

Proverbs A La Carte: Diligence

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[0 : 00] Welcome again. Let me add my welcome to Mike's. Grateful to see you all here and then grateful for you all downstairs and for all of you who are tuning in from home.

So thank you for attending, participating and being here. May God bless the preaching of his word to us today. A few weeks ago, I finally saw the musical production Hamilton. And no, we did not pay a lot of money and go to a theater. We got to watch it from home because my in-laws got Disney Plus.

So we got hooked up with that and really enjoyed it. It was a great production. And one of the lines that reoccurs over and over, if you have seen it, you will recognize it, is that Alexander Hamilton, who the musical is about, keeps vowing to himself and to others that he's not going to waste his shot.

He knows that he's only got one life to live. And he was an extremely ambitious, hardworking, and very gifted individual.

And he stamped his legacy on American history. He did not, at least in terms of a worldly perspective, he did not waste his shot. He did not throw away his shot. Like Hamilton too, we only have one shot. We don't live forever.

[1 : 26] We have a limited amount of time, energy, skills, opportunities, relationships, roles, responsibilities, and we must use them well before our time is done.

Some have more, some have less, but all of us have a shot. How will we use our shot?

Will we throw it away? Will we make it count? Do you want to come to the end of your life and stand before God, your maker and your ruler, and say, I threw away my shot?

I wasted my time, my energy, my talents, my resources, all the opportunities, everything you gave me, and I've got nothing to show for it. Or do we want to be like the servant in the parable of the talents that Jesus told in Matthew 25, who buried his master's money in the ground and didn't do a thing with it?

No. None of us want to be like that. None of us want to waste our shot. We don't want to throw it away. We know we've got a certain amount of time to live, and we want to use it well.

[2 : 42] But what's going to make the difference between throwing away the shot and making it count? And I think from the perspective of the book of Proverbs, it's diligence.

Now, there's lots of other things that we could say about that, but diligence is key. If you've been around Christ the King Church for the past few months, you know we're in a series of the book of Proverbs, which is this precious book of the Bible that teaches us how to live life well in God's world.

It teaches us a skill of wisdom, of making our lives count for something that matters. And it's my job this morning to convince you that without diligence, it's impossible to please the God who has entrusted us with so much to make our lives count.

So, let me take a shot, pun intended, at a working definition of diligence through the lens of the book of Proverbs. Here's what Proverbs gets at what diligence is.

Diligence is the God-oriented use of our resources that honors God and serves others.

[4 : 02] Being a diligent person means that we take full advantage of our energy and our time and our abilities and our responsibilities, everything that God has given us to honor Him and to serve those around us through those responsibilities.

In contrast, Proverbs also spends a significant amount of time painting a picture of the opposite of diligence, which is laziness, slothfulness, as the Bible also puts it.

Slothfulness, laziness, is not a God-oriented use, but a self-oriented use of our resources to please self. A slothful person, a sluggard, as Proverbs often calls them, uses their energy and their time

and their abilities primarily to please themselves without regard to God's authority over their lives or their neighbor's good.

At the outset of this sermon, I don't want to get too far in before saying something as a bit of a confession. I am not preaching this sermon as an expert. I am preaching this sermon as a failure. I am preaching this sermon as a lazy person. There are so many ways that I have repented this week of being slothful in the ways that I have lived my life.

[5 : 26] I can think of countless hours and minutes, even this week, that I have not used to the maximum of glorifying God. So I am not preaching this as some guru.

I am preaching this as a fellow lazy sinner. And so as you hear God's word coming from this particular human instrument, know that this is God's good work in me that is still being done. So don't hear this on my authority. Hear this on the authority of God's word. You might be a lot like me. You might be very aware of ways in which you have been throwing away your shot.

And from personal experience, let me just tell you, don't live there. Don't live there in ways in which you have been wasting your life, ways in which you have not been faithful.

Instead, confess your sin before God as you hear God's word this morning. And bear in mind that each of us has an opportunity to use today, not worrying about yesterday or tomorrow, but today, for God's honor and praise.

[6 : 38] So with that confession in mind, let's turn our attention to what Proverbs is going to teach us about both laziness and diligence. We'll do this in three steps.

The first is that we're going to unpack what Proverbs teaches about the characteristics of laziness and diligence. There's a lot to say about it. So first the characteristics and then the consequences of a lazy life versus a diligent life.

And then lastly, the core of a slothful life versus a diligent life. And then we'll come up with a few, we'll end with a few questions of application.

So first, the characteristics. In the spirit of David Letterman, we're going to do a top ten list. And you're probably thinking, oh great, a ten point sermon. That is not good. But I'll be brief.

There'll be quick snapshots. But Proverbs has a wonderfully robust picture of both laziness and diligence. So let's look at these. And in contrast to David Letterman, these characteristics are not for laughs.

[7 : 40] These characteristics are a mirror. I want you, as you listen to these characteristics of laziness and diligence, let God's word be to you a mirror. And see in yourself ways in which you need to turn away from a lazy, slothful life, self-oriented use of your resources, and turn toward diligence, which is a God-oriented way of living your life.

So keep your Bibles handy. We'll be hopping around quite a bit in the book of Proverbs. If you don't quite get to it, you can just jot down references. That's fine as well. So top ten characteristics of laziness and diligence.

Number ten. Because that's what David Letterman does. He starts with number ten. Laziness avoids hard work. Diligence is industrious. Laziness avoids hard work.

Diligence is industrious. Take a look at Proverbs 21, 25. Proverbs 21, 25. The desire of the sluggard kills him, for his hands refuse to labor.

There is slowness in the slothful person to put forth effort on much of anything. Proverbs is like riddles lazy people.

[9 : 02] The wise people who wrote the book of Proverbs reserve their most ridiculous language for the sluggard. Listen to Proverbs 19, 24 to just describe how slow the sluggard is to do any kind of effort.

Proverbs 19, 24. The sluggard buries his hand in the dish and will not even bring it back to his mouth. If there's effort involved, the slothful person is reluctant to do it.

One way this can show up in our lives is the P word, procrastination. It's doing all kinds of other things, maybe seeming very industrious, really, but you're actually avoiding the most difficult task. I find a great challenge to do this every week of recognizing, okay, the big thing in front of me is this and it's going to cost me effort. I don't really want to do that, so I'm going to pay attention to all these other things that I can pay attention to before the hard thing.

So, laziness avoids hard work, but on the flip side, the diligent person is industrious, like the ant. Proverbs 6 has this great depiction of the diligent person as an ant.

[10:16] Go to the ant, you sluggard, Proverbs 6 says. Consider her ways and be wise. Without having any chief officer or ruler, she prepares her bread in summer and gathers her food and harvest.

So, the ant eagerly does what needs to be done when it needs to be done. The ant knows her responsibility. Her responsibility is important to her. She hops to it with gusto.

She doesn't avoid hard work. She leans into hard work. She does the hardest thing first. So, laziness avoids hard work. Diligence is industrious.

Number nine, laziness neglects responsibility. Diligence is internally motivated. Laziness neglects responsibility. Diligence is internally motivated.

Proverbs 24. At the end of Proverbs 24, there's this classic depiction of the lazy life. I passed by, starting in verse 30 of Proverbs 24.

[11:17] I passed by the field of a sluggard, by the vineyard of a man lacking sense. And behold, it was overgrown with thorns. The ground was covered with nettles. Its stone wall was broken down.

And then I saw, and I considered it. I looked and received instruction. A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest, and poverty will come upon you like a robber and want like an armed man.

An untended field is a parable of a lazy life. Uncultivated, unprotected, and unproductive. The owner of this field had let his responsibilities go.

He did not daily weed, cultivate, maintain, nurture what he alone had the responsibility to do. He didn't even hire someone else to do it. He just let it go.

But, on the other hand, the aunt from chapter 6, she is internally motivated. Did you notice what it said back there in Proverbs chapter 6?

[12:17] The aunt doesn't have a chief officer or ruler telling her what to do. She is busy doing what she knows needs to be done.

She is internally motivated. She doesn't have someone over her shoulder micromanaging her. Rather, she knows what needs to be done, when it needs to be done, and she's internally motivated to get it done.

And, this doesn't mean that you need to be a productivity guru or an administrative genius. Some of us, yours truly included, are rather organizationally challenged.

It takes a lot of work to get myself organized. But, it does mean that we must recognize that we have responsibilities given to us by God. That we must take them seriously, and we must apply ourselves earnestly to fulfill those responsibilities with excellence.

So, laziness neglects responsibility, but diligence is internally motivated. Number eight, laziness is not dependable.

[13:20] Diligence is trustworthy. Laziness is not dependable. Diligence is trustworthy. Go to Proverbs 10, verse 26.

Proverbs 10, verse 26. This one gets me. Like vinegar to the teeth and smoke to the eyes, so is the sluggard to those who send him.

Those images just make you wince, don't they? Vinegar to the teeth and smoke to the eyes, so is the sluggard to those who send him. Anybody who's sat around a campfire knows how aggravating and debilitating smoke in the eyes can be.

And, equally aggravating and debilitating is entrusting a lazy person with a job that needs to be done. And, it doesn't get done, or at least it doesn't get done right. So, a lazy person is not dependable.

He is not faithful in what he is being given to do. But, a diligent person, on the other hand, is trustworthy. They regularly complete things on time and with excellence when they're entrusted with responsibilities.

[14:29] Because, they love excellence. They love a job well done. They go above and beyond what's expected because, like the aunt, they're internally motivated. They know what needs to be done, when it needs to be done, and they are internally motivated to get it done.

It's not just because they don't want to be fired. It's not just because they want to please their boss. It's because they, from the inside, are seeking to love excellence. Number seven.

Laziness wastes resources. Diligence stewards them well. Laziness wastes resources, but diligence stewards them well.

Well, Proverbs 12, 27 says, Whoever is slothful will not roast his game, but the diligent man will get precious wealth.

So, a lazy person will let fresh meat just spoil for a lack of will to use it properly, wasting the resource that they're given. This holds true for fresh meat and groceries, even more so for relationships, opportunities, talents, and most of all, time and energy.

[15 : 38] These are precious resources that God has given us. And we must not let them simply go to waste because we don't want to do the hard work that is necessary to make something of those resources.

And on the flip side, rather than wasting resources, a diligent person is a good steward of their energy and their time and their talents, possessions.

Proverbs 27 has kind of an extended exhortation to the student of wisdom. Proverbs 27, verses 23 to 27.

Listen to this exhortation. Know well the condition of your flocks and give attention to your herds, for riches do not last forever.

And does a crown endure to all generations? When the grass is gone and the new growth appears and the new vegetation of the mountains is gathered, the lambs will provide your clothing, the goats the price of a field.

[16 : 37] There will be enough goat's milk for your food, for the food of your household, and the maintenance of your servants. Every one of us has been entrusted with resources. Probably not herds of goats and flocks of sheep, but certainly we have been entrusted with relationships, with some money, with time, energy, skills, and opportunities.

God's word is telling us here to take careful inventory of what we have been entrusted with, to give earnest thought for how to use it wisely for the remainder of our lives.

So laziness wastes resources, diligence stewards them well. Number six, laziness talks big, diligence is true to its word. Laziness talks big, diligence is true to its word.

This great short little proverb in Proverbs 14, 23, 14, 23 says this, In all toil there is profit, but mere talk tends only to poverty.

When I was in high school, some friends and I decided that we were going to make a movie. We had all kinds of great ideas. We had a few very enthusiastic planning meetings.

[17 : 51] We nailed down the plot and the setting and the equipment we would need to borrow. But eventually the project petered out because we just lacked the grit to actually make it happen.

It was going to require way more effort than any of us wanted to put in. It's easy to talk about doing something. It's another thing to actually put it into action.

The sluggard is consistently saying, I'm going to get to that one of these days. But good intentions and wishful thinking don't actually lead to much. But in contrast, the diligent are true to their word.

There is little difference between what they say they're going to do and what they actually accomplish. Better to just do something than make big plans and have nothing come of them.

Or to make empty promises just to make people feel better. Saying, yep, I'm first on my to-do list, but it actually gets neglected throughout the week. Number five, laziness pursues worthless things.

[18 : 52] Diligence does the next right thing. Laziness pursues worthless things, but laziness does the next right thing. In Proverbs 12, verse 11, it says, Whoever works his land will have plenty of bread, but whoever follows worthless pursuits lacks sense.

Imagine with me a man who's got big ideas, and he has about how to use his gifts, how to pursue his dreams. You probably have heard someone like this talk before.

He talks big, he dreams big. He gets involved in things, though, that actually ultimately wind up bankrupting his dreams and his gifts. He gets involved in online gambling or online video gaming to acquire fast wealth to accomplish those dreams.

And all the while, he neglects his family that's right in front of him. Or he neglects his day job that is right in front of him. And pursuing these worthless things leads to him actually losing everything.

Being slothful doesn't mean you never put forth some kind of effort. It could just mean that you're putting forth effort into the wrong things. Slothful people fail to prioritize the right things because they seem hard or ordinary or boring.

[20 : 11] Instead, they energetically pursue exciting things that promise a lot, and they seem a little bit easier. But the diligent, on the other hand, prioritize the thing that God has given them right in front of them.

As in the proverb, it's the land. Whoever works his land will have plenty of bread. The land's not going anywhere. It's just right there. And they prioritize the land that God has given them to cultivate, and they zealously work it.

They do the next right thing that's in front of them. For us, that land could be putting the phone down and playing with your kids. It could mean turning off the TV and writing that letter. It could mean closing the distracting browser window and write that report that your boss has asked for. Only God. God has only given us a certain amount of time and energy and talent and wealth. And so we just do the next right thing that's in front of us.

That's what diligence does. Number four. Laziness makes excuses. Diligence embraces risk and mess. Laziness makes excuses.

[21 : 18] Diligence embraces risk and mess. There's this hilarious proverb in Proverbs 22, 13. The sluggard says, There's a lion outside.

I should be killed in the streets. There was about as much a chance for the ancient Israelite to be mauled in the streets of Jerusalem as a modern person to be killed in a plane crash. On paper, it's a possibility.

But in reality, it's not something to be concerned about. The point of the proverb is to expose the excuses that lazy people make to avoid doing what needs to be done.

Let me give you a pitiful personal example. When I was a teenager, I knew I needed to read my Bible. It was good for me. I knew it was good for me. I knew I needed to do it to grow my relationship with God.

But I didn't really want to put the effort into doing it. And I had this great excuse for not reading my Bible. This was when Eugene Peterson was translating the Message Bible.

[22 : 18] And I thought, you know, I'll just wait until Eugene Peterson is all done. And then I'll buy the Message Bible. And I'll have a Bible that I can read. And it'll make sense to me. Not like this new King James.

It's just too much effort for me to actually read it. I wish someone had slapped me upside the head and said, Billy, read your new King James. It's not that hard.

It's not going to kill you. I love Proverbs 14.4, which kind of counters this. Where there are no oxen, the manger is clean. But abundant crops come by the strength of the ox.

It's a little bit cryptic. Here's what it's getting at. The idea is that it's pretty easy to find excuses to not keep oxen. They're dirty. They're messy. They eat a lot. They poop a lot. It takes a lot of work to take care of oxen.

But the fact is, the ancient Israelite farmer just didn't produce much of a crop on his land unless he had oxen to pull the plow. Him by himself didn't really have the strength to do much of a crop.

[23 : 18] The lazy make excuses, but the diligent embrace the risk and the mess of the oxen. Obviously, the diligent are reckless or careless with their risk-taking.

But the fact is that to use what God has given us well requires some element of risk. And some element of mess. This is true of getting married and having a family.

It's true of meeting new people and making friends. Of venturing an idea that might get shot down. Of having a difficult conversation with someone that you know you need to have.

Of confessing sin to someone. Or crossing the street to engage your neighbor for Christ. Whereas the lazy make excuses for these things. The diligent tell themselves, If it's the right thing that needs to be done, I'm just going to do it.

I'm going to trust God with the results. No matter the risk and no matter the mess. Number three. Laziness is self-indulgent, but diligence loves excellence.

[24 : 19] Laziness is self-indulgent, but diligence loves excellence. Back to Proverbs 6 and the example with the ants. The wise person asks the sluggard, How long will you lie there, you sluggard?

When will you arise from your sleep? A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest. And all this bad stuff comes upon you. Did you notice all those littles?

Self-indulgence doesn't have to look like a 48-hour Netflix binge. It can be a Facebook break here, a YouTube video here, just one more episode.

Wherein there is actually a responsibility that needs to be attended to. Now obviously this doesn't mean that we can't take breaks or enjoy legitimate pleasures like sleep or a good book or a TV show.

But there's a difference between enjoying a God-given pleasure in faith and avoiding a responsibility by giving into every distraction that presents itself to your mind.

[25 : 22] The opposite of self-indulgence is loving excellence. Proverbs 22, 29 commends the man who loves excellence. Proverbs 22, 29.

Do you see a man skillful at his work? He will stand before kings. He will not stand before obscure men. It takes some serious intentionality and effort to hone a skill to the point of excellence. It doesn't just happen. Well, for some people it does, but they're the rare ones. One cannot live self-indulgently and love excellence at the same time. Faithfulness and excellence in your walk with Christ, in your home, in your friendships, in your vocation, in your skills, in your talents, in serving this church body.

It takes committed effort that competes with the time and energy that our self-exalting hearts want to put toward self-indulgence. So it takes effort, good effort, to love excellence as opposed to indulging ourselves with that time and energy that God has given us.

Number two, laziness brings shame. Diligence honorably provides. Proverbs 10, 5.

[26 : 40] He who gathers in summer is a prudent son, but he who sleeps in the harvest is a son who brings shame. If a member of the family is lazy, his or her actions affect the family dynamic.

You've probably witnessed this in your family, or you've been the one who's brought this about in your family. Even in our individualistic American culture, we still feel this. If one family member doesn't pull their weight, it affects everyone else.

If one person is known as an unreliable, unfaithful slacker, it can affect the reputation of the whole family. We don't live as islands. What we do, how we live our lives, affects others.

It can bring shame. The diligent person understands this well. In Proverbs 31, there's this beautiful poem tribute to a kind of woman who models wisdom in every aspect of her life.

And in Proverbs 31, 27, it honors her diligence to provide for her household. It says, she looks well to the ways of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness.

[27 : 47] So the wise woman who diligently provides for her family does not bring shame upon her family, but she brings honor and blessing on them. She does not eat the bread of idleness that brings shame, but she honors God and she honors her family.

Lastly, number one, we have arrived at the top of the list, or the bottom of the list, however that works. Laziness is wise in its own eyes, but diligence pleases the Lord.

In Proverbs 26, we find the root of the laziness problem. After ridiculing the sluggard for three verses, starting in verse 13, the wise man concludes by showing us what really is going on at the heart of a sluggard in verse 16.

The sluggard is wiser in his own eyes than seven men who can answer sensibly. Ultimately, lazy people are biblical fools.

A biblical fool is someone who does not fear God. They don't take God seriously. They leave God out in their calculations. And this is not just a minor problem.

[29 : 02] Because God is there. We must take him seriously. The sluggard only sees himself, only lives for himself, and only cares for himself or herself. In contrast, look about what Proverbs says about the diligent person.

In Proverbs 15, 19, it contrasts the sluggard and the diligent, but it uses a different word. The way of a sluggard, 15, 19, is a hedge of thorns.

But the path of, it doesn't say diligent, it says the path of the upright is a level highway. Did you notice who is contrasted with the sluggard? It's the upright. We're expecting the word diligent, but instead, the Proverbs uses the word upright.

And upright, throughout Scripture, consistently in the Old Testament, that word describes people who fear God, who do what God commands, and who live in a way that pleases God. In other words, those who live a diligent life please the Lord because they acknowledge God as the ultimate authority of their lives and not themselves.

So, these are the characteristics of laziness and diligence according to Proverbs. Before we move on, just take a moment and take stock. Do you see ways where you are risking throwing away your shot?

[30 : 23] Do you see reflections of laziness in your life? Do you see ways in which you need to grow in diligence? We'll circle back to that in a moment, but it's good to pay attention to it now.

Now, much more briefly, what are the consequences of a lazy life and a diligent life? And then, what's at the core? First, the consequences. What are the consequences of a lazy life?

Three Ds. Difficulty, deficiency, and dissatisfaction. Difficulty, deficiency, and dissatisfaction. I just read Proverbs 15, 19.

The way of the sluggard is a hedge of thorns. Ironically, this is so ironic, the sluggard wants the easy path. But, by choosing that easy path, he actually chooses a very difficult one.

It's hard to be lazy. It simply doesn't pay in the long run. So, the consequence is difficulty.

Secondly, is deficiency. In Proverbs 10, verse 4, Proverbs is pretty blunt and says, A slack hand causes poverty.

[31 : 31] A slack hand, lazy people tend to not have enough. This is kind of a no-brainer. You don't have what you don't work for. There's not a lot that can be gained in life without some effort.

And lastly, dissatisfaction. Proverbs 13, verse 4 says, The soul of the sluggard craves and gets nothing. The sluggard can't get no satisfaction.

He desires a full stomach and a happy life, but he is not satisfied because he doesn't put the effort into getting it. Until he cares enough to get up and to do something about it, he will always be complaining about what he doesn't have, even though it may be in his power to attain it.

Now, what about a diligent life? What are the consequences of living diligently? Not three D's, but three S's. First, success. Proverbs 12, 24.

The hand of the diligent will rule. In general, those who are zealous to use their resources for God's honor and for the good of others will have a measure of success in what they set their hands to do.

[32 : 45] However, remember this is Proverbs. Proverbs is general principles to live life by, not guaranteed divine promises of X plus Y equals Z.

There are plenty of examples, even in the Bible, of righteous, diligent people who suffer and fail in their endeavors, and it's just for no fault of their own.

That's the kind of world we live in. But, in general, those who work hard tend to be successful. They tend to accomplish something with their lives. They have given respect.

They are given roles of greater responsibility and some kind of reward of wealth or privilege and honor. So, success. Also, sufficiency. Proverbs 10, verse 3.

This great promise. The Lord does not let the righteous go hungry. And if the diligent are upright before God and righteous before Him, if they fear Him, then the living God Himself will attend to their needs.

[33 : 51] They will not find themselves lacking a roof over their head or food on their table. Now, again, of course, these are general principles, but they tend to hold true. And lastly, success, sufficiency, satisfaction.

Proverbs 13, verse 4, we just looked at, The soul of the sluggard craves and gets nothing, while the soul of the diligent is richly supplied. There is something wonderfully satisfying about eating a solid meal and laying your tired head down on the pillow after a hard day's labor.

God satisfies the soul of the diligent with simple pleasures of good work, good food, and good rest day after day after day. It's almost as if that's part of the fabric that He wove into the existence of our lives.

Listen to Ecclesiastes, chapter 2. Even the very cynical and depressed author of Ecclesiastes wrote these words, There is nothing better for a person than that he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil.

This also I saw is from the hand of God, for apart from Him, who can eat or have enjoyment? So rather than making us miserable through our work, God actually intends to satisfy us in our labor.

[35 : 10] It's the kind of life that anyone would want to live. So that's the consequences of a lazy or diligent life. What's at the core of laziness and diligence?

We've already hinted at this. At the core of laziness is a worship of self. A slothful person does not lift their heart in devotion to anyone or anything higher than self.

They do not fear God. They are wise in their own eyes, wiser than seven men who could answer sensibly. And they do not see themselves as having responsibility toward anyone except themselves.

They view their energy and their time and their resources as their own. They assume that they have the authority to use their resources and responsibilities and opportunities as they see fit.

They have overlooked the beginning of wisdom, which is the fear of the Lord. And that is what is at the core of the diligent life.

[36 : 14] An earnest desire to please the Lord, to use the resources that He has given us well because we know that we are not our own. Now before we turn the corner into seeking how to apply this to our lives, I want to just fixate on that truth for just a moment to help us be motivated and to seek diligence.

I want to fixate on this core of diligence that we are not our own. First, we are not our own because we're creatures. God is our creator. He made us. He owns us.

That's true from the first sentence of the Bible. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. And do you know what the Bible calls God's creation? In Genesis 2, it says that when God had finished His six days worth of creating, He rested from His work.

That's right. God Himself works. God Himself is diligent. In creating us, God worked. He had a job to do and He did it exceedingly well.

And as Christians, we are not only not our own because God made us and worked in making us, but because in Christ He worked to redeem us.

[37 : 26] Listen how Paul in Ephesians 1 describes God's masterpiece work of redeeming us. Ephesians 1 verse 19. And what is the immeasurable greatness of His power toward us who believe according to the working of His great might that He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand of the heavenly places.

Later, Paul describes us as believers as God's workmanship, crafted that we might do good works which God prepared in advance for us to do.

So, at the core of diligence is recognizing that we are not our own and that when we diligently make our life count, we are imitating our working God. We work because He has worked, not only to create us, but to redeem us in Christ with His great and powerful grace.

And in laboring in that way, imitating our working God, there is great satisfaction. Oh, and according to Philippians 2, that work is not just in the past.

He's not done working in you. Listen to Philippians 2. Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now not only in my presence, but much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.

[38 : 51] We're not alone in our working. At the core of diligence is the assuring promise that our diligence is always accompanied with His power. We don't labor on our own.

We labor in partnership with His Spirit who is at work in us. And He enables, by His power, our efforts to faithfully make much of Him with our lives.

So assuming that you're convinced, assuming that you don't want to throw away your shot, let me conclude with three questions for us to ask ourselves so that we can become a more diligent people.

First, what are the limited resources that I've been entrusted with? What are the limited resources I've been entrusted with?

It's worth taking some time, maybe this afternoon, sometime this week, to just make a list of what you have been entrusted with. That list, whether it's your time, your health, your energy, your skills, your possessions, your relationships, your wealth, your responsibilities, none of it is ours inherently.

[39 : 57] It's all been given, all been entrusted. And that list should produce gratitude toward God, and it should also sober us. There are so many assets that our Creator and King has entrusted us with, and none of them are just for our enjoyment, although it's good to enjoy them.

Think about our time, just alone, our time. None of us knows how long that little hyphen is between our date of birth and our date of death on our tombstone.

None of us knows how long that will be. Listen to Ephesians 5, verse 15. Look carefully, then, how you walk, not as unwise, but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. It is worth just taking stock of the time with which God has entrusted us, and asking, how am I using my time well? So take stock of what you've been entrusted with.

They're limited resources, and they need to be used well to please our Master. Second, what priorities must I pursue with these resources?

[41 : 08] What priorities must I pursue with these resources? I recently listened to a brief biography of Martin Luther, the great reformer from the 16th century.

That guy had talent, and that guy had energy. But do you know what? Even a world changer like Martin Luther couldn't do everything.

He had a specific place that he lived in, with specific people he knew, with specific tasks to do. He couldn't be everywhere. He couldn't do everything. He couldn't solve all the world's problems.

He only had so much he could accomplish with his life. Ultimately, God has given us just a few priorities to diligently pursue. My brother-in-law has famously said, at least within our family, has famously said, if I can be a faithful lover of Jesus, a faithful husband, and a faithful father, I'm doing pretty good.

That's enough to fill my plate. I like that perspective. It grounds me. So what has God told us to diligently pursue? Well, Scripture gives us a few priorities.

[42 : 13] Deuteronomy 6.17. You shall diligently keep the command of the Lord your God, his testimonies, and his statutes which he has commanded you. That comes first. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, with all your strength.

That kind of sounds like diligence, doesn't it? How is that priority doing in your life? Obviously, that doesn't mean you read your Bible every moment of the day. But it does mean that most of us have ground to take in diligently learning what pleases the Lord, in enjoying fellowship with him in his word and in prayer.

2 Peter, if you haven't read that in a while, it's a great little place to start. Three little chapters. And it's this book that just motivates me to godly diligence.

Peter urges diligent steps towards growth. He doesn't heap condemnation upon us. He just says, make every effort. He's a coach on the sidelines.

Come on. You can do this. Make every effort to know and please the Lord by growing in the grace of Jesus. So that's one priority. The second I would commend to you from Scripture is to take care of the people around you.

[43 : 24] If you're part of a family, that means diligently attending to the role and responsibility God has given you as a husband or a wife, father or mother. If you are a child in the family and still under your parents' roof, it means diligently honoring your parents.

If you're a parent, it means diligently teaching your children to love and obey God. If you're single, like Paul was, you have a certain amount of freedom to prioritize serving the church, caring for friends, investing your time and priorities that folks and families might not have as much time to do. So whatever you're a part of, whatever people you got around you, are you diligently attending to your most basic roles and responsibilities in serving the people around you?

How about your vocation? Are you being diligent in your vocation as an employee, as an employer, as a student? If you're in school, high school, college, diligence is a skill that is essential to learn at this age.

Learning diligent now and pursuing your priorities in your school and your job now, young people, is incredibly helpful. You don't primarily exist to please yourself. You exist to please the Lord by faithfully using your resources well in this time of your life.

[44 : 44] And the third question is very brief. Lastly, what is one way, one way that you can lean into your priorities with your resources this week?

What is one step you can take to lean into the hard work of making every effort to please the Lord with your priorities and your resources this week?

Is there one change you need to make? Is there a habit to start? Is there a habit to put to death? What can you do this week to be a more diligent follower of Jesus?

People of God, we've got one shot. Don't throw away your shot. Use it well for the one who created you and redeemed you. You are not your own.

Let's use our limited resources and responsibilities to make much of the one who has given us all that we have. Let's pray. Oh God, you know how weak I feel in delivering this truth to your people.

[45 : 59] Thank you, God, that you are a God who forgives the lazy. Thank you, God, that you are, as we sang this morning, the friend of sinners. Thank you that you are a God who redeems and transforms us by your grace.

God, help us not to pursue diligence because it will save us. Help us to pursue diligence because you have worked for us in Christ. And to do so in a way that pleases you, our Heavenly Father. Lord, help us not to throw away our shot. Help us to make it count. For your glory, in Jesus' name, amen.