

How to Mortify Sin
Action Plan
Adapted from John Owen
Pastor Aaron Visser

Colossians 3:5–10 ESV

Put to death, therefore, what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these, the wrath of God is coming. In these, you too once walked, when you were living in them. But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.

How do we put to death (mortify) our sin?

The Westminster Confession of Faith: Edinburgh Edition The Shorter Catechism

Q. 14. What is sin?

A. Sin is any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, the law of God.

Step 1: Evaluate

- The first thing we must do in our fight to kill sin is evaluate our sin. How grave is this sin? Is this sin deep-rooted? You may have heard the saying that all sin is the same and that no sin is more severe than another. And in a sense, that is true because every sin has eternal consequences, but some sins have more severe consequences than others. And some sins are punished more harshly than others (see 1 Tim 5:24)
- The most serious sins are the ones that have gone deep enough that they are now habitual, meaning your subconscious habits directly lead you to sin again and again. This sin is not something you have done here and there, but instead, it is a part of your life now. You sin on autopilot.
- As you consider your sin, you need to ask whether this sin is now manifested in your habits. Is it easier to sin than to do what is right? Don't automatically say no; think about it, evaluate it and be prepared for the answer.

Step 2: Fill

- This part is hard, and at first, you're going to think it's wrong and not want to do it. That's okay, but you have to.

- After you have identified the nature of your sin, you need to fill your mind and conscience with the guilt, the weight, the evil of your sin as an act of willful rebellion against God. Feel the weight of guilt, not condemnation, but guilt. This step sounds extremely countercultural. We tend to lean toward always focusing on our high self-esteem and forgiving ourselves, but you are better off feeling the guilt of your sin before moving towards that direction.
- Sin will always try and convince you that it's not that serious, and you don't need to be concerned about it. You know what I am saying, well I am not sinning as bad as others, I have done it before, and nothing terrible happened. This is why you need to consider just how dangerous that sin is; you need to consider how it dishonours God and makes you less useful for the Lord's work.
- I know this sounds harsh, but this is the reality of sin; it's disgusting to God. Don't joke it off; it's serious. And God takes it seriously.
- Look to the Gospel, to the cross of Christ, not for forgiveness, not let, though we will get to that soon. Look to the cross from the ultimate picture of the cost of your sin as Christ suffers and dies for that sin you want to commit. Consider how patient and kind God has been with you in allowing you to go on without striking you down for your sin. Feel the weight of that, the guilt of it, see Christ bearing your sin on the cross, and do not avert your gaze until that view sits heavy on your soul.
- This produces godly sorrow, which is different than worldly sorrow. Worldly sorrow is sad over losing the things of the world, while the focus of godly sorrow is God himself. Godly sorrow is pained over the break-in relationship with God. It is heartbroken that God has been grieved and offended. This is godly sorrow, and it's something that leads to true repentance.
- Fill your heart and mind with the fact that when we sin, we sin first and foremost against God.

*David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord."
And Nathan said to David, "The Lord also has put away your sin;
you shall not die. (2 Samuel 12:13 ESV)*

Step 3: Long

- At this point, you have evaluated the sin, and filled your heart and mind with the evil of it, and loaded your conscience with the guilt of it.

- Now you must long for deliverance from it. Because now that sin is in sharp focus, it's clearly evil and disgusting, and you see it and know it. This is why that last step, although it's hard, it's important because it shows you how truly horrible your sin is, which puts you in the right place too long for deliverance from it.
- You are longing for deliverance, not out of fear of consequence or shame and embarrassment. Because if you repent out of those reasons, that's just worldly sorrow, but when you repent from a place of understanding just how evil sin is, you are repenting from godly sorrow.

Step 4: Consider

- Through this process of killing our sin, when you come to this step, "consider," you want to pause for a moment and consider whether there are ways this sin that you are battling is amplified by your nature or natural disposition.
- Is there something in your life, your history or even your family history that makes you especially prone to this sin? For example, does alcoholism run through your family, does constant worrying passed down, has something happen to you in the past that has caused you to fail in this area time and time again.
- By the way, alcoholism is not the only thing that can be passed down from generation to generation. So can having a melancholy personality, meaning your parents always grumble and complain, so now you always grumble and complain, which is sin, by the way. Constant worrying can be passed down, which is also a sin.
- Anger can be passed down, which is also a sin.
- We quickly call out pornography, alcohol and drug abuse while ignoring other evident sins like lying, gossiping, abusive language, worrying, not loving well. And the list goes on and on of these sins that I call socially accepted sins because people view them as so small, yet they are all cosmic treason towards God as all sin is.
- So you need to consider these sins and see if you have a predisposition because of family life or because you were sinned against as a child or made wrong choices in your upbringing.
- But I must mention that even if you discover that you have a predisposition towards a specific sin, it doesn't provide you with an excuse if you fall into it. No sin is sin. This should only convince you of your weakness and your desperate need for God's strength. Always remember that you're not on your own in this; these steps are designed to show you that.

- You can't kill your sin without the Grace of God and his strength. If you have a predisposition towards a sin, you need to make sure that you are vigilant in that area, keeping watch for that temptation to arise, and when it does, kill it.

Step 5: Contemplate

- So far, we have evaluated our sin, filled our minds and hearts with the weight of sin, long for deliverance from it, and then began to consider the perimeters around this particular sin.
- And now it's time to take action against this sin. In this step, you are going to be putting together a battle plan against your sin. In this step, you will think about the occasion in which this sin breaks out in your life. You will find with sin is that once it has taken root, you develop patterns around this sin. You need to discover these patterns.
- You need to think about the times you fall into this sin; what is the occasion surrounding it? What happens right before you sin? Meaning what leads you to this sin? What are the habits/patterns that lead you to it? What mood or frame of mind are you in before you commit this sin?
- Think about these things, ask yourself these questions, develop an awareness of your patterns and habits, and behaviours before you sin.
- Because when you can determine these patterns/habits/behaviours, you can stop the downward spiral long before it gets to the point of sinning. You rarely commit a big sin before sliding down the slippery slope of minor sins. Consider even the little sins, identify the patterns, and stop it long before it progresses.
- The second part of this step is contemplating where you may need to take radical action against your sin.
- This is what Jesus was talking about when he spoke about deep-rooted sins

*If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away.
For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right-hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.
(Matthew 5:29–30 ESV)*

- Jesus wasn't calling for self-mutilation because it's the heart, not the body, that is the root of sin. He's making a point of the seriousness of sin and removing the things from your life that are causing you to sin!

- If it's your electronics, cut them out; if it's money, practice being more generous. You can make a game plan for anything. Will it be inconvenient to how you lived, yes, but that's the problem, in the first place. That's what you are killing, are your old self habits.

Step 6: Battle

- Cry out to God at the very moment you feel that temptation rearing its ugly head, don't toy with sin, don't believe the lie, I will only sin this far and no further. Remember, sin is stronger than you but not stronger than God.
- Sin is like water being held back by a dam; a tiny crack and the pressure of the water will blow through that dam, eradicating it.
- Cry out to God when you feel weak; He lives inside of you through the Holy Spirit, so he is always close. Call for his help and call for the help of other Christians as well. God has put us in a community with other Christians, so we can strengthen and encourage each other.
- This is truly a battle, and you're not called to do it alone; you need to commit to fighting, or you will always be overthrown, pray to God and ask your brothers or sisters in the Lord to keep you in prayer and to hold you accountable.

Step 7: Meditate

- As the desire of sin rises up which it will meditate on the goodness of God, on His glory, his majesty, his strength, his guidance. Read his word, think of how great he is—Labour in prayer.
- As John Owen says, "If we do not abide in prayer, we will abide in temptation."
- Meditation on the greatness of God and your inability will humble yourself and not allow pride to sneak in and tell you that you got this on your own. Being Humble is essential in this process.

*But he gives more grace. Therefore it says,
 "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."
 James 4:6 ESV*

*Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders.
Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another,
for "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."
1 Peter 5:5 ESV*

- God gives grace to the humble; if you want his grace in your battle of sin, it will start with your humility.
- This may entail that you find the verses in the Bible that are talking about your specific sin and meditating on them. This is what I did for my sin of anger.

*I have stored up your word in my heart,
that I might not sin against you.
Psalm 119:11*

- Meditate on the holiness of God because if you meditate on his holiness, you will long to be holy as He is holy, as we see in 1 Peter 1:14-6

*As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of
your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy,
you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written,
"You shall be holy, for I am holy."
1 Peter 1:14–16 ESV*

Step 8: Expect

- Expect to hear God speak peace to your soul. As you do all these and follow each of these steps, you can expect that God will help you put your sin to death and will give you peace in your mind and conscience. You will feel peace because you are at peace.
- Always remember this great promise during your battle; no matter how eggar you are to see this sin put to death, you can be sure God is even more eggar than you. He wants it gone more than you do, so rest in that promise that he is fighting for you and not against you.
- But this step comes with a warning, and that's not to speak peace to yourself until God does. You may be tempted to see your desire to kill sin as actually putting that sin to death. Or maybe you will quickly jump to the conclusion that this sin is dead. Remember, sin will also try and convince you it's not essential. Allow God to speak peace, and believe me; you will know when he does.

Replace vice with virtue

- This is the process of putting on the new self. Yes, you put off the old self and its practices, but you must also put on the new self with its rules, or you will fall back into old habits. You must replace vice with virtue.
- This is very important for those profoundly rooted sins, or you have a history in your life or family's life. You must replace these sins with the opposite virtue as a step to arm yourself from falling back into them.

We often see this principle in Paul's epistles

Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labour,
doing honest work with his own hands so that he may
have something to share with anyone in need.

Ephesians 4:28 ESV

- You see, the thief needs to stop stealing, but that's not enough; he also needs to labour in honest work. He needs to learn how to work for things in life, earn a living, and give generously.

*Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths,
but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion,
that it may give grace to those who hear.*

Ephesians 4:29 ESV

- He shows the same principle here, if your deep-rooted sin is in your words, either it is filthy language, gossip or abusive, Paul says don't let corrupting talk come from your mouth, but also to help you with that, we need to learn how to speak well by building others up.
- The man or women who struggle with lust needs to stop it and learn how to have self-control, learning how to steward their sexuality to the glory of God faithfully.
- The person who struggles with laziness cannot merely stop being lazy, which is a good start, but must learn to be active and use their gifts and abilities to serve God and others. The list goes on and on.
- Your life is like a glass of water that is always full; when something is taken out, something else rushes in. When you stop sinning, if you don't fill that void with a virtue, another sin will take its place. we see this in Luke 11:24-26

- There are some areas of your life where you are not particularly prone to sin. They are not temptations for you. But you still need to pursue godliness in it.
- For example, I don't struggle with stealing, it doesn't take much effort for me not to steal, but that doesn't mean I don't have to pursue the opposite virtue of theft, which is generosity. It may not require as much effort or prayer as the areas in which I struggle, but I still need to pursue it, and so do you.
- Take these steps with you and kill your sin today, don't wait; it's time to be serious about our walk with Christ.
- I pray this helps! Remember, this is all done out of the power of the Holy Spirit and the community you are in! Don't do it alone!