

Overcoming One's Root Sinful Tendency

By Jim Seghers

To grow spiritually it is important to recognize and combat one's root sin or sinful tendency. The root sin is that basic tendency or weakness that is at the deepest core of one's sins and sinful inclinations. Recognizing and combating one's root sinful tendency is vital if one is to grow spiritually. The following steps will prove to be an effective means of engaging in this spiritual combat.

I. ANALYSIS

Set aside a time to reflect on your most common sins and faults. What are the behaviors that you frequently confess? Seek to discover the root of these sins and shortcomings. Reflect on the major sins of your past life and then examine them to discover their root. A pattern will occur. It is important to understand that the inclination to sin is not a sin until one consents to the sinful tendency.

You will find in this analysis that the obstacles or negative manifestations are chiefly the result of one of three dominant inclinations that afflict men: PRIDE, VANITY, and SENSUALITY.

To aid you to better recognize these three root sins, some of their most common manifestations are listed below:

PRIDE - The decision to base our security and self-esteem on MYSELF.

Characteristics -

HAUGHTINESS includes: having an elevated concept of myself; annoyance with those who contradict me; easily judging others negatively, and hence easily gossiping about them; difficulty in recognizing my own failing or acknowledging when I've hurt someone; obstinacy to ask, seek or render forgiveness; insincerity in order to hide my faults; hypocrisy; fury when others fail to thank me for favors; unwillingness to serve; impatience, keeping others at a distance, brusqueness in my daily contact with others; thinking that I'm the only one who knows how to do things right; unwillingness to let others help me; over-rationalism so that I judge anything I don't agree with to be in error; opinionated; and in practice not believing that I need God, even though I may pray.

SELF-LOVE manifests itself in the following: permitting nobody to contradict me; growing annoyed if I don't get my way or if I'm not considered or consulted; refusing to assent unless everything is explained to me; nursing grudges a long time, not letting go of minor annoyances; rebelling against what I don't like or what seems mistaken to me; unwilling to take directions from anyone; acting authoritarian; inflexibility; thinking of myself first; my agenda, ideas or interest takes priority over everyone else's; being indifferent to others and their needs, tastes and viewpoint; stubbornness in disrupting my plans when someone asks me for something; great calculation in my relations with others and with God; liking to be heard, always thinking my conversation is the most important; centering games, entertainment and activity around myself; easily take offense.

VANITY - The choice to place my security in OTHERS - In what they think of me.

Characteristics -

Wanting others to admire me; thinking that I'm good, successful or valued when others recognize my talents; being dominated by "human respect"; shyness because I'm afraid others won't like

me; becoming easily discouraged at my failures; two-facedness or hypocrisy in the attempt to make myself accepted; abandoning or silencing my principles in order to "fit in"; easily judging others when they don't like me; and speaking openly of their "errors" when I have an appreciative audience; desiring to have "intimate friendships," joining the "in group," in order to appear popular and valued; breaking confidences; stretching the truth, or lying outright, in order to make myself noticed or appreciated; always talking about myself and my accomplishments.

Seeking to be the center of attention; severe disappointment when others don't appreciate my views, personality, home etc.; seeking to be accepted even if I have to compromise my principles; having a real fear of rejection; rejoicing in failures of others and an inability to genuinely rejoice in their successes - I'm too jealous or envious.

SENSUALITY - Placing my security and self-esteem in THINGS and FEELINGS.

Characteristics -

I DON'T FEEL LIKE IT: Giving primacy to my feelings; my daily activity depends upon my emotional state - whether I feel like it, whether I like the person I'm dealing with, or if I like my task. Avoiding responsibilities when I don't feel good; accomplishing my responsibilities at the last minute just to finish them, without concern for perfection in what I do; wasting time easily; when I'm not under a deadline I only do what I like most; fleeing anything which exacts bodily mortification; complaining about everything; if I'm a little under the weather, everyone knows about it.

MATERIALISM: Always wanting what is the newest or the most up to date; never wanting to throw anything out; being attached to personal possession; excessive worry about things and about money. I NEED THINGS to feel good about oneself. I spend excessive time shopping.

LIFE OF PLEASURE: Passing easily from friendship to animosity in relating to others, as if people were disposable objects like a paper cup; the need to be liked and to feel the affection of others is a high priority. Always looking for the most comfortable, that which requires least effort, the easiest for me, and the most comfortable postures. Daydreaming, not controlling my thoughts; constructing castles in the air in which generally I play heroine or the center of attention. At meals, eating only what I like, rejecting everything else even if it hurts another or wastes food. Having to see everything, experience everything; excessive curiosity; seeking pleasures, even to the point of endangering my purity with thought or actions.

II. LIST THE MOST IMPORTANT MANIFESTATIONS OF YOUR ROOT SIN

You should select only one of the root sins listed above: PRIDE, VANITY OR SENSUALITY. It is important to focus on this one area and work on it even if there is some overlapping into other areas.

If you have difficulty determining which is your predominant root sin, settle on pride. The nature of pride is to produce spiritual blindness!

In evaluating yourself dig deeply to list the most concrete manifestations of this root sin in your life. This aids your focus. The clearer the enemy becomes you can be more focused on eliminating your root sin. You should list no more than five or six primary manifestations.

III. CHOOSE AN OPPOSITE VIRTUE

The spiritual life has to be based on a positive striving for virtue. It can not remain on a level of, "just saying no" to our weakness, but has to be turned into "saying yes" to Jesus in the living of virtue.

Pick a virtue that is opposite from your root sinful tendency. This virtue will become a central focus of your spiritual life. Below are some examples of opposite virtues:

PRIDE: HUMILITY, SIMPLICITY, SUPERNATURAL SPIRIT, MEEKNESS, COMPASSION, DOCILITY, SERVING OTHERS, DEPENDENCE ON GOD THROUGH PRAYER.

VANITY: PURITY OF INTENTION, LOVE FOR CHRIST, SEEING CHRIST IN OTHERS, SELF ACCEPTANCE, DETACHMENT, UNSELFISHNESS.

SENSUALITY: DISCIPLINE FOR LOVE OF CHRIST, FOCUS ON THE PERSON OF CHRIST, ABNEGATION AND SELF-DENIAL FOR LOVE OF CHRIST, HOPE, SPIRIT OF LOVING SACRIFICE, PATIENCE, PURITY.

IV. CHOOSE "CONCRETE" MEANS TO OBTAIN THIS VIRTUE.

What can I do on a daily or weekly basis to form this virtue in my soul? The first two or three means should be prayer and the sacraments. Again it is vital to be as concrete as possible. The means you select must be as clear and well defined as possible. This allows you to examine your progress on a daily basis.

V. DEFINE THE IDEAL TO IMITATE.

Your IDEAL will always be related to the Person of Jesus Christ because the aim of your spiritual life is to become transformed into Him. Based on the virtue you most need, choose some aspect of the personality of Jesus Christ as your ideal. It will also help to choose a motto, that is, a phrase that speaks to you and helps you focus on Christ, your ideal.

VI. FOLLOW UP ON YOUR PROGRAM.

1. **BASE YOUR DAILY EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE ON OVERCOMING YOUR ROOT SIN AND ACQUIRING ITS OPPOSITE VIRTUE.** Review the means you have chosen. Have you practiced them or not? Why or Why not? What can you do to improve tomorrow.
2. **MAKE OVERCOMING YOUR ROOT SIN THE FOCUS OF CONFESSION.** For example, "Father I am struggling with the sin of (PRIDE, VANITY, OR SENSUALITY) and this is how it has manifested itself since my last confession....."
3. **MAKE OVERCOMING YOUR ROOT SIN THE FOCUS OF YOUR SPIRITUAL DIRECTION.** (See the Guide for Spiritual Direction)
4. **MAKE THE VIRTUE THAT YOU ARE TRYING TO LIVE A FOCUS OF YOUR PRAYER AND THE FRUITS OF YOUR MEDITATION.**
5. **TRY TO REVIEW YOUR PROGRESS, AT LEAST BRIEFLY, EVERY DAY!**

BELOW - EXAMPLES OF IMPLIMENTATION

Example # 1 - PRIDE

IDEAL- Christ who viewed everything from the perspective of his Father.

MOTTO- Jesus meek and humble of heart make my heart like yours.

OBSTACLES- Root sin: **PRIDE**

MANIFESTATIONS OF ROOT SIN:

1. Being critical of my spouse especially when he/she....
2. Not listening to my wife and co-workers, but trying to convince them that I am always right.

3. Not being consistent in saying my prayers because I am not convinced of the desperate need I have for God's grace.
4. Always rationalizing. Making excuses for myself, especially at work. Not accepting things on faith alone when they don't make sense to me.
5. Not being sensitive to the needs of others. Especially not having patience with my children.
6. Never admitting I am wrong, especially to my spouse and at work.

PROGRAM- Opposite virtue: **DEPENDENCE ON GOD THROUGH PRAYER.**

MEANS TO FORM THIS VIRTUE:

1. Meditate 15 minutes. every day, with a focus of my dependency on God as an absolute necessity to be able to accomplish anything in my life. I will especially meditate on the long hours Jesus spent in prayer and his total dependency on the Father.
2. I will attend Mass twice during the week and make the effort to live the Mass supernaturally by obedience to God and service to others.
3. I will strive to see Jesus in other people and accept them as they are, not as I would like them to be, especially my spouse.
4. Do not take myself so seriously. View everything from Christ's perspective, so I can see that being right or wrong is not the most important thing, but in showing the other person love and understanding. I will strive to enter into conversations with that attitude and try to listen more attentively, especially with ____.
5. Make sure that all of my decisions are based on supernatural standards. I will avoid rationalizing especially when...
6. Seek the advice of others at least 2x weekly.

Example # 2 - VANITY

IDEAL- Christ crucified for love of me.

MOTTO- "For me to live is Christ, to die is gain."

OBSTACLES- Root sin: **VANITY**

MANIFESTATIONS OF ROOT SIN:

1. I can be really hurt if people do not treat me with respect especially my mother.
2. I am always speaking about myself especially with my friends.
3. I can't say no to anyone. I always allow people to use me-especially ____ and ____.
4. I am afraid to stand up for what I believe. I do not want people to think I am a religious fanatic, - especially around my business associates.
5. I fail to discipline my children because I am afraid that they might not love me.
6. I love and live for people's compliments, especially from my friends and co-workers.

PROGRAM- Opposite virtue: **PASSIONATE RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS CHRIST**

MEANS TO FORM THIS VIRTUE:

1. Meditate daily on the Passion, looking for the fruit of being convinced of Christ's love for me and, thus, I do not need to look for love and approval in any other place.
2. Come to grips with my feelings of rejection. Bring to Jesus my most painful memories of being rejected, especially as a child. Develop the realization that He was there all the time loving me.
3. Attend Mass twice during the weekdays (Tues. & Thurs) and focus on the personal sacrifice of love that I receive from a Christ who died for me.
4. Before I accept any projects or get involved in anything I will first tell them I have to think about it and then see if it is for God's glory.

5. See all that happens within my family as coming from the loving hands of God and that whatever I do to them I do to Christ.
6. Do not speak about myself. Concentrate on speaking positively about others and offer up all my own success to Christ in secret - it is my gift to him.

Example # 3 - SENSUALITY

IDEAL- Christ in Gethsemane

MOTTO- "Not my will, but your will be done."

OBSTACLES- Root sin: **SENSUALITY**

MANIFESTATIONS OF ROOT SIN:

1. Laziness, always putting things off.
2. Disorganization and disorder, I do whatever is "immediate or "pressured".
3. I only do things when I 'feel like it'. Feelings control me.
4. I become angry and impatient if I do not feel good or I feel pressured.
5. I live to shop; it's only thing that picks me up.
6. I always put off my prayer life.

PROGRAM- Opposite virtue: **SELF-DISCIPLINE THE FOR LOVE OF CHRIST**

MEANS TO FORM THIS VIRTUE:

1. I will meditate 15 minutes a day focusing on Christ's total self-giving to others, especially during his Passion.
2. I will establish specific times for my spiritual exercises: Rosary, examination of conscience, spiritual reading, etc. I will follow it very closely, giving it the first priority.
3. I will make up a schedule to live by and follow it. I will not do the immediate thing based on the emotion of the moment. I will accomplish what is on my list because I see it as God's will for me.
4. Read "The Imitation of Christ" every day for 15 minutes.
5. I will be aware of my sentiments and moods and try to make sure that they do not get in the way of what I should do. I will try to put on Christ's sentiments and see all through a supernatural point of view.
6. When I do not want to do something, I will offer it up for some specific intention, knowing that this sacrifice is my most powerful weapon.

IMPLEMENTATION

IDEAL-

MOTTO-

OBSTACLES- Root sin:

MANIFESTATIONS OF ROOT SIN:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.

PROGRAM- Opposite virtue:

MEANS TO FORM THIS VIRTUE:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.

POINTS SHOULD BE CONCRETE, PRACTICAL AND SPECIFIC.

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