can't stand it when the world seems threatening and no one but me seems to see it.	*Fear*
I can't stand it when things get too boring, painful, or confining.	*Gluttony* **Not just about food*
I can't stand it when someone tries to box me in.	*Lust* **Not just about sex*
I can't stand it when there's lots of conflict and discord.	*Sloth*
I can't stand it when I'm clearly in the right and others are wrong.	*Anger*

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What's Killing Me…

Pride

Pride demands people return any help you give them with praise and affirmation. There's nothing wrong with wanting to be loved, but when you start attacking or withdrawing from people for not recognizing how amazing you are, you might be wrestling with pride.

Deceit

Deceit puts on a false front so that everyone *thinks* you're amazing, even when you don't feel that way about yourself. It can manifest as out and out lying, but also as keeping relationships shallow so that no one sees the real you. Deceit says you aren't lovable for yourself.

Envy

Envy can feel like regular old jealousy, but it can also take the softer guises of longing, daydreaming, or dissatisfaction. When envy has a hold of you, it can poison good relationships and situations with the dream of greener grass somewhere else.

Greed

Greed isn't just about money. Greed is that feeling that you don't have enough—whether that's enough money, time, energy, ability, skills, knowledge, resources, whatever. Greed makes you pull away from people if you think they're taking what few precious resources you think you have.

Fear

Fear is insidious, wrapping itself all through your psyche. Fear can look like an inflated sense of responsibility, constant anxiety, or micromanaging others' lives in an attempt to keep them safe. Fear says you can't ever trust or relax, even with the people who love you.

What Brings Me Life…

Asking for Prayer

Asking others to pray for you is a vulnerable move, saying that you're both in need of and worthy of others' help. It short-circuits pride by lifting up a gift someone else can give you.

Journaling Truth

Sometimes you need to put time and effort into something that won't be seen by anyone but you and God. Spend time with your true self in a journal you don't show anyone, where it doesn't matter what anyone else thinks.

Sabbath

It's tempting to look elsewhere for happiness. But Sabbath asks you to slow down and take delight in what you have, where you live, and who is in your life. Instead of imagining some ideal future, take time to appreciate what you have now.

Acts of Service

Serving others takes a lot of time, energy, and wisdom, but it also gives back in satisfaction. Serving others proves that you have enough and are enough for the some of the needs of the world, even if you can't address everything.

Centering Prayer

When the worries never quiet down, centering prayer can help. Centering prayer is a kind of meditation that focuses on interior quiet and the unfailing presence of God. Taking time to center yourself in God's promises can help push fear to the margins.

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Gluttony

Gluttony is the tendency to overindulge—not necessarily in food, but in anything. Gluttony promises that you can distract yourself from pain by just doing more of whatever makes us happy. It often manifests in irresponsibility or an unwillingness to stay in relationships when they get hard.

Gratitude Practice

When you're chasing after new adventures, it's hard to be thankful for what you have. Gratitude puts the focus back on what is already good about your life. Instead of making a bucket list of what you want, make a gratitude list of what you already have that brings you joy.

Lust

Lust wants *more*—more without regard to whether it impinges on anyone else. Lust is careless about other people, trampling over their wants and needs. You can lust after power, authority, respect, relationships, admiration, anything, although when lust grips us, it's usually not subtle. Lust wants, then takes.

Vulnerability

It can be incredibly hard for those who struggle with lust to admit vulnerability or need. Making time for a deep conversation with a trusted friend about how you're really doing—without bravado—can be an antidote to the belief that you have to take what you need to survive.

Sloth

Sloth isn't just an adorable animal, nor is it simple laziness. Sloth tempts you to retreat from the world, disengaging from relationships and responsibilities. When sloth has a hold on you, you just sort of disappear from the world, unable to stand up for yourself or be the person others know and love.

Self-expression

Doing something *you* love can help steer you away from sloth mode, guiding you towards action and to your own God-given identity. Self-expression can be anything from painting to auto mechanics to a new haircut—whatever eases you back into God's world.

Anger

Anger doesn't always look like yelling. Sometimes it looks like irritability, self-righteousness, or demanding others do better. You may think your anger is obviously justified, but it leaves others feeling attacked, confused, or unworthy of your love.

Breath Practice

Breath practices offer two benefits: time and disruption. When anger strikes, try taking five or ten deep breaths. Pay attention to your nose and lungs, pausing your thoughts. You may still be angry, but the pause will hopefully have given you the ability to express it in a healthier way.

"For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life…" Ephesians 2:10

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