# Seven Deadly Sins, Seven Lively Virtues

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**Biographical Information**

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to Bishop Robert Barron’s enlightening study on sin and virtue. Over the course of this study, we will look at what Catholic tradition calls the Seven Deadly Sins and contrast them with what Bishop Barron refers to as the Seven Lively Virtues. This study guide is designed to help you understand and apply what you learn from Bishop Barron’s video talks about these seven sins.

The Study Guide’s aim is to increase understanding, promote reflection, and encourage practical action. You will have the chance to dig into the Catholic tradition and grapple with Scripture and the Church’s teaching as it is summarized in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC). You will also be able to use this study to assess and enhance your life as a disciple of Jesus Christ. The guide is built around QUESTIONS FOR UNDERSTANDING and QUESTIONS FOR APPLICATION, which will reinforce the main points made in each section on a Deadly Sin and its corresponding Lively Virtue. Throughout the study, you will be asked to look up different Bible verses and passages from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC).

In the introductory video, Bishop Barron presents a framework for understanding what sin is and why it happens. He begins by saying, “God does not need you. You have been loved into existence and that is where your worth comes from.” In response to this generous gift of love, we should all relax and allow the love of God to surge through us to others. God’s economy is different than the world’s — the more you give God’s love away, the more you get. The more you give God’s gifts away, the more you get. But we don’t know this because we have forgotten who we are, and how we came into existence through God’s love.

Not knowing our true worth, we become afraid and start to justify ourselves and try to prove that we have value. Many believe that if they get enough wealth, material things, pleasure, power or honor, they’ll be worth something. This attitude does not allow you to give away God’s gifts; it promotes grasping those gifts and keeping them to oneself, fearful that others might take them away. Spiritual masters describe this state of fear as being “caved in on oneself”
or being tied up in negative attitudes and distortions of the spirit that lead to sin. This self-imposed imprisonment keeps us from being fully alive as God wants us to be. This attitude is deadly, and the most egregious symptoms of this imprisonment can be called the “deadly sins.”

The great Italian Catholic poet, Dante Alighieri, wrote about these sins in *Purgatorio*, the second part of his masterpiece, *The Divine Comedy*. This epic poem opens in the year 1300, when its protagonist was 35, mid-life by a Biblical reckoning: “The measure of our life is seventy years...” (Ps. 90:10). As psychologists and spiritual teachers over the centuries have testified, mid-life is often a time of crisis and breakthrough. The justly celebrated opening lines of the *Comedy* signal this truth: “Midway on the journey of our life, I woke to find myself alone in a dark wood, having wandered from the straight path.” Though he was a massively accomplished man, renowned in both the artistic and political arenas, Dante was, by his mid-thirties, spiritually lost. That he realized this—that he woke up to it, to use his metaphor—was a blessing and the impetus for his journey, much as “hitting bottom” and “turning one’s life over to a higher power” are essential for those undertake a Twelve-Step process.

He meets the ghost of the Roman poet Virgil, who functions as his spiritual director and guide. Virgil tells the troubled Dante that there is a way forward but that it involves a journey through Hell. In our “I’m okay and you’re okay” culture, this is a very difficult message to take in, but every authentic spiritual master acknowledges its indispensability. We have to confront our sin and dysfunction with complete honesty; otherwise we will get stuck. So, Virgil first leads Dante on a tour of the underworld. After having gone all the way down to Hell, Dante is now ready to rise. Moving through the center of the earth, he comes out the other side and commences a journey up Mount Purgatory. On each level of that seven-story mountain, one of the deadly sins—pride, envy, anger, sloth, avarice, gluttony, and lust—is punished, usually through some version of moving in the direction opposite of one’s sin. Bishop Barron sees these countervailing actions for sin as the Seven Lively Virtues. Each virtue is an antidote, meant to be practiced in order to turn from that particular sinful pattern.
At the top of mountain, Dante has been cleansed of all sin and freed from the burden and heaviness of sin, so he is light enough to fly to Paradise. He commences a flight through the various levels of heaven. What he sees are, in essence, different dimensions of love, for heaven is nothing but love. Finally, at the very end of his pilgrimage, the poet is permitted to look into the face of God, which he appreciates as “the love that moves the Sun and the other stars.”

**QUESTIONS FOR UNDERSTANDING**

1. Read the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) paragraphs 1849-1851 and 1866. What is sin? What are the Seven Deadly Sins?

2. Read CCC 1803 and Philippians 4:8. What is virtue? Why is it important in the spiritual life?
3. Read Wisdom 1. What are the qualities of wisdom? What are the qualities of the wise or righteous person? What are the qualities of the unwise fool?

4. Read CCC 759. As a sheer, gratuitous gift, God intends that you exist and share in his divine life. What response does this require from us?
QUESTIONS FOR APPLICATION

1. The startling proposition, “God does not need you” affects different people in different ways. Some people might feel relief. Others might feel resentment. Still others might feel puzzlement. What is your response to that proposition?

2. St. Thomas Aquinas says that love is “willing the good of the other as other.” Can you think of examples of this that you have witnessed either in your own life or in the lives of others? Can you describe an experience of having been a conduit for God's love?
3. Bishop Barron also warns of the opposite danger of a “love” that is really “indirect egotism.” Can you think of times in your life when you have “loved” somebody in order to get him/her to do something for you and not because you actually cared about his/her good? Or, how about a time when your relationship with a person took precedence over your relationship with God? How did you recognize and overcome temptations like this?

4. Bishop Barron describes fear as being at the root of all sin. Have you ever experienced fear working against the virtue of love in your life? How can fear lead you to forget the love of God and put your trust somewhere else?
5. What makes sin deadly? How can God’s anger be good news for us? Have you ever experienced sin’s killing effect? Have you ever seen God’s liberation from that deadliness at work in your life? What was that like?