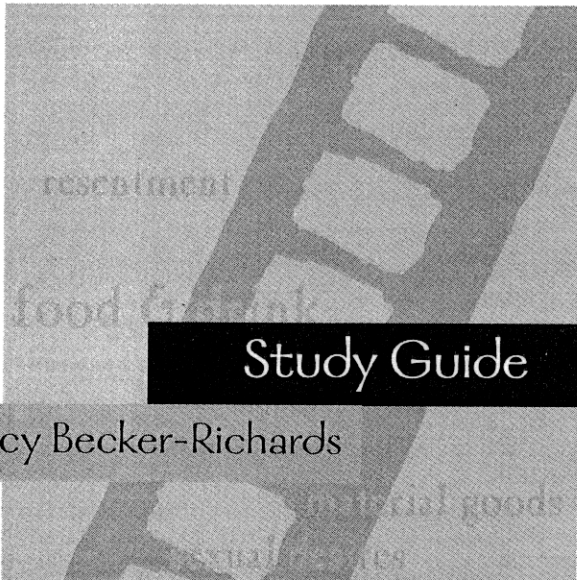


Eight Deadly Thoughts

self-centeredness



Study Guide

Joicy Becker-Richards

success

EIGHT DEADLY THOUGHTS
STUDY GUIDE
by Joicy Becker-Richards
Copyright ©1997 by Studio One Productions,
Princeton Theological Seminary.
All rights reserved.

Cover by Kathy Whalen; research by Marie Hulme Adam. No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying and recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, except as noted in the work; or as expressly permitted by the 1976 Copyright Act; or in writing from Princeton Seminary. Requests for permission should be submitted in writing to PTS MEDIA, Princeton Theological Seminary, P.O. Box 821, Princeton, NJ 08542.

The accompanying video, *Eight Deadly Thoughts*, copyright ©1997 by Studio One Productions, Princeton Theological Seminary. Duplication or broadcast of such videotape is prohibited without express written consent.

CONTENTS

How to Use This Video
for Small Group Study 4

Part 1 – Introduction 8

Part 2 – Gluttony 10

Part 3 – Lust 12

Part 4 – Avarice 14

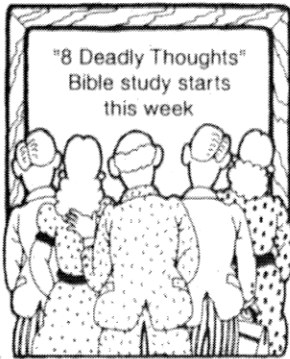
Part 5 – Sadness 16

Part 6 – Anger 18

Part 7 – Apathy 20

Part 8 – Vainglory 22

Part 9 – Pride/Conclusion 24



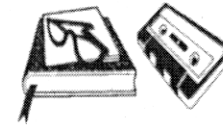
How to Use This Video for Small Group Study

About This Video

This video is based on Dr. Diogenes Allen's book, *Spiritual Theology: The Theology of Yesterday for Spiritual Help Today*. While it is designed for use by small groups in eight or nine sixty-minute sessions, it can be modified for use in other study situations. Video segments run from five to fifteen minutes each, and have been edited as follows:

- ◆ Part 1 – Introduction – 13 minutes
- ◆ Part 2 – Gluttony – 9 minutes
- ◆ Part 3 – Lust – 15 minutes
- ◆ Part 4 – Avarice – 7 minutes
- ◆ Part 5 – Sadness – 5 minutes
- ◆ Part 6 – Anger – 16 minutes
- ◆ Part 7 – Apathy – 9 minutes
- ◆ Part 8 – Vainglory – 12 minutes
- ◆ Part 9 – Pride and Conclusion – 15 minutes

Sessions are designed to accommodate the typical 50-minute Sunday adult Christian education classes, but may be modified depending upon the needs and time limits of the group.



Before the Sessions Meet

Leader preparation: As facilitator of the group, it's important to remember that you don't need to be the "expert," but you will want to be well prepared by doing the following:

- Before the first session, read through the entire Study Guide. This won't take long, and it will give you a sense of how the study sessions are put together. Then focus on the appropriate section prior to each session.
- If possible, read Dr. Allen's book, *Spiritual Theology: The Theology of Yesterday for Spiritual Help Today*, focusing particularly on the introduction and chapters one, five, and six.
- Before each session, view the video segment you will be showing so that you know in advance what your group will be seeing. Jot down any impressions or questions of your own that come to mind.
- Keep in mind that watching a video is a passive activity, and that it is through the discussion that the material will be absorbed and remembered. Be prepared to move quickly into the discussion once the video is over.

Equipment setup: Well before the meeting, check to make sure the television and VCR are set up and working.

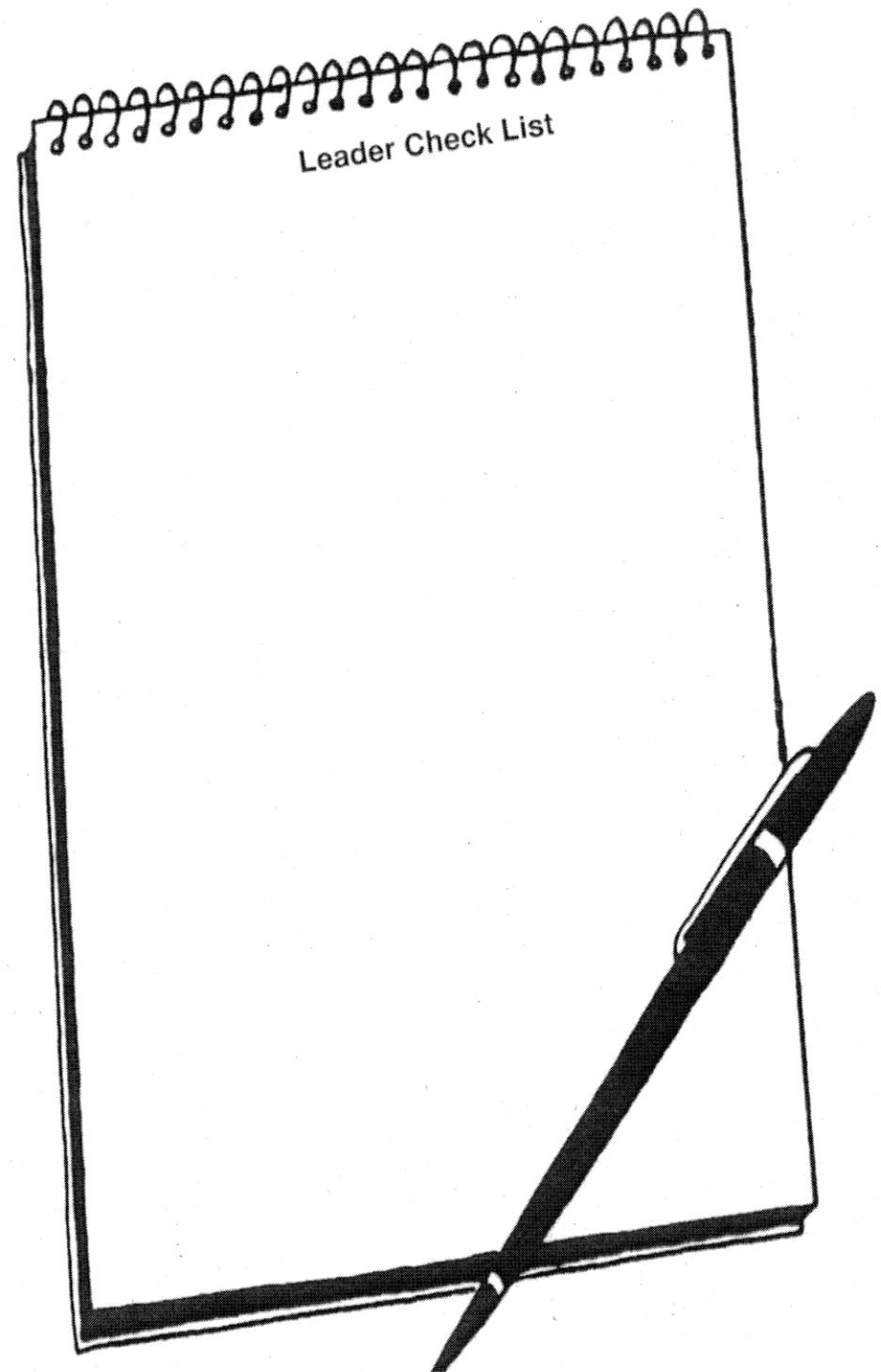
- You will need a nineteen-inch screen for up to six people to view comfortably, and a twenty-five-inch screen for up to twelve people. A larger group will need a larger screen or more than one monitor hooked up to the VCR.
- Just before the group gathers, make sure the TV and VCR are turned on and the tape cued to the right spot so that the tape can be rolled with just a flick of a button. You may want to ask a group member to be responsible for playing the tape, so that you can concentrate on leading the discussion.

Room setup: While a circle is the best way to seat a group for discussion, it may not be best for viewing the video, depending upon the size of the group.

- Consider some kind of flexible seating for the group that will allow a good view of the video and circle seating for the discussion that follows.
- If the group is larger than twelve, consider breaking into smaller groups of four to eight members, to allow everyone an opportunity to participate.

Teaching aids: If using this resource with a group, you will want to have newsprint or whiteboard available to write down key points as noted in the guide.

Remember – the questions in this guide are only suggestions. You may wish to skip, modify, or add questions based on the needs and interests of your group.



**PART
1**

Introduction

Scripture: *1 Peter 1:13-16, Luke 4:1-13, and 1 Corinthians 10:13*

In this video resource, Dr. Diogenes Allen draws upon the timeless wisdom of fourth-century desert fathers and mothers in considering the basic concerns we all have in common: food and drink, sexual desires, comparison with others, personal injuries, failure, success, and self-centeredness. The temptations aroused by these ordinary things were known as the “eight deadly thoughts,” and were originally modeled on the temptations that Christ faced in the wilderness. Every Christian can expect to be assailed by them at one time or another, and unless these thoughts are mastered, they can lead to sin. Even when we do not sin, unruly passions can seriously hinder us from following Christ.



Warm up

10–15 minutes

After introductions, have a volunteer read *1 Peter 1:13–16*. Then have the group respond to the following:

◆ In this study, we will consider how certain thoughts can keep us from living lives obedient to Christ. What do you think some of those thoughts might be?

[Leader's note: list thoughts on newsprint; tear off sheet and tape up for comparison later.]



Watch the Video

13 minutes

Notes



Discuss

15–20 minutes

1. Can you remember the eight thoughts that Dr. Allen listed as deadly? What were they?

[Leader's note: list answers on newsprint. They should include: gluttony, lust, avarice, sadness, anger, apathy, vain-glory, and pride, or the equivalents].

Were there any surprises? Explain.

2. Why do you think that these eight thoughts are considered deadly?

3. Have you ever experienced a time when Christ seemed hidden from view? What was that like? Do you think your way of thinking might have had anything to do with it? Explain.

4. In your own life, how much power do you think your thoughts have over you? How do you deal with destructive thoughts?



Close

5 minutes

Have someone read *1 Corinthians 10:13*. Then close with prayer.

**PART
2**

Gluttony

Scripture: Deut. 10:16–19
and Proverbs 23:19–21

The first of the eight deadly thoughts is gluttony. Although Christians are not required to restrict their diets to the bare necessities, our appetites are not easy to control. Because gratification of appetites is so pleasurable, we have to make an effort to restrain them, or regret it later. Some of the evil thoughts that tempt us today include “Don’t be afraid to enjoy yourself,” or “Don’t deny yourself anything you really want, because denial is not the way to self-fulfillment.” But if we cannot control our appetites, it is unlikely that we can ever be strong enough to put the needs of others before those appetites, and love of God and neighbor will always be out of our reach.

Warm up

10 minutes



Have someone in the group read Deuteronomy 10:16–19, and then have the group respond to these questions:

- ◆ The first deadly thought is gluttony, which Webster’s defines as “excess in eating or drinking.” Can you think of some reasons why people might eat or drink too much?
- ◆ How can this be a problem?

Watch the Video

9 minutes



Notes



Discuss

20 minutes



1. Were you surprised to hear Dr. Allen discuss anorexia (undereating) in the context of gluttony? Explain.
2. Why do you think food and drink are such a problem for so many people?
3. How are alcohol abuse and eating disorders contrary to God’s will in our lives?
4. What are some other ways that people tend to be self-indulgent? How can self-indulgence hamper our spiritual lives?
5. In what ways can this community share our surplus?

Close

10 minutes



Have someone in the group read Proverbs 23:19–21, and then ask the group to respond to the following questions:

- ◆ What do you think the writer meant by the phrase “direct your mind in the way”?
- ◆ What are practical ways we might “direct our minds in the way” to avoid gluttony?

Close with prayer.

**PART
3**

Lust

*Scripture: Matthew 5:27–28,
1 Corinthians 6:12–20,
and 2 Peter 1:3–8*

What is to be gained, people today might ask, by denying your desire for another person, when both of you consent, and there is no exploitation? While in Christianity there is no condemnation of sexual instinct, lust *is* condemned. This is because a human being is more than just a body, and the body of a human being cannot be separated from the person. To lust is to desire the body but not the person. Lust depersonalizes, and even when there is mutual consent, there is exploitation because both parties are depersonalized.



Warm up
10 minutes

Have volunteers read Matthew 5:27–28 and 1 Corinthians 6:12–20 and then have the group respond to this question:

- ◆ Given the culture and the times, do you think scriptural teachings about sexuality are out of date? Why or why not?



Watch the Video
15 minutes

Notes



Discuss
20 minutes

1. What does Dr. Allen mean when he says our indulgences “blind” us?
2. How does lust differ from love?
3. Do you think sexuality is sinful? Explain.
4. Have a volunteer read II Peter 1:3–8. What is the writer referring to when he speaks of “the corruption that is in the world because of lust?” How do God’s promises help us escape this corruption?
5. Do you think people today are more obsessed with sex than people of other generations? Explain.



Close
5 minutes

In the face of a continual onslaught of sexual messages, how can Christians today distinguish between healthy sexuality and destructive lust?

Close with prayer.

PART
4

Avarice

Scripture: Exodus 20:17,
1 Timothy 6:6–10,
and Luke 12:13–21

The third deadly thought concerns avarice. Many of us tend to collect and hoard material goods out of fear, hoping to protect ourselves against calamities which might occur in the future. That anxiety and insecurity can keep us from being generous, because we become so consumed with stockpiling enough goods to keep us secure that we fail to pay sufficient attention to God or neighbor. And if we do notice them, too often it is in terms of how they can help us to become more financially secure. In contrast, one of the signs of God's activity in our lives is that we become more giving and willing to share our resources.

Warm up

10–15 minutes



Have volunteers read Exodus 20:17, 1 Timothy 6:6–10, and Luke 12:13–21. Then have the group respond to these questions:

- ◆ Do you think rich people are happier than poor people? Explain.
- ◆ According to the Scriptures, what is so dangerous about wanting to be rich?



Watch the Video

7 minutes

Notes



Discuss

15–20 minutes

1. How does Dr. Allen define avarice?
2. No one would disagree that each of us has a need and even a responsibility to provide for ourselves and our families. But in what ways can this prevent us from being generous?
3. Do you agree with Dr. Allen's suggestion that we are self-deceptive? Explain. What can happen when we are self-deceptive?
4. Often people feel very uncomfortable talking about money. Why do you think that is?



Close

5–10 minutes

How do we know when we are crossing the line from responsible to selfish? Can you think of the kinds of situations that "hook" you into hanging on to what you have instead of sharing?

Close with prayer.



**PART
5**

Sadness

Scripture: 1 Samuel 1:9–18

Sadness takes hold when we allow the achievements of others to make us feel disappointment with our own lives. This kind of sadness is actually a form of self-pity, and may come from a belief that certain restrictions of the Christian faith have somehow prevented us from being “all that we could be.” Rather than finding joy in following Christ’s ways, we may be tempted to think of the pleasures that could be ours if not for our obedience, and our thoughts may be filled with unrealistic fantasies of how much greater we might have become, “if only....”



Welcome

Warm up

15 minutes

Have the group respond to the following questions:

- ◆ Do you ever feel “down”? What kinds of things make you sad? [Leader’s note: list answers on newsprint.]
- ◆ Are there some sad thoughts that might actually be helpful? Explain.
- ◆ What are some examples of sad thoughts that are unhelpful or even destructive? Explain.



Watch the Video

5 minutes

Notes



Discuss

20 minutes

1. Have you ever thought to yourself, “If only things had been different...” or, “Oh, what I might have become...”? How can these kinds of thoughts be “deadly”?
2. According to Dr. Allen, what is the “freedom of a Christian”?
3. Who determines “who we are and what we are”? Explain.
4. How do you think God sees us?
5. Have you ever known people who seemed to be held captive to their sad thoughts? Describe.



Close

10 minutes

Have a volunteer read 1 Samuel 1:9–18, and then ask the group to respond to the following question:

- ◆ What are some practical ways that we can keep sad thoughts from becoming “deadly”?

Close with prayer.

**PART
6**

Anger

Scripture: Psalm 37:8,
Psalm 139, and Proverbs 22:24

The passion of anger is similar to sadness, in that it concerns our relationships with other people. Sometimes anger is a healthy response to unfair injury, as is the case with those who have been unfairly oppressed. The teachings of Christ do not mean we are to take abuse. However, anger becomes deadly when it causes us to hold grudges and to hate others. This kind of anger can so possess us that it becomes a permanent disposition, quick to react in rage. Such anger can lead us to act unjustly ourselves, moving us to desire revenge rather than reconciliation.



Warm up
10 minutes

Have volunteers read Psalm 37:8 and Psalm 139, and then have the group respond to this question:

◆ What kinds of things make you angry? Do you think that there are times when anger is okay? Explain.



Watch the Video
16 minutes

Notes



Discuss
20 minutes

1. How did Dr. Allen find relief from "inordinate anger"?
2. What is the difference between healthy and unhealthy anger?
3. How do you think God sees our enemies?
4. Where do we see anger played out in our culture? Give some examples.
5. What are some ways that we can guard against destructive anger?



Close
5-10 minutes

Have a volunteer read Proverbs 22:24, and then ask the group to respond to the following question:

Do you think anger is contagious? Explain and give an example.

Close with prayer.

**PART
7**

Apathy

Scripture: Psalm 119:141–144
and Luke 5:1–11

The last three deadly thoughts only come to the surface as we wrestle with the first five, and they all relate to the issue of progress in the Christian life. After conversion, many Christians are so thrilled to have found direction that they are unprepared when the initial euphoria wears off and boredom or apathy set in. Each of us has found our minds wandering on occasion during a sermon or prayer; many of us have experienced discouragement over our slow progress in the Christian life. We have felt frustrated by church politics, or the failures of fellow Christians. But such discouragement is not a sign that we have left the path; rather, it's just another part of the spiritual journey.



Welcome

Warm up

10–15 minutes

Have volunteers read Psalm 119:141–144 and Luke 5:1–11, and then respond to the following questions:

- ◆ In the reading from Luke, what was Simon's response when Jesus asked him to let down the nets into deeper water? How do you think Simon was feeling?
- ◆ What was Simon's reaction after their nets were splitting from the abundance of fish? Why do you think he fell to his knees, confessing his sinfulness?



Watch the Video

9 minutes

Notes



Discuss

20 minutes

1. Do you ever have feelings of discouragement concerning your faith or the church, feeling like there isn't enough progress being made? Describe.
2. According to Dr. Allen, why is discouragement part of the Christian life?
3. What is the difference between habitual failure and weakness?
4. Are there times that we, like Simon Peter, need to go into "deeper water"? Explain.



Close

5–10 minutes

Have the group respond to the following question:

- ◆ Have you ever had times in your spiritual life when you felt "stuck," and when God seemed strangely silent? What did you do?

Close with prayer.

PART
8

Vainglory

Scripture: Matthew 6:1–6 and
Matthew 23:1–7

When we finally do make progress in our spiritual journey, we can expect to meet with the seventh deadly thought: vainglory. As we improve in obedience, we want people to notice it. But when we begin to think of ourselves as superior to others, when we long for praise and prestige, and even feel some annoyance and depression when we don't receive the kind of recognition we think we deserve, then we probably have fallen victim to vainglory. At this point, it is important to remember that any good fruit that we bear is because of Christ's good work in us.



Welcome

Warm up

10–15 minutes

Have volunteers read Matthew 6:1–6 and Matthew 23:1–7 and then have the group respond to these questions:

- ◆ Have you ever known people like the ones described in these passages, who seem to “do all their deeds to be seen by others”? How do folks like that make you feel?
- ◆ Why do you think Jesus warns against this kind of behavior?



Watch the Video

12 minutes

Notes



Discuss

20 minutes

1. Why do you think praise and prestige are so important to us?
2. What are some of the ways that people try to draw attention to themselves? Why does Jesus warn against this? Explain.
3. Dr. Allen quotes Samuel Johnson as describing fame as the “vain desire to fill the minds of others with yourself.” Can you think of any examples that support this definition? Do you think that this is in opposition to God's will? Explain.
4. Does it matter if you have wrong motives for doing good, as long as you are doing good? Explain.



Close

5–10 minutes

In the second passage, Matthew 23:1–7, Jesus describes those who “do all their deeds to be seen by others” as also being those who do not “practice what they teach.” What do you think this tells us about those who suffer from “vainglory”?

Close with prayer.

PART
9

Pride

Scripture: Proverbs 27:1-2
and 1 John 2:15-17

Frequently, vainglory is accompanied by the deadly thought of pride. With vainglory, we want people to notice our achievements; with pride, we take full credit for our progress, with no recognition of God's place in it. This leads to a sense of superiority. But anger and sadness follow on the heels of pride, because others do not have a high opinion of those who think too much of themselves.



Warm up

10 minutes

Ask for volunteers to read Proverbs 27:1-2 and 1 John 2:15-17, and then have the group respond to this question:

- ◆ What do these passages tell us about pride?



Watch the Video

14 minutes

Notes



Discuss

15-20 minutes

1. What does Dr. Allen mean when he says, "All of us are thieves"?
2. How does Dr. Allen's understanding of original sin differ from St. Augustine's? Do you agree or disagree? Explain.
3. Can you recall a situation when you wanted to be "more than what you are"?
4. According to Dr. Allen, we must seek to be free of the power of the eight deadly thoughts because they stir up passions which inhibit the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. What are some of the ways that the eight deadly thoughts can block God's action in our lives?
5. Based on Dr. Allen's presentations, what are some of the ways that we can control the deadly thoughts?



Close

10 minutes

What has been most helpful to you in this series?
Have there been any surprises?
Has anything changed in your spiritual life as a result of this study? Explain.

Close with prayer.