

The Awful Effects of Sin

June 28, 2020



Daily Devotions

As an individual or as a family, use these daily devotionals and reflection questions to connect with Jesus each day this week.

Each day, there will be a thought stemming from our Scripture passage along with 2-3 questions. Our hope is that as we journey together through the book of Joshua, we'll be able to come out the other side knowing how God wants to take new ground in and through our lives, groups, and church.

Be sure to prayerfully consider each day's truth, passages, and each of the questions. If you are a part of a life group, let these devotionals stir your thinking and be the foundation for your group conversation.

Additionally, we've added a section to each day called "Evening Reflection + Prayer." This section of the daily devotionals is intended to help you reflect on your day with God in prayer to notice where he was active in your life.

Our prayer is that these devotionals, questions, and reflections will help you love God, love people, and make disciples.

Day One // Effect #1: Sin harms others and hurts God's people

Joshua and the Israelites have just conquered Jericho. They marched around the walls of the city for once each day for six days and then seven times on the seventh day. On that final day, the walls came tumbling down with a loud crash and the people of God “devoted all in the city to destruction, both men and women, young and old, oxen, sheep, and donkeys, with the edge of the sword” (**Joshua 6:21**).

That is...until Achan. **Joshua 7:1** says that, “The people of Israel broke faith in regard to the devoted things, for Achan the son of Carmi, son of Zabdi, son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took some of the devoted things.” And we then read God's response: “And the anger of the LORD burned against the people of Israel.”

This led to physical and emotional consequences for Israel (see **Joshua 7:2-5**).

A passage like this can be challenging for our Western minds to understand. All kinds of questions flood into our minds, the most pressing of which probably goes something like, “*How is it that all of Israel is responsible for one man's [Achan's] sin?*”

That's not an easy question to answer, but it has something to do with the covenantal nature of God's people. God made a covenant with the *nation* of Israel at Sinai (**Exodus 19-24**) and in **Deuteronomy 29** that covenant was renewed and even expanded. In **Deuteronomy 29**, Moses tells Israel that within this new covenant, the people must, “Beware lest there be among you a man or woman or clan or tribe whose heart is turning away from the LORD our God...” (**29:18**) and later he says that, “The LORD will not be willing to forgive him, but rather the anger of the LORD and his jealousy will smoke against that man...” (**29:20**).

It seems as if because of the covenantal nature of the people of Israel, that while ultimate responsibility lies with the individual who would sin, sin also affects the whole community. The nation is responsible for and must be wary of any individual who wanders from God's law.

We see this same line of thinking with the church, too—God's covenantal people today. In **1 Corinthians 5**, there's a man who is engaging in ongoing, unrepentant sexual immorality. Paul criticizes the Corinthian church for allowing this man to continue fellowshiping with them because, “Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?” (**1 Corinthians 5:6**).

What's the lesson of this whole story? Sin hurts others and sin infects the body of Christ.

Questions for reflection:

- When have you been hurt by someone's sin? How has this affected you?
- When has your sin hurt (physically, emotionally, etc.) someone else?
- What feelings do you have about the prospect of someone in the church's sin infecting our church as a whole? Do you agree or disagree? Why? What should be the Christian's response to sin in the life of the body (see **1 Corinthians 5:1-13** and **2 Corinthians 2:5**)?

Day Two // Effect #2: Sin makes you like the world

In the story of Joshua, God's people had been set apart as holy. They were to enter the Promised Land, *remain* holy, and be a blessing to the other peoples of the Earth. Unfortunately, over the course of Israel's history, we read that they all too often had a problem (actually several)—a problem with allowing sin to distort their purpose of being a blessing to others and a problem with allowing sin to corrupt their identity of being the holy people that God was calling them to be.

The people in this section of Joshua are no different.

After Achan took the things devoted to the Lord, Israel was attacked by the people of Ai. Ai won this battle against the army sent out by Israel because of the sin that had infiltrated their camp. As a people, they allowed Achan's sin to go without correction. This angered the Lord and caused Israel to fall in battle to Ai (because it was the Lord that had previously given them victory—not their strength, gear, or battle prowess).

As a result, we read in **Joshua 7:5**, "The hearts of the people melted and became as water."

These are the same words used typically when talking about Israel's enemies and *their* disposition when they hear Israel coming their way. The text usually tells us that when the nations hear of Israel's coming, *their* hearts melt (**see Joshua 2:9, 11; 5:1**) in fear.

Israel's sin affected their relationship with God. They were becoming more and more like the nations. Instead of trusting, they doubted. Instead of relying on God, they exercised their own agency. Instead of living in confidence, they lived in worry.

What does this show us? It shows us that the people of Israel had *become like the nations*—fearful, worrisome, and distrusting of the God they said they believed in.

Becoming like the world is something writers of the New Testament warn us about, too. And sin is at the center of it. That's why Paul says in **Romans 12:2**, "Do not conform to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." And, in another letter, he writes, "See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy..." (**Colossians 2:8**).

As Christians, it's always good to take into account who we're becoming. Are we becoming more like Jesus? Or are we becoming more like the world?

Questions for reflection:

- When you think of "conforming to the world" where do you see this idea at work in your own life?
- Describe a time when you were confronted with the truth of Scripture and changed your thoughts or lifestyle based on that truth.
- Write a prayer to God asking him to help you become more like Jesus.

Day Three // Effect #3: Sin separates you from God

One of the harmful effects of sin is that sin makes us feel separated from God.

We learn this from the very opening pages of the Bible when Adam and Eve disobey God and eat the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil. Immediately, they feel shame. Immediately they feel distance from God. In fact, they go so far as to even hide from God and cover themselves. It's not that God distanced himself from them. Their sin caused the chasm.

The story of Achan and Israel's sin in **Joshua 7** is no different.

Read Joshua 7:10-12.

In these verses we realize that one of the specific consequences of Israel's sin is that their proximity to the LORD is obstructed. We read God say to Israel, "I will be with you no more, unless you destroy the devoted things from among you."

Which...makes sense when you think about what sin is and how sin works. If sin is pursuing that which is not of God, then how can it *not* lead anyone away from the Lord?

This is one of the problems Paul addresses in his letter to the Ephesians. In trying to unify the church at Ephesus, Paul alerts them to the truth that everyone in Christ started at the same place—separated from God. He says to the Ephesians, "Remember that you were at that time separated from Christ..." (**Ephesians 2:12**) and later he reminds them that those who are not followers of Jesus *to this day* are those who are, "Alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart" (**Ephesians 4:18**).

Paul follows that up, however, by saying in **Ephesians 2**, "You all were dead in your trespasses and sins...but God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ" (**Ephesians 2:1-5**).

Today when we sin, despite our Ephesians 2 *reality* as Christians, we often feel as if our sin has caused another great chasm in between us and God that is too great to cross. Like Adam and Eve, we are ashamed of our thoughts, desires, and actions.

Christian, let the truth of Ephesians arrest you. Let it entrench itself in your mind and heart.

Before having a relationship with Christ, we were indeed alienated and separated from God. But if you are in Christ, you are no longer separated. For what can separate us from the love of God (**Romans 8:35**)?

Our **Ephesians 2** reality has not changed...but perhaps sin has made us feel differently...just like when you lie to your spouse or take advantage of a co-worker, the relationship is hindered. We know that sinning against God hinders our relationship with him (not because God moves away, but because we heap shame upon ourselves).

With that in mind, here are a few questions to consider:

- How close does God feel to you right now?
- When in your life has your sin made you feel distant from God?
- Write a prayer to God based off of Ephesians 2. Ask him to entrench the reality of your position before God in your heart and mind, so that when you come to times where you feel distanced from God, you can replace the lie that God is distant with the truth of the gospel.

Day Four // Effect #4: We deserve judgment for our sin

The Scriptures make it clear that sin is no good. In fact, sin is so bad that it must be dealt with. It has no place in God's world because sin only ever brings forth death (**James 1:14-15**)—relational, emotional, physical, and spiritual death.

In this week's chapter of Joshua, we see just what those verses describe in James. Desire leads to sin and sin leads to death. In the case of Joshua 7, Achan desired the things "devoted to the Lord," he took them, and as a result he and his family were stoned outside of the Israelite camp in the Valley of Achor.

Read Joshua 7:14-26.

We see in this passage a very good example of what theologians call God's "active judgment." In the Scriptures we see God mete out judgment in two ways: actively and passively.

God's *passive* judgment is seen in passages like **Proverbs 26:27**, **Proverbs 29:6**, and **Romans 1:18-32**. In these verses, it isn't God who doles out the punishment for sin, rather, the punishment for sin is simply the natural *result* of one's sin. Conversely, God's active judgment is what we see on display in **Joshua 7**, quite frequently throughout the Old Testament itself, and in the teachings of Jesus (see **Genesis 6** and **Matthew 25:28-30** for examples).

Because of our sin, we are deserving of judgment. Sin must be dealt with. This can be hard to hear because we think of ourselves as good, undeserving of the consequences of our actions and dispositions. You might say, "Well I haven't harmed anyone, or taken advantage of someone, or gotten a divorce!"

But the truth (and we all know it to be true) is that inside every one of us is a little devil—a voice that tells you to cut corners, have lingering eyes, indulge in excess, idolize family or country, think of yourself more highly than you ought, not love God with your whole heart, allow injustice to be ignored, talk about someone behind their back, not assume the best, not tell the whole truth, save face, slander another, pridefully reject help, lash out in frustration, co-opt others' empathy to make yourself feel good, and so on the list goes.

Ivan Fyodorovich says it best in Fyodor Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* when he says, "In every man, of course, a beast lies hidden."

We all, like Achan, deserve punishment for our sin. But God, in Christ Jesus, went outside the city of Jerusalem and took the punishment we deserved. Like a black hole, Jesus took our sin and shame on himself, and, like a fire hydrant, Jesus gushed his love and righteousness into our hearts. The punishment was no longer ours to bear. He bore in our stead.

Questions for reflection:

- When you think of God's judgment, what feelings or thoughts do you have about it?
- When you take into account the sin in your own life, what might be the *natural results* of your sin (i.e. what would the *passive* judgment be)?
- In what ways might God judging sin once and for all actually be a good thing?
- Write a prayer to God expressing thanks to Jesus for his substitutionary work on the cross.

Day Five // Effect #5: We can't take new ground because of sin

In today's final devotional, we need to realize that sin actually hinders us from accomplishing the purposes God has for us. Think about it...

- When God created Adam and Eve, it was their sin that prevented them from fulfilling God's purposes.
- When the kings of Israel failed to rule rightly, it was their sin that prevented them from fulfilling God's purposes.
- When Ananias and Saphira chose to withhold money from the church, it was their sin that prevented them from fulfilling God's purposes.

Time and time again, sin gets in the way of new ground being taken for the Lord.

- Today, when a Christian wife is focused on pornography, she cannot succeed in fulfilling God's purpose of her helping to sanctify her spouse.
- Today, when a Christian man marries a non-Christian, he cannot succeed in fulfilling God's purpose of him raising his kids fully in the Lord.
- Today, when a man or woman is idolizing their work for the sake of personal gain, he or she cannot succeed in fulfilling God's desire for them to love others.

When we are focused on self, there is no way we can take new ground for the Lord. It just logically does not work. We are headed one way; God is headed another.

This is what happens in Joshua 7. The people of Israel had just entered into the Promised Land. They take on Jericho. They win a great victory. Then Achan sins and before they know it, they are cowering in fear because they lose a military battle to Ai. Then, Israel has to take time aside and deal with the issue at hand. They have to find out who sinned and deal with the sin—all the while, they could have been fulfilling God's purpose for their lives!

Doesn't this happen in our own lives? When we sin, we are potentially missing out on the new ground that God wants to take *in* our lives and *through* our lives. I wonder where that might show up?

Questions for reflection:

- What sin(s) are preventing God from taking new ground in you and through you right now?
- Describe what new ground you might be able to take (or the Lord could take in your own heart) in the next 6 months, year, and 3 years if you weren't wrestling with those sins?
- How would your life be different if you kept struggling with those sins over the next 6 months, year, and 3 years?

Reflection + Prayer—Sin is Awful; God’s Grace is Abundant

God desires that we take both sin and grace seriously. His grace is cheap and means nothing if we don’t grasp that he is just, if we don’t acknowledge our depravity and the wretchedness of our sin. Because God is just, he cannot overlook sin. It must be paid for. We are incapable. So, in his grace, he sent Jesus.

Each evening this week, review your day with God through the following exercise. Ask him to help you see your depravity, confess your brokenness, and receive his beautiful and loving gift of grace and forgiveness.

Quiet yourself before God. Prayerfully consider the following verse about the costly sacrifice of his son on your behalf—what it cost him and how he desires for it to benefit you.

But he was pierced for our rebellion,
crushed for our sins.
He was beaten so we could be whole.
He was whipped so we could be healed. – Isaiah 53:5 NLT

And now, consider the true condition of the human heart apart from Christ’s redemptive and restorative grace.

The human heart is the most deceitful of all things,
and desperately wicked.
Who really knows how bad it is?
¹⁰ But I, the LORD, search all hearts
and examine secret motives.
I give all people their due rewards,
according to what their actions deserve. – Jeremiah 17:9-10 NLT

Look back through your day with God and humbly invite him to examine the secret motives of your heart—those you may have excused, rationalized, hidden, or not noticed. Ask him where this root of sin will lead if it’s not routed out—what death could result? Death of hope? Death of opportunity? Death of a conversation? Death of relationship? Death of connection with him?

In brokenness and godly sorrow, pray the following prayer of confession and repentance to God:

¹⁻² God, give me mercy from your fountain of forgiveness!
I know your abundant love is enough to wash away my guilt.
Because your compassion is so great,
take away this shameful guilt of sin.
Forgive the full extent of my rebellious ways,
and erase this deep stain on my conscience.
³⁻⁴ For I’m so ashamed.
I feel such pain and anguish within me.
I can’t get away from the sting of my sin against you, Lord!
Everything I did, I did right in front of you, for you saw it all.
Against you, and you above all, have I sinned.

¹⁰ Create a new, clean heart within me.

Fill me with pure thoughts and holy desires, ready to please you.

¹¹ May you never reject me!

May you never take from me your sacred Spirit! – Psalm 51:1-4, 10-11

Allow God's grace to wash over and through you, cleaning your heart, renewing your mind, healing your brokenness, and restoring your relationship with him...that you might walk in freedom and take new territory.