



The Virtues and Character Development Project

The One who calls you is faithful, and He will do it.

I Thessalonians 5:24

BOOK REVIEW

Glittering Vices: A New Look at the Seven Deadly Sins and Their Remedies

Rebecca Konyndyk DeYoung

Life habits become our journey to character. When the habits are vices, the result is bad character; when they are virtues, good character results. Rebecca Konyndyk DeYoung describes this journey by revealing the seven vices that the Early Church Fathers and Mothers identified. She discusses how each vice is a disordering of one's heart, and how that twists the person away from the desire for God and His love. To reinforce the concepts, she uses movies as examples of the vices.

In short, this is a book about sin and self-examination with an understanding that sanctification is the way that the Holy Spirit operates in our lives to conform us more and more to the character of Jesus Christ. The vices mark what we leave behind as we move toward Christ-like character. DeYoung emphasizes that these are graced disciplines that require daily efforts. Yet, they are not merely human effort, but require us to submit to the Spirit's transforming work. The goal is *to reshape and enliven every inch and corner of your life and character.*

DeYoung begins by explaining why it is important to study the vices and virtues by explaining that vices and virtues are life habits that we develop through deliberate, repeated choices in regular practices, eventually becoming our character. These cover every aspect of our nature: mind, will, and emotions. When transformed by the Spirit, we are led to a life of flourishing in relationship with God. She uses Paul's illustration of *putting off the old self and putting on the new self* (Ephesians 4:22-24). In time, these habits become second nature to us. *The common theme among the vices is that they are a twisted, but seductive, search for happiness.*

To show how vices have been a problem throughout Christianity, DeYoung walks the reader through the history of vices and virtues from the Early Church Fathers and Mothers, through the Middle Ages, and up to today's time. She points out that the identification of vices has changed over the years, but the point that these are the fundamental issues in the life of believers that lead to sin. The image of a Tree of Vices and a Tree of Virtues became a means to demonstrate how vices and virtues grow in one's life. This helps one understand that vices are like cancer, and not a broken arm. Dealing with cancer requires a much more serious treatment. Aristotle viewed the virtues as the mean between the extremes of the opposing vices, which can be described as too much or too little. The purpose of this examination of vices is to provide a means of *looking at our character in the mirror offered by the Christian tradition, which will better enable us to make progress in spiritual formation and, by grace, to turn from vice to greater virtue.* DeYoung walks the reader through 7 of the primary vices that arise from pride.

Vainglory can be viewed as *image is everything*. This vice is *the excessive and disordered desire for recognition and approval from others*. Vainglory inclines us to seek a big round of applause from anyone, regardless of reason. *The worst of vainglory occurs when we fail to give due glory to God as the source of our good.* To deal with vainglory, we must relinquish our place as the center of attention and seek God. In doing so, we *lay down the crushing burden*

of the opinions of others and give up on all the little human systems of self-aggrandizement and self-promotion that lead to exhaustion and emptiness.

Envy is a disordered heart that is manifested in a resentment of another person's good gifts because they are superior to your own. DeYoung compares envy with greed and covetousness to explain that envy concentrates on who we are, even getting satisfaction when a rival fails. The lack of self-worth arises when we fail to realize that God is our source of worth and love.

Today's view of **sloth** focuses on laziness. DeYoung returns the focus to the view that sloth (originally termed *acedia*) is a lack of a desire to follow God's call. It results in a disordered desire to respond to God's love and be transformed through the work of the Holy Spirit. *When we make acedia a habit, we turn our backs on the joy we should have over being united with God and committed to Him in love.* This may appear as inactivity or it may be seen as overworking, even in spiritual activity, to avoid *trusting that God's call to love leads to life and freedom.*

DeYoung points out that **avarice** (greed) is a disordered heart that does not trust that God will provide for our needs. Therefore, we hold tightly to our possessions since we believe they are our hope. We fail to use what God has given to help others. *When avarice gets its grip on us, the excessive desire to possess trumps even the most fundamental demands of justice and love of neighbor.* We believe that we do not need to rely on God, but on ourselves.

Wrath (anger), which may be good, becomes a vice when the focus shifts to defending our own kingdom instead of God's kingdom. We trust in ourselves instead of trusting in God. As a result, we lose the freedom and peace in our hearts. When we surrender to God, our anger *serves as a holy power of resistance to injustice rather than a hellish habit of insisting on our own way.*

DeYoung discusses two remaining vices that are focused on self-gratification. The first one, **gluttony**, reduces all of human life to pleasure. What began as a gift from God, eating and enjoying it, becomes a disordered desire that dominates life. Since this vice leads to a refusal to be content, it draws us away from God, who is the only One who truly satisfies. *Fasting and feasting are characteristic parts of the Christian life. Rather than accepting food as a gift from God and looking to God to fill our spiritual hungers as well as our bodily ones, we take on God's responsibility to meet our needs and wants.* The second one, **lust**, is very similar. Sexuality is a gift from God, but when self-satisfaction becomes the goal, our disordered heart no longer is able to experience a love relationship. Lust dehumanizes others as it becomes a taking and getting instead of self-giving. It is a seeking of self-pleasure instead of allowing God to meet the needs in our hearts.

DeYoung concludes with recommendations for self-examination and spiritual formation through working with the Holy Spirit to allow transformation of the heart and mind (Romans 12:2). *These are graced disciplines, not valiant human efforts to be better. We can't make ourselves Christlike, no matter how hard we try.* This growth in Christian virtue is a call to grow in grace in every part of our being.