



Ryan Tafilowski: ([00:03](#))

How do we learn to get along in the workplace as broken people with other broken people?

Joanna Meyer: ([00:10](#))

You're listening to the Faith & Work Podcast where we explore what it means to serve God neighbor and society through our daily work.

Joanna Meyer: ([00:20](#))

Hi, and welcome to the Faith & Work Podcast. I'm Joanna Meyer, Denver Institute's Director of Public Engagement. And today we're kicking off our fall series virtue and vice. One of the things that I have loved about my time in the Faith & Work movement is learning more about some of the historic traditions of the Christian faith. Learning how Christians through the centuries thought about the way people of faith should live in the world, or the profound ways they shape culture, invented technology or invest in their communities has sparked my own imagination for what it means to be a Christian today.

Joanna Meyer: ([00:51](#))

I've gained a new understanding of life with God that compliments what I hear at my local church. And this fall Denver Institute will publish Virtue and Vice, a book that draws on the historic traditions of the Christian faith to offer a framework for understanding the challenges and opportunities we encounter in the modern workplace. It explores vices with juicy names like sloth and gluttony, and we'll learn about more about those in a moment. And our podcast conversations will be framed around virtues like love, courage, humility, temperance, and justice.

Joanna Meyer: ([01:25](#))

It's a wonderful compliment between the two. We'll talk to leaders like Andy Crouch, the author, and redemptive thought leader on entrepreneurship about temperance. We'll also hear from a champion ultra-marathoner named Sabrina Little, who's also a philosophy professor and has deep thoughts about how athletic training develops courage and character in our lives. And I'm excited about talking to Katelyn Beaty, the former editor of Christianity Today, and the author of a new book about Celebrities for Jesus, how personas platforms and prophets are hurting the church. She's going to weigh in on what Christian humility looks like. It's going to be an amazing series. So I encourage you to tune in.

Joanna Meyer: ([02:01](#))

And today we're kicking off our conversation with the authors of this book. We're joined by Denver Institute staff members who were instrumental in shaping this project, Communications Director, Dustin Moody, and Theologian in Residence, Ryan Tafilowski. And it's important to note that this will mark their final official appearance on the podcast as staff members of the Institute. By the time this broadcast airs, they will have transitioned into new work opportunities. So Dustin is working as the communications



director for a small global missions agency. And Ryan, kudos to him, has recently earned a professorship at Denver Seminary in their theology department, so kudos to Ryan for that.

Joanna Meyer: ([02:42](#))

Welcome to the podcast, Dustin and Ryan. What a privilege to get to connect with you today.

Dustin Moody: ([02:48](#))

Thanks Joanna.

Ryan Tafilowski: ([02:50](#))

Really happy to be here. It's fun.

Joanna Meyer: ([02:51](#))

So for listeners who may not be familiar with the concept of vices and virtues, tell us briefly about the five virtues that you selected for the book and what their historical context is.

Ryan Tafilowski: ([03:04](#))

Well, so most people know about the seven so-called deadly sins. They know about it at least because of the movie Seven, probably, if you remember that movie with Morgan Freeman and Brad Pitt, where they're trying to catch that serial killer, who's committing all these grizzly murders, according to the seven deadly sins. So it's found its way into the popular imagination in this way, but it's got roots really deep in the Christian tradition. It was articulated most clearly, probably, by Thomas Aquinas in the 13th century.

Ryan Tafilowski: ([03:30](#))

But for this project, we actually ended up looking at Christian literature that was much earlier even than that, like fourth century. So 1700 years ago, Christian writers in the monastic tradition started talking about these patterns of behavior that could sort of distort us into vicious versions of ourselves. And they had different lists, some listed eight, some listed seven, but they've all got basically the same territory covered.

Ryan Tafilowski: ([03:58](#))

And the big ones of course are pride and lust and gluttony, greed, sloth, anger, envy. In this project, we ended up looking just at five in particular, and the ways that they show up in our work, because as it happens, our daily work is a good breeding ground for the vices. So we looked at pride, lust, sloth, gluttony, and greed. And what we tried to do was to sort of reframe those vices, which we typically associate with very narrow patterns of behavior and try to broaden the definition to see the way that they impact our work.



Ryan Tafilowski: ([04:33](#))

So gluttony is thought to be just about food, but it's not. Lust is not just about sex, it's about any kind of impulse to control other people. So we took a very ancient sort of Christian idea and tried to update it for the 21st century workplace.

Joanna Meyer: ([04:50](#))

Dustin, you spearheaded this project. Why do you think these principles have value for modern workers?

Dustin Moody: ([04:57](#))

As Ryan explained, this is not a new concept. It was not original to us to explore the classical or the cardinal or the capital virtues and vices. There's a lot of recent examples. One recent example would be Karen Swallow Prior's book, *On Reading Well*, that explores virtue and vice through classic literature. But in my exploration of those types of resources, I didn't see anything that primarily situated this discussion in the workplace. And as an organization that believes that work is one of our greatest opportunities to live out the gospel, it seemed like that was a important heuristic to think about how these virtues and vices show up in our work and in our relationships and in our organization.

Dustin Moody: ([05:36](#))

So that was kind of the background of the project. And hopefully it gives us an opportunity to look at really spiritual formation in the context of our work. Now, Ryan's work doesn't necessarily get into practical implementation of these sorts of things, but they do serve as a good kind of framework for thinking about how are these areas showing up in my work? And what can I do to kind of reform those?

Joanna Meyer: ([06:03](#))

Ryan, it was fascinating watching you work on this project, because you immersed yourself in the writings of the early church fathers. I'm curious to know what you learned by spending so much time with these historical documents.

Ryan Tafilowski: ([06:18](#))

Well, I learned a lot more than I expected to. I think the biggest takeaway for me is realizing that these early Christian figures have such tremendous insight into what we would now call psychology, even though they're writing centuries and centuries before psychology even emerges as a discipline. That word originates in the 19th century. And we have a tendency as modern people to think that people who live before the Enlightenment don't really have any useful information about much of anything. But these folks have tremendous insight into what makes us tick, why it is we do the things that we do, why we have such a difficult time taming our basis impulses, why it's so difficult for us to live with ourselves and even more difficult for us to live with other people.



Ryan Tafilowski: [\(07:07\)](#)

And I ended up focusing the study on two particular figures. One guy, a guy named Evagrius of Pontus, was monk who lived out in the desert by himself, in Egypt, in the fourth century. And he is representative of what scholars call eremitic monasticism, which means hermit based monasticism, folks living by themselves. And they might live in loose constellations where they're near one another, but they spent a lot of time in caves or cells by themselves.

Ryan Tafilowski: [\(07:34\)](#)

And then I looked at another figure, a guy named John Cassian, who was a little bit later, and he led a monastery in what is now France, it was Gaul at the time, in the late antique period, early medieval period. And why I chose those two figures is because Evagrius shows us that vice can grow in us in our work, when we're by ourselves. And Cassian shows us that those vices tend to intensify when we're with other people.

Ryan Tafilowski: [\(08:04\)](#)

And so Evagrius kind of shows us that the problem with work is that we come to work with a self, which means that we are persons who are twisted by vice. And the trouble that Cassian points out is that when we come to work, we sit down next to other selves who are twisted by vice. And so we've got this sort of double conundrum with how do we learn to get along in the workplace as broken people with other broken people? And that was one of, I think, the most interesting insights.

Joanna Meyer: [\(08:33\)](#)

It's fascinating. If you can get through some of the more ancient language, the wisdom that they have as this relevant today is opening a book by Henry Cloud or a psychologist that we would turn to, or Adam Grant, an organizational psychologist.

Joanna Meyer: [\(08:47\)](#)

So let's dig into two of these vices that you explore in the book that might be less familiar to modern Christians, the concept of lust, which we'd referred to earlier, and sloth, which is also referred to as acedia. And I'd love to start with Dustin. When you think of lust is probably related to our physical desire or sexual urges, but I'd love to know how does this definition fall short really from a Christian perspective of what these early church fathers had in mind?

Dustin Moody: [\(09:15\)](#)

So certainly lust and particularly in the workplace can include misplaced sexual desire, but underlying lust and maybe kind of broadening the definition, Augustine described it as a drive to dominate. And one of the early synonyms for it is luxuria, essentially, a possessive excess. And underlying kind of all these definitions is a quest for power, and really a dehumanizing of the object of that power.



Dustin Moody: ([09:41](#))

So the failure to see the Imago Dei or the humanity or the image of God in that other person. So certainly sexual lust would include that, but it's also broader and shows up in our work in terms of power for power's sake, power to unjust ends, power or office rivalry, or the way politics show up in our relationship. So this idea of lust isn't just potentially leading to infidelity in the workplace. It actually has a lot to do with my desire for power, and where that power is kind of located or the object that power is aiming for.

Joanna Meyer: ([10:14](#))

Ryan, how would you define lust?

Ryan Tafilowski: ([10:18](#))

Well, I think Dustin hit on a couple of key points there. I mean, it is overwhelmingly true in the history of the sort of Christian spiritual tradition that lust has been identified primarily with misplaced sexual desire or inordinate sexual desire or illicit sexual desire, sexual desire for persons who are not our spouses, say. And that's true. And as a veteran of the sort of purity wars of early 21st century evangelicalism, where we read every young man's battle or I kiss dating goodbye, we're all familiar with lust in that capacity. But as Dustin said, one of the things that's very interesting is when you look at this literature, they define lust more broadly as a kind of urge to possess other persons in ways that deny their dignity and their agency.

Ryan Tafilowski: ([11:12](#))

And Augustine very famously in the city of God, calls it the libido dominandi, the libido to dominate. Now, when we hear the word libido, we think sexual drive and we have Sigmund Freud to thank for that. But Freud was picking up on this concept from Augustine. It's a sort of uncontrollable urge to objectify the people around us.

Ryan Tafilowski: ([11:32](#))

And so if you are seeing your coworkers as objects to be manipulated, to be flattered say, or to be persuaded or to be eliminated, even. Sexual desire is only one expression of this more primal drive. And so, as Dustin mentioned, Aquinas called it luxuria, which I think we should best translate as possessive excess. It is the desire to have the things around us, including people. And that's one of the most noxious ways that it shows up at work, I think.

Joanna Meyer: ([12:08](#))

I invite our listeners to reflect on the last time they saw that kind of behavior reflected either in themselves or in the workplace around them, examples come to my mind immediately. But these concepts aren't limited to the early church fathers. We see them reflected in scriptures. Can either of you think of examples of when we saw lust at work in the lives of scriptural heroes?



Ryan Tafilowski: ([12:31](#))

I mean, there's almost too many to count. I mean, the Old Testament should have an X rating. And there's lots of these stories that are not included in children's Bibles. For example, when I read the Bible with my daughter, who's three, there's lots of Sampson stories, but it's about how he had nice hair and how he's real strong. It doesn't include most of the Sampson story, which is where he's trying to physically carry women away with him. You see this, even in some of the great patriarchs, especially David had problems in this department, of course. And actually Solomon is the person I would go to, because the story that Solomon tells about his own reign in the beginning of the Book of Ecclesiastes actually illustrates this multi-layered nature of lust really beautifully and powerfully.

Ryan Tafilowski: ([13:17](#))

Because you can see how in Solomon's life, these levels of lust go unchecked, and they actually escalate. He starts by saying that he accumulated possessions. He says that he built public works and he got palaces and houses. And then he goes on to say that he possessed men and women, servants and wives, and using the same language. He gets women in the same way that he gets a house. And then he concludes by saying, "Actually, what I really wanted was to be unrivaled in Jerusalem." And he says, "And I finally attained what I thought I wanted, which was to be greater than anyone who had gone before me."

Ryan Tafilowski: ([13:51](#))

And so there, you can actually see lust as someone like Augustine understands it. Sure, he's lusting after women and he is lusting after houses, but what he's really trying to do is dominate and control everything around him. And that's lust, if I could put it this way, in its terminal stages, that's where it's most destructive.

Joanna Meyer: ([14:10](#))

It's so fascinating. Dustin, before you came to Denver Institute, I know you had broad workplace experience in both the nonprofit sector and in academia, in academic administration. I would love to know how do you see this concept relate to the modern workplace? How do you see it play out in people's daily lives?

Dustin Moody: ([14:29](#))

I think it could play out in a lot of ways. I think it could play out, again, if we situate lust as quest for power or power for unjust ends or desire to dominate. And we include the idea of forfeiting someone else's humanity, forfeiting someone else's Imago Dei, the image of God, that can look like a lot of different ways. That can look like using my agency for personal gain. That can look like seeking to use people for my own unjust ends, using people for their service, not for their personality or what else they can bring to an organization or to a team. It could be really centered around a very selfish view of my



contributions to my work for the sake of advancement, not for anything else, but for kind of power for power's sake.

Dustin Moody: ([15:16](#))

And I think you, Joanna, you mentioned a good point, a lot of the diagnostic for these things begin with self-reflection. We want to make sure that we are having an examined life when it comes to how these vices show up in our work, because power for just ends is great. But I think once we get to those motivation levels and those heart levels of why are we pursuing this? Are the methods that I'm pursuing these opportunities lining up with my faith and my beliefs? Or am I kind of running the rat race and playing the office politics simply for purely selfish motivations? I think it takes really examining our own heart and our motivations to see where these things are showing up for us.

Joanna Meyer: ([15:57](#))

I think of almost any movie or TV show that is situated in a workplace environment, it's a powerful example of lust at work. One of the things I appreciate in this book is that, Ryan, as you were writing, you point towards a gospel response, a gospel driven perspective that can serve as an antidote to these lusts, a way to point us towards virtue. Tell us a little bit about what spiritual practices can address lust in our lives.

Ryan Tafilowski: ([16:27](#))

That's the trick. And actually, as we got into this project, we jokingly said, maybe we should just call it vice and vice at work, because the deeper I got into it, the more I realized we've all got all these capital vices in spades. And actually the project turned much more into something like helping folks diagnose, recognize the way these vices are taking root. And maybe a future project will concentrate more on the virtues that can curb them. But we did gesture towards, as you say, some gospel solutions. And in this tradition, the virtue and vice tradition, you'll see these theologians pairing a capital vice with a capital virtue.

Ryan Tafilowski: ([17:07](#))

And when it comes to lust, it's will probably come as no surprise that the corresponding virtue is chastity. And chastity is a bit of a dirty word in our culture, as we live after the sexual revolution, we consider ourselves to be sort of sexually liberated. Our bodies are ours, and we can do it them what we want. And it's often thought that religious folks are Puritans, who are trying to tell us what to do with our bodies. And that's true, I suppose, but it presuppose is a very narrow view of chastity.

Ryan Tafilowski: ([17:42](#))

Chastity does have very much to do with what you do with your body, but I would want to broaden the definition of chastity to something like humanizing regard for others. That's the language that I would prefer to use about chastity. So it's not just about you don't look at your coworker as a sexual



opportunity, although that's a good start. Chastity would mean learning to regard other people in your life, in all of their beauty and brilliance without trying to possess it or control it. It is to let others be who they are without trying to domesticate it, which is the temptation of lust it's to possess something.

Ryan Tafilowski: ([18:26](#))

And so ideally in a sort of sanctified Christian vision, we could learn to regard one another as beautiful, attractive even, without objectifying one another. And that goes on a sexual level, but it also goes for the way that we relate to one another in the workplace. And so it's one thing to talk about chastity. The hard work is cultivating it.

Ryan Tafilowski: ([18:46](#))

And these early Christian writers, these desert fathers and mothers in particular emphasize a couple of practices that could help us here. One is fasting, actual physical fasting, because it's a way of cultivating self-denial. So someone like Evagrius, that monk I mentioned, who lived out in the Egyptian wilderness, he says, "If you want to get better at lust, then skip meals or eat less bread." He says, "Put your bread on a balance, and the spirit of fornication will flee from you," he says. And what he means is if we get a little bit better at denying our most basic instincts, even for food, we'll get into the habit of saying no to all of our impulses.

Ryan Tafilowski: ([19:27](#))

And so little by little, if we can say, "You know what, I don't actually have to eat that second cookie. I can stop at one," that actually does something in turning us into the kind of person who can see another human being and say, "That human being is attractive, then that's all."

Ryan Tafilowski: ([19:44](#))

So self-denial, fasting, and another is gleaning, which is a biblical practice that we get from the Levitical code, Leviticus 19, where Israel is commanded to leave grain on the margins for other people to collect. And this is a beautiful practice for a number of reasons. And you might not naturally connect it with lust, but one of the ways it combats lust is that it leaves room for another person to explore the dignity of their own work without you having to impose your vision on it. So these are just two little things that we can start doing on a small scale to start chipping away at the demon of lust, I think.

Jeff Hoffmeyer: ([20:22](#))

Hi, I'm Jeff Hoffmeyer, Vice President of Advancement here at Denver Institute for Faith & Work. And I'd like to invite you to become a part of our new monthly partner community, whether it's a monthly commitment of \$25, \$50 or any amount, your generosity will support Denver Institute's ongoing efforts to help men and women love God, their neighbors, and society through their daily work, including this podcast. To say thank you, as a monthly partner, you will receive a welcome box. You'll have exclusive access to private digital content, personalized vocational coaching, and discounts for Denver Institute



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Joanna Meyer: ([21:16](#))

I'm so thankful you're translating, because when you had said that phrase, "Put your bread on a balance, the spirit of fornication will flee from you," I thought how do we glean contemporary wisdom from that? And yet there's a lot to learn. I mean, there's just beautiful, timeless richness here, if we're willing to dig a little bit deeper.

Joanna Meyer: ([21:31](#))

So I want to know about the next concept, which is sloth. And I think if anyone's seen the animal, they may have an idea of what sloth looks like. We often associate it with laziness. One of the other terms that the church fathers use is acedia. But it's really powerful, as a staff team, we were exploring this concept and we realized it may be the spirit of our day, even though it was the early church fathers that really helped us begin to understand it. So tell us a little bit about sloth. What in the world is it?

Ryan Tafilowski: ([22:02](#))

Well, here again, we've got some untangling to do because this term has taken on a meaning in our modern idiom that it didn't have when the term originated. And like you said, we tend to associate it with physical laziness. Sloth is someone who has trouble getting motivated, can't get out of bed, doesn't do anything. And it is true that these monastic writers do talk about sloth as an aversion to physical labor, but they actually see it, that, that physical laziness, as a symptom of a much deeper sort of spiritual malaise.

Ryan Tafilowski: ([22:36](#))

And in fact, you mentioned the Greek term that is translated sloth is the word acedia, and it's a compound word. And in Greek it literally means not caring. And so you mentioned the animal, the sloth as an image, I would counter with Eeyore from Winnie the Pooh. I mentioned I'm a three year old. I watch a lot of Winnie the Pooh these days. And Eeyore actually is a really good image of sloth. It's true that he does move slowly, and it's true that he's kind of lazy and slow, but what Eeyore captures about acedia is the sense of almost resignation and despair about the nature of reality.

Ryan Tafilowski: ([23:14](#))

And that's because acedia, I think a better definition comes from, well, there's a Catholic theologian, RJ Snell, who's written an excellent book on this, and he defines it as metaphysical boredom. It's not just laziness. It is waking up every day and going to the same job, driving the same commute, eating the same oatmeal for breakfast, sitting down at your desk next to the same coworkers, opening your same email inbox, performing the same task, driving home, watching TV till you pass out, and thinking, "Os



this all there is?" That's the spirit of acedia. And it takes a lot of other expressions that we can talk about, but I would want to get to that deeper meaning of a sort of apathy towards the beauty of reality itself.

Joanna Meyer: ([24:00](#))

I wanted to share a quote that has a real spirit of humor in it from Evagrius of Pontus, who you mentioned, one of the figures that you studied for this. He describes acedia among the monks in his brotherhood. And he said, "The demon of acedia also called the Noonday Demon is the one that causes the most serious trouble of all. He presses his attack upon the monk about the fourth hour and besieges the soul until the eighth hour. First of all, he makes it seem that the sun barely moves if at all. And that the day is 50 hours long. Then he constrains the monk to look constantly out the windows, to walk outside the cell, to gaze carefully at the sun to determine how far it stands from the ninth hour," which was 3:00 PM, the customary hour for monks to have dinner "to see if perhaps one of the brethren appears from his cell."

Joanna Meyer: ([24:48](#))

And I think we all have moments like that here at the office where I spend a little too long staring out the window, or in my case, it might be doom scrolling on Twitter, where there's just this existential angst of being bored. Dustin, I'm curious, I'd love to know from you how you see acedia reflected in people's working lives today.

Dustin Moody: ([25:08](#))

So on the one hand, acedia might be slightly easier to diagnose than lust was. So lust usually has an external object or kind of an external quest for power. Again, with usually a dehumanizing element. Acedia is much more internal and acedia can show up in a couple ways. Ryan mentioned the idea of metaphysical boredom, and there's kind of two paths that this can take. One is just hyper underactivity and not caring about the work that we're supposed to do. So doing the bare minimum, not really caring about our coworkers, our colleagues, our organization, basically kind of filling our time with busy work just to make it through the day, make it through the week.

Dustin Moody: ([25:48](#))

Acedia can also show up as hyperactivity, and this immense drive to keep doing, doing, doing, but all at the surface level. So that could look like doom scrolling, that could look like bingeing on Netflix for the weekend, that could look like an insatiable quest for the next thing. But that insatiable quest is driven by just an abject void and lack of concern within your soul. So I think it's on the one hand, easier to diagnose than lust was. But on the other hand, also a little harder to diagnose, because, again, it gets to that underlying motivation level of why am I doing this?



Dustin Moody: ([26:23](#))

I'm the parent of young kids and to your illustration earlier, Joanna, my wife and I often talk about the clock moving backwards. There's just days that feel like they are dragging. And I love my kids, but sometimes it's just a little too much to continue to engage with them on long periods of time. And I think a lot of times that's acedia. When we were talking about this as a staff, this might be one of the more convicting ones, because there are different ways that it shows up, but it's all very relatable from one person to another.

Dustin Moody: ([26:51](#))

We've all been at a place that we've just kind of checked out of a job. We're just doing the minimum and it's either time to move on or time to reengage. Many of us have been at a place where we're hyperactive and trying to do things, but we're not really motivated by anything beyond the activity itself. So I think this shows up in a variety of ways for different people, but again, ask yourself, why am I scrolling? What have I really gotten out of these last 15 minutes looking at my newsfeed?

Joanna Meyer: ([27:18](#))

Ryan, I want to hear more from you because we talked about our smartphones being a tool of acedia, almost any of us has something that can feed that habit in our lives. How have you seen it in your own life? Where do you see it crop up because of your phone?

Ryan Tafilowski: ([27:32](#))

I said before that, as I started this project, I came to realize that I have all seven of the capital vices, and it was just a question of which one comes first, and what order to put them in, and that depends on the day. But as I reflect on it, I wonder if acedia is probably my biggest struggle. And I think it's fair to say it is the characteristic vice of our age. And I'm not the only one to say this, there's many philosophers and theologians, who are starting to wonder about this.

Ryan Tafilowski: ([28:02](#))

And I was thinking of the 20th century theologian, Paul, Tillich a name, some of our listeners might know. He wrote a book called *The Courage to Be*, in which he is trying to spur people on to stay engaged with reality, summon the courage to be. And he says in that book that "every age in Western civilization has had a characteristic fear." So he says, "If you lived in the days of the early fathers of the church, you were afraid of death, which is why a lot of early Christian literature talks about Jesus overcoming death." And he says, "If you lived in the age of the Reformation, say, there'd be a preoccupation with your guilt, your shame, which is why you see the reformers writing quite a lot about how Jesus takes your guilt and your shame."



Ryan Tafilowski: [\(28:45\)](#)

And Tillich says, and I think he's right about this, that "starting about the mid 19th century, the signature fear became meaninglessness." We're just afraid that our lives don't mean anything. We're more afraid of that than we are of death and guilt. We're just not sure why we do anything than we do. And if you've ever had a sort of dead end job, you know that feeling, where you show up and you turn on your computer and you just sort of think, "Why am I here? What is this for?" And then you go home and what is that for?

Ryan Tafilowski: [\(29:16\)](#)

So this is why we watch Netflix, or for me, it's playing chess on my phone, which is just another way of avoiding reality. It looks more sophisticated than playing Candy Crush, but it's the same thing. And so I think what the wisdom of these fathers and mothers is telling us is that acedia is at work any time that we are trying to avoid confronting reality as it is.

Ryan Tafilowski: [\(29:42\)](#)

So Dustin mentioned he's parenting young kids, so am I, my reality is like, that's going to demand most of my time. I don't want to do it, usually. I don't want to change diapers. I don't want to get up in the middle of the night. What's hard for me is I don't want to talk to my three-year-old, and she talks all the time and it's so draining for me to have to be on. But anytime I check out, and that's usually by looking at my phone, that's acedia. That's a failure to meet the demands of love.

Ryan Tafilowski: [\(30:13\)](#)

And even though I'm filling it with some other activity, what I'm actually doing is disengaging from reality. So I think our smartphones are doing that. I think if we have an inability to sit in silence, so if you're driving to work and you have to have something on all the time, that's acedia. If you get home, and the first thing you do is put on a sitcom that you've seen a million times, that's acedia too. It's a failure to be present to the moment, because you're afraid of it.

Dustin Moody: [\(30:40\)](#)

On a broader level, one of the things that we're seeing, at least in the US, around what scholars and philosophers are calling the Great Resignation are employees and workers seeing a lack of meaning in their work. Now there are a lot of reasons for people to resign and change jobs. Job transitions are multi-faceted, so I don't want to oversimplify anything for anyone who may be listening. But one of the recurring themes that we're seeing coming out in literature today is this idea that work is not providing meaning for people.

Dustin Moody: [\(31:09\)](#)

Now, we can argue and discuss whether work should be doing that or the right place to situate work in our lives and our meaning. But I think one of the ways that we're seeing this play out is people job



hopping or leaving their current jobs or realizing through the pandemic that there's different things they want out of their work. Again, those can be benevolent and good and positive reasons to change roles and careers, but it could just be acedia showing up, or acedia reaching the end of its lifespan and people deciding to do something else.

Ryan Tafilowski: ([31:42](#))

Yeah, boredom.

Joanna Meyer: ([31:44](#))

Okay, so help us out here, from a biblical perspective, how do we begin to combat acedic tendencies, I want to make up that word, acedic tendencies, in our own lives?

Ryan Tafilowski: ([31:55](#))

A couple things I would say here. The first is that, as is the case with many of these vices, actually, but especially with acedia, the solution is actually profoundly counterintuitive. Our first impulse, I think, when we feel like we're in the grip of acedia, when we feel like kind of we're in the doldrums of a workday, or actually the doldrums of a career. That's another reason that Evagrius calls this the Noonday Demon, not only does acedia strike during the middle of the workday, "Acedia," he said, "strikes in the middle of a life," which is why you see midlife crises, which is why I would dye my hair blonde and get a convertible and try to find a new career. A midlife crisis is an expression of the Noonday Demon coming and asking, "What do you have to show for this, halfway through?"

Ryan Tafilowski: ([32:44](#))

And so the temptation is, and I think our first impulse is when we feel those doldrums, is to frantically, frantically start paddling. And that's why it shows up as hyperactivity. We've just got to grind through it. And so we think that actually the solution to acedia is more work or working harder. But what these writers will show you is actually that's going to make it worse. It's a bit like, if you're swimming in the ocean and you get caught in a riptide, lifeguards will tell you to let it take you out. Because if you try to thrash against it, you'll exhaust yourself, and you'll drown. If you're in the grip of acedia, the solution actually is not more activity, it's actually less.

Ryan Tafilowski: ([33:29](#))

So this is why it's hard to get our heads around. And this takes two expressions, I think. Number one, someone like Evagrius or John Cassian will tell you that the first thing you do when you feel acedia starting to attack is sit still. And they mean this physically. They want you to pay attention to your body because they see agitation in your body as an expression of agitation in your spirit. So if you feel yourself starting to get restless during a workday, they would literally say, "Sit still. Let it pass. Stay at your desk and see the task through."



Ryan Tafilowski: [\(34:06\)](#)

The word they use in Greek is the word hypomoné. And that word, it gets translated into English as endurance, but it literally means to bear under something. So what it actually means is to let something crush you for a little bit. So sitting still might look like I'm not that happy in my job at the moment, but maybe I let it crush me for a little bit. Or, "It's irritating to work with this coworker, they really grade on me." Maybe you let, them crush you for a little bit. Maybe you bear with it. And another piece of advice that Evagrius will always say to a monk struggling with acedia is to "stay in your cell."

Ryan Tafilowski: [\(34:46\)](#)

So stay at your desk. Stay in your job. Stick it out. Change that diaper. And you might have to summon it as a sense of duty. You might feel no passionate at all, but one of the great fictions of our culture is that you shouldn't do things that you don't feel passionate about. That does not come from the moral universe of the Christian tradition. So that's number one.

Ryan Tafilowski: [\(35:05\)](#)

And the second is the practice of celebration. What acedia really wants for you to do is, number one, drop out the fight, which is why you've got to sit still. And number two, acedia wants you to hate life, wants to drain all your energy, wants you to see in black and white rather than in color, wants you to stop paying attention to beauty, wants you to stop enjoying the music you've always enjoyed. It wants you to stop finding satisfaction in your work.

Ryan Tafilowski: [\(35:32\)](#)

And it's weird to think about celebration as a discipline, but there are times when we have to make ourselves celebrate. And so there's practices that are helpful here. You might keep a gratitude journal. You might mark accomplishments in your career that don't feel like anything in the moment, but they might when you look back on them. It's a way of refusing to let acedia drain the vitality of your existence. So those are a couple practices that come out of this tradition.

Joanna Meyer: [\(35:58\)](#)

So fascinating. Okay, I would love to give you guys the final word as we wrap up the podcast. In just a moment, I will let our listeners know how they can get a copy of Vice and Virtue. I hope they've just gotten a glimpse of the incredible thought that the two of you have put into this project, and how compelling and novel it is. I'm thrilled that they're going to get a chance to get their hands on this.

Joanna Meyer: [\(36:19\)](#)

But as we think about taking first steps to begin to deepen our understanding of these timeless principles for our work lives, and really all of life, what would you encourage them to do? What's like one step they can take to begin to live a more virtuous life and move away from these vices we've described?



Dustin Moody: [\(36:39\)](#)

Well, as Ryan said earlier, it is far easier to diagnose vices than to cultivate virtue. So the book is going to feel slightly incomplete in that regard. But if there's a part two, we'll tackle that later. I think one thing that has helped me kind of working with Ryan in this and examining these things in my own life is just stopping and making space to reflect. And that can be, as Ryan mentioned, through a journal, through conversations with trusted people, perhaps you have a mentor, perhaps you have a trusted advisor that you can talk through. But saying, "How does this show up in my life?" And getting some external perspective on how am I showing up? Or how are these vices showing up in my life and in my work?

Dustin Moody: [\(37:20\)](#)

Because if we don't start with recognizing where they are, we can't really do anything to eliminate them or to cultivate the corresponding virtue. I think it really starts with examining, how is this playing out for me? Is it doom scrolling on my phone? Is it being the Eeyore in the office? Is it an insatiable drive for power that dehumanizes my coworkers, those sorts of things. And you may not be the only person that can diagnose that. If you have trusted people around you, they've probably seen those things as well. So that's where I would probably start with this.

Ryan Tafilowski: [\(37:55\)](#)

Yeah, I think that's really good advice, specifically, the part about getting this out in the open and relationship, I think is really important. I also work as a pastor, so I'm just going to go into pastor mode here for a moment, you'll have to indulge me. But when you read this literature, particularly Evagrius, likes to personify the vices as demons. And so he literally will, for example, report seeing the demon of lust, take the form of a woman, who's trying to entice him out into the desert out, of his cell. But he says that, "All these vices manifest themselves. And what they're all trying to do is get you by yourself, because they know that if you are isolated, you probably can't beat them. You're going to fall into the vicious cycle and it's going to spit you out, and it's going to malform you."

Ryan Tafilowski: [\(38:45\)](#)

So I would just piggyback on Dustin's point, virtue cannot be formed by oneself. There's lots of talk about virtue. These days, the virtue tradition, both the Christian and the non-Christian virtue tradition is enjoying something of a Renaissance. All these tech bros in Silicon Valley are reading the Stoics, people like Seneca, and other philosophers. And it's this vision of sort of self betterment, but that's not really the Christian vision.

Ryan Tafilowski: [\(39:17\)](#)

The whole problem with the vices is that we are no match for them by ourselves. But if we bond together in community and we can get these things out into the open, we actually find that we can bear one another's vices in a way that we can't bear together. So to go into pastor mode, the good old fashioned confession of sin to someone else goes a long way.



Ryan Tafilowski: ([39:41](#))

Now, that's extremely painful. It's very humiliating. But if you can name the vice right out loud, that's a good first step. If you can say to someone out loud, "I was angry at my coworker," or, "I was trying to manipulate my colleague," or, "I saw my colleague and saw them as a sexual opportunity," it doesn't feel good to say that, but the vices want you to keep it quiet. So I would name it in community, would be one piece of advice.

Joanna Meyer: ([40:16](#))

Preach it guys. So our conversation today marks our final conversation with you guys in an official staff capacity. And so before we sign off, I just want to take a moment to thank you for both the vision and the excellence that you've brought to all of your work at Denver Institute. But especially in conversations through publications, books like *Virtue and Vice*, and also through the podcast. Thanks for the gift of your intelligence and the way you've applied it wisely to our daily lives.

Dustin Moody: ([40:45](#))

Thanks, Joanna.

Ryan Tafilowski: ([40:49](#))

Thank you, Joanna.

Joanna Meyer: ([40:49](#))

It's exciting to finally be able to share this project with you. To purchase and download your electronic copy of *Virtue and Vice*, you can head to today's show notes. And to compliment the vices explored in the ebook, over the next five podcast episodes, we'll be exploring five virtues of the Christian faith. We'll be talking to author Andy Crouch about the theme of temperance. We'll hear from Katelyn Beaty, author and journalists who just released a book called *Celebrities for Jesus*. She'll be talking to us about humility. And we'll also talk to ultra-marathon or national champion Sabrina Little who also works as a philosophy professor, and has strong opinions about how athletic training and competition is a beautiful template for developing Christian virtues like courage. You don't want to miss these conversations.

Joanna Meyer: ([41:34](#))

And you also don't want to miss *Women, Working, Calling*, which returns Saturday, October 8th in person here in Denver and online, anywhere in the world. You can find information about it at womenworkingcalling.com. And we'll be exploring themes like how do we work with valor and mercy? What does it look like to have a redemptive understanding of power as Christian women? How can we pursue a whole and healthy life, not just work/life balance? And finally, how does our faith inspire us to master the craft of whatever field we work in? And I am amazed at this year's speaker lineup. We have



women who are leading across industries who will be joining us for the event. So I hope that you two will join us on Saturday, October 8th.

Joanna Meyer: ([42:14](#))

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