

bread for the journey

Resistance and the willingness to change

One of the seven deadly sins—that is, deadly according to certain religious traditions—is sloth.

It is the refusal to dig deeply and do the necessary work required for a lifestyle change. I have been known to be a whiny baby for various ailments I have incurred over the years, from kidney stone attacks to gall bladder attacks. When you get to be a person of age, stuff begins to fall off or break down. It is quite the insult. People younger than myself, particularly my children, get up into my face and say, “Do something about it. Get in shape, lift weights, do the treadmill, ride the bicycle, swim laps, do yoga, climb a mountain, trot, jog. Do something more than the old guy shuffle, old man.”

Of course, I object with a 1001 excuses: I am too old. It is too late. What’s the use? I cite chapter and verse instances of guys who died trying to get in shape after turning the corner into senior citizenship. “Then, don’t expect us to feel sorry for you or come to your rescue when you can’t get around like you want to.” Back and forth we go. The bottom line problem here, of course, is sloth, good old-fashioned laziness. That seems to be at the rock bottom of our resistance to change.

We complicate the issue by talking about this disease of addiction as cunning, baffling, and powerful, which it is. We talk about the contributing factors to our resistance to change such as the dual diagnosis that comes upon some of us, the bi-polar

issues we must face. And don’t forget the ADHD syndrome that affects so many of us who struggle with the disease of addiction. And we talk about the disease itself characterized by the itch we can’t reach or scratch to our satisfaction. Craving for our drug of choice, unfortunately, is a life-long nemesis. It is the companion we would just as soon leave home without. This is tough stuff.

And then there are the triggers, which point their ugly trigger fingers at us every day. I made the mistake of asking one of our health center patients if they knew anything about Percocet. “Oh please, don’t even mention it. The very mention of it is a trigger for me.” Good grief. Life is a trigger! Of course, it is not nearly that bad, but life is full of dangerously tempting excuses that tease us into relapse and emotional back flips into depression and just plain goofiness. It’s a jungle “out there.” Or, is the jungle really “in here” between our ears?

Whenever a young person enters treatment and gets clean and confesses he really is not interested in going to any and every length to stay clean, it has to do with sloth and the refusal to do what is necessary to make a radical change. He (or she) may say that he simply misses the rush that comes from using the drug of his choice. He is essentially lying to himself. The truth is more fundamental and basic than a simple desire to return to his drug of choice. Sloth is the culprit. Behind the facade of unwillingness and the stubborn refusal to change lurks another demon: laziness. Sloth by any other name.

Sloth, too, is a disguise for something deeper. It is a spiritual issue. It is fear. We are afraid we don’t have what it takes to change, and we are afraid of what will happen to us if we do. What if we fail? It is much easier for me to give in to sloth because I am afraid at my age a vigorous workout won’t do

(continued on back)


much good or make much of a difference. My head knows better but not my gut. Fear is in the driver's seat. Sobriety is a very big deal. Staying clean is no piece of cake. What if I make a fool of myself and fail?

We know, don't we, that AA is full of good people who tried and failed many times but kept coming back anyway. Success is built upon lots of failed attempts to change. One day it will be our day to experience lasting recovery. But not before we run into the inevitable brick wall a dozen or so times. Not before many failed attempts to get over the speed bump. That's the way it works. Don't allow the statistics of failure at attempted recovery stop us or keep us from trying.

The best line and the most important one in the Big Book is this one: "Rarely (if ever) have we seen a person fail who has thoroughly followed our path." It is a line read at the beginning of every meeting. What keeps us from believing it? Fear disguised as sloth.

We are also afraid of the unknown. What does it look like and feel like to be healthy, spontaneous, creative, fearless and "normal?"

This fear is more fabrication in fantasy than fact. We say, "I am afraid of what will happen if I am clean and sober and well." More sloth. We know life will be better in every way if we make the change and do the work. Life is good when we don't have to look over our shoulder, when people begin to trust us again, when we no longer live under the yoke of guilt and shame. We know how sick and tired we are of being a pain in the neck to our friends and family.

So we do the work of going forward. Sometimes the good Lord gives us a vision of the way our life could be if we made the necessary shift and change in our lifestyle. Either we are given the vision of the way things can be if we put forth the effort or we stop the chaos long enough to get the vision of where life can take us. Treatment is not a cure-all, but it can provide the time and space necessary for us to capture a vision, or at least a glimpse, of what life is on the other side of the mayhem and drama we have caused. Meanwhile, we'll leave the light on and the window of opportunity open for you. 



The Rev. Dr. William Lenters, Chaplain

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is a bi-monthly news and views letter from Rev. Dr. William Lenters, Chaplain at Rosecrance. Bread for the Journey is written on behalf of people who live with addictions. Together, and by God's grace, we will try to make a difference.

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