

# The Sluggard

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[ 0 : 00 ] That middling passage there, that middling section, the page, your Bibles, page 548.

We'll read again from verse 12, although I'll be particularly focusing on verses 13 to 16, but let's read from verse 12 again. Read down to verse 16 just to get the context of the passage.

Do you see a man who's wise in his own eyes? There's more hope for a fool than for him. The sluggard says there's a lion in the road, there's a lion in the streets.

As a door turns on its hinges, so does a sluggard on his bed. The sluggard buries his hand in the dish. It wears him out to bring it back to his mouth. The sluggard is wiser in his own eyes than seven men who can answer sensibly.

It's one of the great teachings that's found in the book of Proverbs. You might say it's one of the common themes that runs through this very long book of wise sayings.

[ 1 : 08 ] And sometimes we think even a subject that doesn't even merit, you know, merit a sermon or merit any kind of spiritual undertaking, spiritual understanding, is a subject that, you know, we might even dismiss as not worthy of consideration.

There's nothing unspiritual. There's nothing unbiblical. There's nothing irrelevant for the Christian to contemplate concerning this whole matter, this subject of laziness.

In a wonderfully descriptive English language, the lazy person is described as the sluggard, the sluggard, the sluggish, lazy individual whose character, whose whole life is lived not to the glory of God, but to the glory of self.

Now, of course, it's not just the book of Proverbs that we see this subject mentioned. In fact, we see it throughout Scripture. It's a whole of Scripture teaching. There's the warning throughout Scripture against laziness.

And, of course, the corresponding opposite, where we read the promotion of work, of energy, of service, of active trust, of active faith in God, the active faith that honours God and the work that God has given us to do, that work that he's given us to do for him.

[ 2 : 38 ] So, this evening we will consider this whole matter of the sluggard. We're going to look at what we're warned against in order that we apply the teaching from this passage.

And let me just say this, I was preparing this on, I think it was Friday, I was as much convicted by what I was looking at and studying as I'm sure you will be convicted.

I certainly have been convicted in these words. Because what we need to look at as we apply God's Word, we apply our hearts, we apply our minds, we apply our very bodies to serve God in the place where God has sent us to live for him, to glorify him.

And so, for each one of us, we're to apply God's Word. And yes, apply it in action. And remember, who do we follow?

Whose example do we follow, of course? Who is anything but the sluggard in giving glory to God and the work that God has given him to do? It was, of course, the Lord Jesus. He did the work, every aspect, every minutia of the work that his Father had given him to do.

[ 3 : 47 ] Jesus did it wholly and fully and completely. Jesus was no sluggard. Jesus delighted to do his Father's will, even in the most difficult of circumstances, even unto death on the cross.

Now, of course, there are quite a number of passages, even in Proverbs, where we actually see the sluggard mentioned. I'm sure when you saw the title this morning, you would wonder, perhaps, is he going to mention the most famous verse of all relation to the sluggard in chapter 6, verse 6, go to the ant, thou sluggard.

Now, that call to observe one of God's tiniest creations, to notice how, you know, if you've ever watched, seen an ant, it never ceases in its work. And there's that call then from Scripture to have a work ethic for the apex of God's creation, humanity, mankind, to honour God through the work that

God has given us to do.

Because God blesses man with work. If you remember, Adam in the Garden of Eden, Adam was given the land to toil, to look after, to cultivate, to subdue Adam given, you know, subdue the earth. In the very act of, in the very act of creation itself, of course, when we think of God, God working. And God, of course, continuing to work for the good of his people and the glory of his name.

[ 5 : 20 ] But it's this section here in chapter 26, because of all the references and proverbs to the sluggard, it's this section here that has the most, you might say, the most condensed teaching.

It's not just one verse isolated. It's actually, as you see there, quite a number of verses together. As you see there, the whole peril and danger of being a sluggard.

Four, you might even, if you want to add verse 12, five verses, consecutive verses, that bring home the disgrace of being a sluggard. There's a disgrace in the eyes of man, certainly.

And above all, a disgrace. The eyes of God. These verses that capture the whole evil of laziness.

And therefore, these verses that should lift you, lift you away from that tendency to laziness, to being a sluggard, and to raise you to that God-honoring labor and action that reveals your love for God and your love for your neighbor that's the very opposite of being a sluggard.

So, four things that I want to take from this passage. And the first thing we see in verse 13, actually, we'll actually look at verse 12 and 16 together.

[ 6 : 35 ] They sort of combine together. But verse 13, the excuse of the sluggard, the sluggard says, there's a lion in the road, there's a lion in the street.

This is righteous humor. This is righteous humor. Nothing wrong with righteous humor. It's a great device for bringing home the absurdity of a self-centered sloth.

That self-centered laziness that's not going to obey the command of God to go and do and serve.

And you see the humor there, that this person, this attitude of this person, he's not going to go out to work because what does he do?

He sees, he thinks he sees a fierce lion roaming the streets. He thinks his life's going to be in danger if he, you know, if he steps outside the door. Never mind that lions tend to sleep during the day, during working hours, but never mind that the sluggard has accidentally heard a rumor that there's a lion in the street.

It's enough to convince him that he can't go out to work. There's so much danger to himself. So he thinks he's got the perfect excuse not to leave the safety of his house because there's danger lurking outside.

[ 7 : 46 ] Now, okay, that's a very basic description, but of course there has to be a deeper meaning, isn't there? There has to be an application for the Christian. We have to get the bigger picture, the big picture.

Just think of it like this. If you are a Christian, if you're a believer, God has called you to serve him. He's called you to obey him. He's called you to do the work that he's given you and you to do.

Now, that work may be physical work. It might be academic work. It could be work that involves your mind. It could be work that's done within the home, with the family. It may be work that's done outside the home.

But it's work that God has given you to do to honour and glorify him. And then, of course, it could be the work of prayer. It could be the work of compassion. It could be the work of coming alongside someone in need.

It could be the work of telling others of the Lord Jesus. Well, look at the attitude of the slugger. The slugger says, Oh, the work's too difficult. I'm not equal to the task.

[ 8 : 54 ] It's too much danger if I get involved. Let someone else face the lions outside. Let somebody else do the work. I'm sure that kind of thinking's happened in your life because it certainly has in my own life.

You know, that fear that dominates your heart and mind when God asks you to do a certain task for him, maybe to go to a certain place, maybe to go outside of your comfort zone, and you look at the circumstances, and from a very self-centred, self-absorbed perspective, you don't do what God asks you to do.

You run away. Think of Jonah. Think of Jonah when he was asked to preach the word to the pagan people in the Nineveh. All he could see were the lions.

The ferocity of the people in the Nineveh. They had such a reputation for being fierce people. You know, you can just see Jonah's mind thinking, how could the word of God enter the hearts of such

wicked people?

He saw the ferocity of these people, certainly at first when he refused to obey God. But he didn't see, at first anyway, he didn't see the all-surpassing enabling of God who'd sent him to these people.

[10:10] And you know, God will give you, well, what might at the time, the time of his calling, time of his sending, what might seem just too much, too difficult, too fraught with danger.

But we're told, take your eyes of circumstances to put your eye unto God, the God of all comfort, the God of all grace, the God who promises to be with you always.

He's not going to send you out without his presence with you. He's not going to send you and not protect and not guard and not keep and not guide you. Think of the words that Jesus gave to his disciples.

Matthew 10, 16, I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Yes, the ferocious beasts are there, as it were. Yes, there are those who want nothing more than to shred the gospel and destroy God's people.

But that should not deter you from going out with the Word of God from your witness to those around you. You know, again, think of the promise that, the many promises that God has given you people through his Word.

[11:23] You know, when you do face lion-like opposition, Psalm 91, for example, you'll tread upon the lion and the cobra, you'll trample the great lion and the serpent.

And then God's Word, because he loves me, says the Lord, I will rescue him. I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name. He'll call upon me and I'll answer him. I'll be with him in trouble. I'll deliver him and honor him.

Long life, I will satisfy him and show my salvation. You know, take that word of promise with you. As you go out, as you embark on whatever God has given you to do for him, yes, we know the world outside hates you for being a Christian.

Yes, you are going out as sheep amongst wolves, but you're not alone. You're not alone. And so this charge here of being a sluggard, really and fundamentally, is really an indication of a lack of trust in God.

And for the Christian, of course, in the full New Covenant context, it's a lack of faith in the Lord Jesus. So trust him. Don't be like that sluggard who was terrified of the lion in the street, the fierce lion that was somehow roaming the streets.

[12:44] But be assured that God is there, that God's presence is with you, even as you go out into the arena of the world where, well, yes, where the lions are, as it were, but where you are to do the work what he's given you to do to accomplish in his name, by his strength and for his glory.

And so unlike the sluggard, have no excuses. God's will must be done, yes, even through you. You know, again, I think with everything that we look at here, we have to turn to the example of the Lord Jesus.

You know, the sluggard made excuses. Jesus made no excuses. Jesus made no excuses in the great work that his father had sent him to do.

And yes, the lions were there, figuratively speaking, of course, the lions, they were ready to pounce on Jesus. I mean, Jesus lived amongst these wild beasts, these beasts that sought to devour him. But Jesus could echo the words of the psalm, the psalm that said, to do thy will I take delight. Jesus was the very opposite of the sluggard.

[13:58] Jesus was active throughout his ministry. Jesus had work to do in spreading the good news. Jesus had that absolute commitment to do that work.

Even as he's approaching the cross, even as he's praying to his father just before his crucifixion, you read in John 17, I brought you glory on earth by completing the work you've given me to do.

And that really takes us on to the next problem of the sluggard. Verse 14, the procrastination. You know, Jesus completed the work his father had given him to do.

The sluggard doesn't complete the work that he's given to do. Verse 14, as a door turns on its hinges, so there's a sluggard on his bed. Here we go again, the righteous humour.

But making a very perceptive point. This, you know, the absurd sinfulness of a lazy disposition. And just look at the description here, the picture of someone, this person who's so attached to his bed, it's like the door that turns.

[15:05] You know, the door, yes, it turns, but it never moves beyond its hinges. And it's like the person is so attached to where he's lying, where he's sleeping, that he doesn't move beyond a fixed position.

And so he justifies his habitual laziness. He's achieved nothing. He's put off what has to be done immediately. Procrastination rather than action.

Now, let's be clear, this isn't a condemnation of rest. And it certainly isn't a promotion of any kind of workaholic lifestyle.

I mean, Jesus rested from his work. God rested on the seventh day, the seventh day of creation. It's for each one of us to follow that Sabbath principle.

I need to remember again and again that principle of complete rest, one day in seven. Human bodies require rest. The land itself requires rest.

[16:07] But where the work of the Lord is postponed, where that work is, you know, put aside, never actually acted upon, then that's where condemnation has to be directed.

And we all, each one of us, we all admit that sin. When God gives you, when he gives you that particular work to perform, it could be the urgency of gospel mission, the urgency of telling others the good news, that urgency of making known the gospel.

Do we always have that immediate response to go out there with the word? Or do we wait for a more opportune time? You know, when it feels right. You know, when we don't have so much to do elsewhere.

But if Jesus calls you to action, there's no place for procrastination. There has to be that decisive response. Why? Well, the days are evil and the needs are great.

So, you know, again, look at scriptural examples to point this out. Look at the call of Jesus to his disciples. Jesus called them to follow him. Now, what do we read?

[17:14] Do we read that they hesitated, that they somehow weighed up the pros and cons of following Jesus? Is that what you read? Not at all. We read of immediately following Jesus.

Think of James and John in the boat with their father Zibbidi. They're in the boat. They're preparing their nets. Jesus calls them. And we read in scripture, and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed Jesus.

And surely that has to be your response and my response when we're called to a particular act of service. Because delays could be costly. So respond with that immediate desire to do the will of God and do it in service, in humble service for his glory.

And we think, you know, again, we think of Jesus responding immediately when needs arose. And, you know, I just love the way that all the gospel writers, again and again you see the word immediately that tells of the instant actions of Jesus when critical moments, critical occurrences happened.

Let's give some examples. Remember when the disciples were on the boat in the Sea of Galilee and they see Jesus walking on the water as Jesus is walking towards them and they're terrified.

[18:37] But as Matthew tells us in chapter 14, it's a ghost, they said, and cried out in fear. And what's Jesus' response to that? It's immediate.

What do we read? But Jesus immediately said to them, take courage, it is I. Don't be afraid. And then, it's a little bit further on, Peter gets out of the boat.

He walks towards Jesus. And the winds increase and he begins to sink. And Peter cries out, Lord, save me. What do we read again in Matthew 14? Immediately, Jesus reached out his hand and caught him.

You have little faith, he said. Why did you doubt? Again, what did we see a few weeks ago in the healing of blind Bartimaeus? It was a few Sunday mornings ago. We're told that when Jesus restored that man's sight, again, it was an immediate healing.

And then we read in Mark 10, immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road. No hesitation on Jesus' part when the need was immediate.

[19:40] He responded at once to alleviate the distress of the disciples in the boat. He responded at once to the distress of Peter. And yes, even in these times when you call out to God for his mercy in particularly difficult and trying situations, when maybe you're at your wit's end.

Yes, and even when he calls you to wait, even that call to wait is an immediate call. Because it's a testing of your faith. Your faith in the all-seeing and all-knowing God, knowing that he is with you always, even in these times of waiting.

So don't be like the sluggard who's compared to the door and its hinges. You know, turning but never moving. In that sort of laziness of self-perceived comfort.

Get going with the work that God has given you to do. And be urgent. Urgent in responding to that call that God gives you to go, to be his disciple wherever he sends you in that work.

And fulfill that work in delight, in delighting to do God's will. Don't be guilty of the sin of idleness in the work that God has given you to do.

[ 20 : 56 ] Which, in fact, takes us on to the next verse. The next section. Verse 15. The idleness of the sluggard. The sluggard buries his hand in the dish.

It wears him out to bring it back to his mouth. Another piece of righteous humor. Tragedy this time. The tragedy of the sluggard.

You're seeing here a description of the sheer emptiness of a life that's lived in idleness. You know, little care for the urgency of life.

Little desire to live life to the glory of God. And you see that in the word picture here. See what's happening. This man has a bowl of food before him. And he's so lazy that, well, he's just expended enough energy to put his hand in the bowl to touch the food where the food lies.

But he doesn't even have the energy to take this hand away from the bowl. And what's he doing? He's actually starving himself through lack of action. He can't see that his indolence, his idleness is actually bringing disaster to his life.

[ 22 : 06 ] He can't see the long-term consequences of his present laziness. And as a result, he's going to starve. He can't see that his idleness is actually bringing about his ruin.

And you see, this example here, really, yes, okay, the example itself, first and foremost, is about satisfying a physical need. And if, you know, if that's considered a failing, which of course it is, and it's a failing of huge proportion, how much more the idleness of failing to satisfy our spiritual needs. You know, let's think of it like this. You can go so far in your devotions to the Lord. You can go so far in your commitment to the work that God has given you to do.

You can go so far in your responsibilities even within a congregation. You can go so far, but no further. And you don't complete the tasks that God has given you to do for the furtherance of His kingdom.

And you know, when you think even of our commitment to the work of a church, the work of a congregation, even for your very soul, see, the means of grace that are provided Lord's Day after Lord's Day, times of fellowship one with another, for example.

[ 23 : 30 ] And when these things become, these means become less and less a part of your true spiritual discipline, and you prefer the idleness of staying back, not being involved, you're not feeding your soul as you ought, you're not being nourished by the Word of God as you ought.

Now yes, of course there are reasons for absence. There are works of mercy, works of necessity, there's illness, there's incapacity. But when you prefer to hold back rather than being fully committed to the work of the Lord, then it's for you and for me to examine our hearts and ask truly where our love for the Lord and His people is.

But again, look to the example of the Lord Jesus. Look at His full commitment. He didn't hold back. He didn't go so far but no further. Jesus was given a particular work to do, that work of redemption, that work that would involve traversing the whole path, going that full journey to the cross.

He wouldn't go so far but no further. Even when the devil tempted Him and many temptations Jesus faced, tempted to hold back from going to the cross.

And even when the cross loomed nearer and nearer, Jesus could still cry out to His Father, not my will but Your will be done. There's no idleness in the heart of Jesus when Jesus was given that commission, that commission to save His people.

[ 25 : 05 ] I pray there's no idleness in your heart or my heart in the commission that God gives each one of us to do to serve Him with all our heart. But then we come to the fourth of the four characteristics of the sluggard and I think in many ways the saddest and most distressing of all, the delusion of the sluggard.

Verse 16. The sluggard is wiser in his own eyes than seven men who can answer sensibly. This desperate condition of the sluggard, the laziness of the mind, the idleness of the mind that won't, that will not think the things of God.

That mind that's so absorbed in self that he won't see beyond his own self-deluded wisdom, which in fact is no wisdom at all. It's the epitome of the fool who's wise in his own eyes.

You know, the person who's already convinced himself that his way is the right way for him. The famous adage, you know, I did it my way. Taking the easy way out, not facing danger, preferring the comfort of an idle life, not going beyond the very minimum in his life and he's now boasting in his laziness.

He's not going to be persuaded even if seven wise men, seven men more wise than himself try and persuade them otherwise. He's being wise in his own eyes and being wise in his own eyes he's shown himself to be a fool in the eyes of others.

[ 26 : 39 ] And that's why I've left the opening verse of this section to the end there, verse 12, because it all comes together. That calamitous condition that verse 12 gives us.

Do you see a man who's wise in his own eyes? There's more hope for a fool than for him. And so the very start of this little section and at the end we see a warning.

We see a warning for each one of us. That warning against being wise in our own eyes. That idleness of our thinking that's actually a complete contrast to the person whose mind is exercised, is active towards God and who truly has the fear of God in his heart.

Because it's the fear of God that's the beginning of wisdom. And you see that spelled out so early on in Proverbs. Proverbs 3, chapter 3, verse 7.

Be not wise in your own eyes. Fear the Lord. Turn away from evil. As I said at the beginning I say again these words I've certainly convicted myself and my own attitude and the work that God has given me to do.

[ 27 : 52 ] And I pray that yes, you've been convicted yourselves and convicted in order to consider your ways. Do we like Christ? Do we like him in mind, in your heart, in your actions?

The way that you exercise the fear of the Lord that actually drives you to action. The more you're, that fear of the Lord, the more it will drive you to do what he's given you to do for him.

Because you see, having that fear of the Lord means that you know the days are evil. And it's for God's people to be active for him. To be urgent in the work that God has given you to do.

And not to be wise in your own eyes. Not to shut out that true wisdom in living. Instead, to trust in the Lord. to listen to his voice that speaks to you through his word.

And through the wisdom that, yes, he gives to you. And yes, the wisdom that's given through others. That God gives to others to enable you to do as God gives you.

[ 28 : 59 ] When others teach you. Yes, and instruct you and admonish you. So that you don't become the slugger that's so condemned in Scripture. But instead, be the one who's active, who serves with gladness in the work of God.

And therefore, I think, you know, we do need to do as the song that heeds us to call us to action. Rise up, O men of God. Have done with lesser things.

Give heart and soul and mind and strength to serve the King of Kings. Amen. Let us pray. Lord, Lord, you have given us work to do for the Kingdom.

You've given us much to do and you promise to be with us always. Lord, forgive us when we forget so easily and so often that your presence is with your people.

That you do not abandon your people. That you are with them always, even to the very end of the age. And forgive us, Lord, for our laziness in the things of God.

[ 30 : 04 ] Forgive us our laziness in the work of the Kingdom. Forgive us, Lord, when we have made excuses. Forgive us, Lord, when we procrastinated, when we've been idle, when we've been delusional in our own mind and making out that we're wise in our own eyes.

Forgive us, Lord, for these things and help us the more to look to you and to find our strength in you and in you alone and to go in our way rejoicing when you help us, when you help your people to glorify your name.

So be with us in this coming week, Lord, you've given us much to do in this week. May we do it with gladness, with sincerity of heart. May we do what we do with an eye to your glory.

May we know that that work that you've given us to do is work that you have blessed for the good of your name, for the glory of your name, for the good of your people.

So hear us, Lord, as we continue to wait upon you now. Again, forgive us for our sins even in holy things. We ask these things in Jesus' name.

[ 31 : 14 ] Amen. Let's close in Psalm 40, the older version on page 260 and we'll sing from verse 8 down to double verse 10.

To do thy will I take delight, O thou my God that art, yea, that most holy law of thine I have within my heart, within the congregation great I righteousness did preach, lo, thou dost know, Lord, that I refrain not my speech.

8 to 10, Psalm 40, to God's praise. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Come on.

[ 34 : 06 ] Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.