

# How Not to Sabotage Your New Year's Resolutions

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[ 0 : 00 ] All right, let's turn to God. I would love to pray as well as we prepare to hear God's word. So we want to pray not only for the kids but for ourselves that we too would be able to hear and receive God's word to us this morning.

So let me pray. Our God and our Father, we are asking for eyes to see, ears to hear, hearts to understand. And we are recognizing this morning, Lord God, that we often do not have these things and that it in fact sabotages everything about our Christian life.

And so, Lord God, would you help us to see clearly, help us to value what you value, to hold on tight to what you believe, to what you call us to, that what you know is good. And that we ourselves may come to believe that you do love us, you do know what is best for us, and that you are calling us to something far better than we would ever have sought for ourselves.

Amen. Okay, how's everybody feeling? Yeah, pretty good. Okay, all right. So anybody half awake? You can admit it.

There's coffee out there. You know, that's good. Maybe now is a good time to preach a sermon about what it means to be a sluggard. A sluggard.

[ 1 : 21 ] Okay. All right. So not exactly, even in the English language, we use the word sluggard only occasionally. Yes, it comes from the animal, the slug, the slow-moving, kind of slimy creature.

The book of Proverbs speaks on several occasions about this person that it calls a sluggard. So who or what is a sluggard?

Well, oh, maybe you've got an image in your mind. A sluggard. And you think, oh, yes. A 30-year-old man who lives in his mother's basement, forever unemployed, forever unshowered, playing video games and smoking weed all day, his fingers coated in Cheeto dust, the ceiling covered with mold and the floor sticky with Mountain Dew.

Right? So that's great. I suppose that's our culture's stereotype of a sluggard. But what we're going to learn today is that the Bible paints actually a much broader portrait of a sluggard than that.

And this portrait that the Bible paints, that God, the Holy Spirit, paints for us, this portrait may make us a little bit uncomfortable because it's going to look suspiciously like you and me.

[ 2 : 42 ] This portrait of a sluggard helps explain why you sabotage your New Year's resolutions every year. So let's do a quick poll.

How many of you have made at least one New Year's resolution this year? It feels like they get less popular every year. But all right. We've still got quite a few. How many of you have a really great track record of keeping your New Year's resolutions?

Oh, boy. Okay. Well, okay. We've got a couple of. My next sermon will be on boasting. You know. What?

I don't know what it is about New Year's resolutions. It just brings out that special inner sluggard in all of us. Right? We get going. Maybe we make it a couple of weeks. By the end of January, we're just failing.

We want to get into the mind of a sluggard. Let's get into the mindset of a sluggard. And for that, I'm going to pick on somebody here. For that, we're going to turn our attention to our good friend, Sabian.

[ 3 : 42 ] And no, no. You misunderstand me. Those of you who know Sabian know he's a very hard worker. And he was also a good enough sport to let me use him as a sermon illustration.

So, a few weeks ago, Sabian was busy directing traffic for community Christmas care. And one of my big regrets for the month of December was I did not take a photo.

Because those of you who saw him know the Sabian was just this picture of just this bundled-up warmth that he had on his thick camo jacket and his camo pants.

And on top of all of that camo, Sabian wore a bright, reflective orange high-vis vest. And so, I told him, hey, Sabian, I'm a bit confused here.

You're wearing this high-vis vest over all of that camo. Do you want to be seen or don't you? And I could not.

[ 4 : 36 ] So, I couldn't figure out, is this guy sabotaging his own visibility or is he sabotaging his invisibility? I don't know, right? And that is a wonderful visual picture of what it means to be a sluggard, right?

Because, not because Sabian is, but because it's an illustration, right? Wearing high-vis over camo. It's an illustration of self-sabotage, of self-sabotage.

You have a certain good purpose in mind. You know, hey, I want to be seen or I don't want to be seen. But then you sabotage your own efforts to get there. You throw on the high-vis vest over all that camo.

Usually, when we put together our New Year's resolutions, we're aiming to do something that we know is good. Something that's good for us or something that's good for the people around us. We're wanting to live a wiser and better life. We're wanting to be people of wisdom. The author and theologian J.I. Packer, he tells us, Wisdom in Scripture means choosing the best and noblest end at which to aim.

[ 5 : 41 ] Along with the most appropriate and effective means to it. That's actually one of my favorite quotes ever. Because it just gets to the heart of what the Bible calls wisdom. Wisdom is about knowing what end or purpose you were made to aim for.

You're not a directionless person. You know what you were made for. You know what you were called to do. And you also know what means to use to get there. You know the most appropriate and the most effective means to achieve that end.

And you choose them. You don't just know them. You choose them. Now, if you're a Christian, you know what your purpose, what your end is. Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.

It's the very first question in the Westminster Shorter Catechism. Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever. And hopefully your New Year's resolutions are maybe in some small way moving you toward that purpose of glorifying God in the way you live.

Moving you towards experiencing greater joy in who God is. But what do you do about your self-sabotage? That we sabotage ourselves on the way to this.

[ 6 : 55 ] What do you do when you keep undermining this very purpose with the decisions that you make, with the habits and patterns of your life? What do you do when your self-sabotage leads you to get stressed out or to grow weary or to lose motivation or just plain burnout?

This is where the book of Proverbs helps us. And what we're going to read today is actually, it's going to be a little uncomfortable, but it's also going to be incredibly, it makes us uncomfortable in a way that is very helpful and is exactly what we need.

Because it helps us to recognize our own self-sabotage. It does this by painting a series of portraits of the sluggard. And you're going to find these portraits in Proverbs chapter 26.

So if you've got a blue Bible, you'll want to be on page 548. Page 548. And that's where you'll find Proverbs chapter 26. And we are going to jump into the middle of a collection of sayings.

And the first few verses of this chapter, all these little individual Proverbs, they're like, they're individual little pearls of wisdom. But when you string them together, they add up to more than the sum of their parts.

[ 8 : 07 ] That's what we're actually going to find out today is we're going to see that all these Proverbs taken together paints a whole picture. And the first few verses of Proverbs 26 paints a picture of what the Proverbs calls a fool.

And this collection of sayings just makes you cringe as you watch the wake of destruction left by a fool. And God gives us these sayings to warn us, to help us, to know that folly is not the most appropriate and effective means to glorify God and enjoy him forever.

So first 10 verses or so are just all about this kind of fool, the destruction that he leaves in his wake. Watch out for this. And then we find in verse 11, there is a nice smooth transition into a particular kind of fool.

There is a particular kind of fool, a subcategory of fool, the sluggard. Now watch how this transition happens as I read verses 11 through 16.

Like a dog that returns to his vomit is a fool who repeats his folly. Do you see a man who is wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him.

[ 9 : 25 ] The sluggard says, there is a lion in the road. There is 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.

Now, let's look at the first proverb in verse 11. This first proverb, this is something else, isn't it, right? Like a dog that returns to his vomit is a fool who repeats his folly.

Oh, that is just lovely. What a great picture to wake up to on a Sunday morning, right? Oh. This is the verse that begins the transition to these portraits of a sluggard.

This is the transition verse. It introduces us to a certain kind of fool who keeps repeating. He repeats his folly. The sluggard is characterized by repetition, repetition, repetition.

[ 10 : 37 ] Even as his life gets harder and harder, the sluggard sticks with his way of handling things, his way of handling life, his way of handling relationships.

He keeps doing it again and again and again. And it stopped working ages ago. It stopped working years ago. But he is stuck in his rut and just doing the same things over and over again.

The same relationship patterns. The same ways of coping. The same procrastination. The same reaction. The same stress and anxiety.

Over and over and over again. A couple weeks ago, BK was preaching on Isaiah chapters 8 and 9. And he mentioned King Ahaz of Judah. And we were looking at some background information about King Ahaz in 2 Chronicles chapter 28.

I was really struck by this. Because as things kept getting worse and worse for King Ahaz, he just kept sabotaging himself and his whole kingdom. You know, talk about the wake of destruction left by a fool.

[ 11 : 42 ] Ahaz just kept repeating his folly. 2 Chronicles 28 says, Ahaz took a portion from the house of the Lord and the house of the king and of the princes and gave tribute to the king of Assyria.

But it did not help him. In the time of his distress, he became yet more faithless to the Lord. The same King Ahaz. So you know what King Ahaz was.

He was a dog returning to his vomit. He was a sluggard. A fool repeating his folly. The text says that he was distressed. He was a very stressed out, very busy man.

Probably his hair was just falling out. And he was a sluggard. Ahaz didn't learn from his mistakes. Instead, he just kept repeating them. The sluggard is a person who is stuck repeating, repeating, repeating his or her folly.

In Proverbs chapter 26, we see three portraits of a sluggard. Three portraits of a sluggard. And then these three portraits are set within a frame that surrounds them.

[ 12 : 49 ] And so what we're going to do is we're going to look at each of the three portraits in turn. And then we're going to step back and look at the frame that surrounds all three portraits. So the first portrait is in verse 13.

So here's verse 13. The sluggard says, there is a lion in the road. There is a lion in the streets. And that is a portrait of fearful inaction.

It is a portrait of fearful inaction. The sluggard will not go outside of the house to do what he is called to do. He is sabotaged by his fearful inaction.

Well, why won't he go outside? Well, the sluggard says, hey, there's a lion out there. There's a lion. And you can just hear his voice growing more distraught as he starts talking about this lion.

You can see him there. He's just like, you know, peeking through the crack door, maybe like pulling the curtains aside and looking out. And he's on the lookout for that lion. It's out there. The sluggard is doing something that we might call catastrophizing.

[ 13 : 54 ] To catastrophize means that you let your mind spiral out of control, rushing off to the worst case scenario. Something bad happens. And in your mind, you're like, oh, no, oh, no.

What about, what about this? What about that? What about this? Oh, no. What if this happens? The sluggard's first statement is actually pretty plausible. There is a lion in the road.

Because, yeah, in ancient Israel, when this was written, there were lions there at the time. They would roam around in the wild. And the Bible actually records, the Old Testament records a few incidents in which lions really did attack travelers as they traveled on roads between the towns.

Because, you know, you'd be walking along the path. Think about like a path like Jack's Trail in Squamish or something like that. And you're walking along. And you might run across a lion. It wasn't unheard of.

So imagine reporting to the sluggard that a lion was spotted on the road to the next town over.

Okay. The prudent thing, what do you think the prudent thing to do when you hear news like that?

[15:01] Well, you say, okay, maybe I change my travel plans for the day. Or maybe I travel in a group. If there's a group of us, the lion's not going to go for us. Maybe I bring a weapon with me.

But that's not what the sluggard does. The sluggard panics. The next thing he says is, there's a lion in the streets. Now, if you look at other translations, the sluggard is saying there's a lion in the town square, which is actually more accurate.

He's picturing a lion, the sluggard is picturing a lion wandering through the streets of the town, the streets of the city. He's wandering into the town square.

He's walking between the houses. He's walking through the busy marketplace. Dangerous. It's not safe to go outside. There's nowhere safe outside from this lion. He's everywhere.

Here's how the proverb might go if we were translating it into modern-day Squamish. The sluggard says, what?

[16:08] Squamish Wildlife Sightings Facebook group. What? There's a grizzly bear by Alice Lake. Oh, no. Oh, no. A grizzly bear on Cleveland Avenue. Didn't that actually happen once, by the way?

Yes. Yes, that actually happened once, right? In the sluggard's mind, it could happen at any time. It's always happening. One moment, you're walking out of Save-On Foods with a bag of groceries. The next moment, you're getting mauled in the parking lot by a grizzly bear. That's the world the sluggard lives in, right? And again, sometimes, you know, these are things that are within the realm of possibility.

If you tell the sluggard, that could never happen. He's like, well, remember the one time? Like, how long ago was that? Like, 20 years ago? It happened 20 years ago once, so it could happen any time. What is your lion?

Who is your grizzly bear? In what situations do you find yourself getting kind of wild and irrational and panicked? Around what kind of people do you tend to become distraught?

[17:16] Pay close attention to yourself. When do you get lost in an inward spiral of catastrophizing thoughts? In what areas of life do you become paralyzed into fearful inaction?

What triggers you? What causes you to procrastinate and put off and put off and put off what you're needing to do to avoid? The sluggard's life doesn't stop there.

It just grows worse because we move on to a second portrait in verse 14. Verse 14. As a door turns on its hinges, so does a sluggard on his bed.

You know, we have to laugh a little bit, but it's a nervous laughter. I mean, after all, who doesn't wish for a little more time in bed on New Year's Day? Right? Notice that the sluggard...

Notice in this verse, we probably picture the sluggard in bed as sort of a beached whale, I suppose. You know, just lying in bed, just completely drooling. He isn't like that.

[18:18] He is not lying just motionless in bed. Because after all, a door isn't standing still. A door is always turning, turning, turning, turning.

And yet the door remains hinged to its place. That's how it is with the sluggard. Turning, turning, turning, turning. And getting nowhere. He is hinged to his bed.

This is a portrait of futile action. It's a portrait of futile action. And that is something that you have to understand about the sluggard. The sluggard may actually be a very busy, active person.

The sluggard may be in a state of constant activity. Perhaps even frenetic activity. He is toiling away, toiling, whether physically or mentally. Toiling in the work they're doing physically.

Toiling, sometimes toiling away inside of our minds. Toiling, toiling, toiling. But going nowhere.

Spinning your wheels in the mud. The sluggard is stuck repeating his folly.

[19:31] So what is your bed? What are the comfortable habits that you always return to? What are the usual ruts that you just keep falling back into? How do you cope with life?

Are there behaviors that you tried out when you were younger? And they seem to work. They seem to help you survive childhood. Maybe survive your early adulthood. You adopted them as patterns and habits and ways of life.

Coping strategies that have gotten you through life. They're not healthy. They're not righteous. They don't glorify God and lead you to enjoy him forever. But you know, they work until they don't

anymore.

But you keep doing them. You keep sabotaging yourself and all your New Year's resolutions. What are the strategies that you use to save yourself and make everything feel like it's okay?

Make you feel like you're okay. What are the patterns in your life which undermine your aim to glorify God and enjoy him forever? Where is your life filled with futile action? The sluggard's life just keeps going downhill.

[ 20 : 38 ] It reaches its lowest point because we move on to a third portrait in verse 15. The sluggard buries his hand in the dish. It wears him out to bring it back to his mouth.

So, the way you would eat a meal in ancient Israel, if you had a serving of bread, you would tear off a piece of the bread. And you would take that morsel of bread and you would dip it into a dish of sauce.

And then you would bring it back to your mouth to eat. If you've ever been, I mean, if you're at an Indian restaurant, you know that's how you eat naan bread. It's a bit like dipping a tortilla chip in salsa.

But that's just how you would eat bread. Now, so imagine you decide you're going to host a dinner party with friends and you're going to have Mexican food. And you've got a big bowl of salsa in the middle of the dinner table.

And imagine one of your friends. Let's call him David Regeer. He takes a tortilla chip in hand. And David, you know, shows up at the party.

[ 21 : 43 ] He's just exhausted. Sits down. Tortilla chip. And he doesn't just dip the chip into the salsa. He doesn't even double dip. You know, when you take a bite and you stick it back in anyway.

He buries his hand in the dish. He takes that chip and he goes in all the way. His hand goes into the dish of salsa up to his wrist.

And stays there. And he goes, I can't get it out. What a party.

What a great time. This is a portrait of failed action. It's a portrait of failed action. Here's where the sluggard ends up.

He is paralyzed by fear. He is toiling and toiling away in futility. And finally, worn out, exhausted by his indulgence.

[ 22 : 42 ] In all these habits and all these patterns of life that he has been repeating for years and years and years. He is stuck deep in his coping mechanism. Stuck deep in these relationship patterns that were feeding him that sort of half worked.

But now he has run himself ragged all his life. He is weary. He's exhausted. He's finally just burned out in despair. He can't even pull his hand out of the dish. Is that a little bit too relatable?

We can all laugh nervously together at this portrait of failed action. So let's take a look. Let's zoom out again. Let's look at the frame. We've got three portraits. And they are surrounded by a frame.

Verses 12 and 16 frame these three portraits. Verse 12. Do you see a man who is wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him.

Verse 16. The sluggard is wiser in his own eyes than seven men who can answer sensibly. So the frame of the portrait tells us why the sluggard stays stuck.

[ 23 : 50 ] Why the sluggard is repeating the same folly over and over. His life is framed by fraudulent wisdom. His life is framed by fraudulent wisdom. He thinks he's wise.

He's not wise. It's a fraud. It's counterfeit wisdom. Because you see, the sluggard is that phrase that gets repeated twice in those two verses. He is wise in his own eyes.

Wise in his own eyes. The sluggard believes he is the reliable interpreter of his life. He's the reliable interpreter of his life.

He believes he sees his life, his situation, his relationships, his past, present, and future. He believes that he is seeing it all clearly. In fact, he is the only one who sees it all clearly.

Oh, other people, they just don't understand. They just don't get it. They don't know really what my life is like. They don't really know what I'm facing.

[ 24 : 53 ] They don't know what I'm going through. Or even worse, they're the ones to blame. It's them. They're the reason I'm in this mess. They're the reason. And he spends his life accumulating people that he has grievances against.

It's your fault. It's your fault. You need to change. You need to change. You need to change. Until by the end of his life, he's got this huge laundry list, hundreds of names long, of all the people whose fault it is, all the people who need to change, all the people who didn't see him clearly, who

didn't understand him, who didn't, you know, who don't understand things, who didn't see things the way he did because he alone sees things clearly.

This is the problem with spiritual blindness. You do not know you are blind. It's not like physical blindness where you're blind and it's obvious. When you're spiritually blind, you think you can see, but you can't.

You're wise in your own eyes. You don't have eyes to see. You don't have ears to hear. You don't have a heart to understand. And in time, you know, life goes on.

And because of that, your situation becomes more and more miserable. Your life descends into hopelessness and despair. You might even know that you're stuck. But remember, you alone are the reliable interpreter of your situation.

[ 26 : 12 ] No matter how many wise and sensible people come alongside you, and they come alongside you with correction. They come alongside you with help. But you find some problem with their words.

Their correction, no, they just don't understand. You don't see things properly. You know, there's something wrong. Or if you can't find something wrong with their words, you'll find something wrong with them. Well, you didn't help.

That's not how I want to be helped. That's, no, no, not like that. Not like that. Oh, well, I know what you're trying to do. You're just trying to take advantage of me. You're just like this.

You're just like that. I see it. This is what it means to be a sluggard. You're stuck, alone, repeating your fear and futility and failure, and there's more hope for a fool than for you.

Now, here's the funny thing about this sermon. Two kinds of responses that you can have to it.

First, if you actually are a sluggard, you are either going to become very offended by what you've just heard because it touched a raw nerve, and how dare you say that to me?

[ 27 : 24 ] How dare you suggest that I'm like that? Or if you're a sluggard, maybe it'll just go right over your head. It doesn't register because you're very confident.

Oh, that's not me. That's not me. Not a problem. Or you're already, in your mind, running through a list of all those family members over the holidays who behave like such sluggards.

Oh, I know who this sermon... Man, I'm already deciding who I'm going to send this sermon to, right? It's, you know, you're elbowing your spouse, you know, elbowing your kids. You know, hey, hey, listen up.

This is you. This is you. You're the sluggard. There's a second kind of response, and it's a better kind of response. Maybe you're thinking, hey, is this me?

Or even, help, I'm the sluggard. Well, here's the good news. If you are actually wanting help, if you are willing to choose to receive help, if you're willing to seek out, open up your life to the examination and to the correction of those who are wise, those who love you and want to help you glorify God and to enjoy him forever.

[ 28 : 46 ] If you are willing to do that, to choose that, to follow through with that, then according to verse 16, you, by definition, are not a sluggard because a sluggard is wiser in his own eyes than seven men who can answer sensibly.

And that's not you. Now, yeah, you do have behaviors like a sluggard. You do have those behaviors. So how does a former sluggard get unstuck?

How do you get unstuck? How do I arrive at a point where I can, maybe I can even look back on my old self-sabotage, maybe years down the road, I can look back at that. And, you know, sometimes those things, our behaviors can be so shameful that they, they're hard to do, but maybe some of the things that I'm doing right now in my life, wouldn't it be wonderful if I could reach a point where I could look back and just chuckle at it?

Can you believe that? You know how I used to live? Isn't that ridiculous? Oh, praise God. He saved me. So what's a sluggardly person to do?

Well, we're going to walk backward through these proverbs to see how a sluggard comes unstuck. And then we're going to continue onward into what a spirit-led life looks like.

[ 29 : 58 ] So there's four things that a sluggard does to get unstuck, and there's three things that we do and put on in its place to live a spirit-led life. First, get help.

First, get help. Verse 16, the sluggard is wiser in his own eyes than seven men who can answer sensibly. So if that's what a sluggard does, guess what you do? The opposite.

Get wise people who can help you. Bring them into your life. Ask them, have you seen any places where I am stuck? Do you see any patterns of fear and futility and failure in my life?

Have you seen any patterns in the way that I interpret the events of my life, the relationships of my life? Where should I be suspicious and call into question my own interpretation and be a little bit less sure that I'm seeing everything really clearly?

You're going to need help with this. The sluggard thinks that they can just, okay, never mind. I know what to do in response to this sermon. I know what I need to do.

[ 31 : 04 ] I don't need to get help. I've got it. I've got a plan. No. No. You need help. You need other people in your life because you just can't trust your own judgment.

Our judgment matures and grows as we grow in wisdom. And if your life is characterized by a sluggardly behavior, you're just not there yet. We've got our blind spots.

This is why at our church we offer biblical counseling. It helps you get unstuck. That's the whole point. To help you get unstuck so that you can grow and mature. To help give you another set of eyes, an encouraging voice, a voice that challenges, to help you see the patterns in your life, to help set you free from where you're stuck.

So first thing you do, get help. Second, consider verse 15. Name where you are weary. Name where you are weary.

Is it at your workplace? Is it at your home? Is it here at the church? Is it certain relationships in your life?

[ 32 : 16 ] Are there certain recurring events and situations? Just weary you. You feel helpless and you feel powerless. There is nothing you can do. There are people who suffer real things, who really are helpless, really are powerless.

And God's word has such words of mercy and help to those who have suffered, to those who truly are helpless and powerless. Sometimes our feeling of helplessness and powerlessness in a lot of these situations and relationships is actually a false interpretation.

I preached a sermon a couple years back on John chapter 5 where Jesus is continually challenging a man who views himself as helpless and powerless over his own life.

Is it possible that you've buried yourself in a dish of your own making? You're going to need help to answer this. Help for someone to come alongside you and help you sort out where am I truly needing the help and mercy of God and where have I just actually, I'm not actually helpless and powerless, but I've convinced myself I am.

Name where you're weary. Third, consider verse 14. Name your bed and your turning.

[ 33 : 31 ] Name your bed and your turning. Where are you staying in that comfort zone of your bed? What's that comfort zone where everything is safe and everything's okay and I've got this?

What are the habits and behaviors that help you feel like life is in control or help you feel like you feel okay about yourself now because you're doing this again and again and again? What are the familiar thoughts and patterns, those mental ruts, those mental highways that you just keep returning to again and again and again to the point they're almost automatic?

Who are the people whose approval and affirmation you keep going to again and again and again to get life, to feel like you're okay, like you're alive, that life is worth living and I need this person to approve of me and to affirm me?

Where are you tossing and turning? Where are you toiling away in your mind? Anxious thoughts circling again and again inside of your head. Where are you toiling away as a people pleaser? Afraid to say no. Running yourself ragged to keep everybody happy. Where are you toiling away as an achiever? Trying to prove that you can get more done. You can get it done perfectly.

[ 34 : 43 ] And when you do it, everything will be okay. Again, you may need the help to find the answer to this. You will need help. Name your bed and your turning.

Fourth, consider verse 13. Name your lion. Name your lion. What is the big scary thing? Maybe you know immediately what it is, but what's the big scary thing that leaves you paralyzed, that leaves you procrastinating, maybe even panicked?

What's the situation you're just avoiding and not wanting to get into? And maybe you can't even admit to yourself it's your big scary lion, but it is. You can tell by your behavior.

Who is the person that you swore you would never become? What is the terrifying situation you swore you would never let happen again? You see, the sluggard believes a half-truth about the lion.

There really is a lion. Maybe it really is in the road. But the lion is not that ever-present existential threat that the sluggard is convinced that it is.

[ 36 : 00 ] What half-truths have you believed about the things that paralyze you and frighten you? You may need help to find the answer to this.

You've got to name your lion. So these first four steps, they help us to recognize what it looks like to walk according to the flesh.

Because the sluggard is doing just that. He's walking according to the flesh, operating out of his own human wisdom. The sluggard has a mind set on the flesh, on human ability, human power. He thinks he can get himself unstuck by his own creative effort. Or he thinks he'll get unstuck if only his situation would change, if only those other people would change.

Change is something, he thinks, that can be accomplished by himself or by other people. And that's how someone who is wise in their own eyes thinks. But in Romans 8, verse 6, here's what we're told.

[ 37 : 04 ] To set the mind on the flesh is death. But to set the mind on the spirit is life and peace. You can be set free from your sluggardly ways.

You can experience life and peace. There is life for you. All that energy that has been lost to your turning and turning and toiling, what if you could stop?

What if all that energy that is poured into your self-protection and poured into your habits and patterns of life, what if that were all freed up to glorify God, to enjoy him forever?

You can experience not only life, but peace. You would be experiencing freedom.

You would be empowered to love other people. What if all that energy are freed up to start loving other people rather than pouring all of it into building up defenses against them? This is what it looks like to move from withering away to flourishing.

[ 38 : 13 ] If you truly are a Christian, this pathway is available to you, the pathway of Jesus Christ. He has walked it and he calls you to follow him.

Jesus was and is the most diligent man who ever lived. Jesus always acted in effective and appropriate ways to glorify God and enjoy him forever.

when he was being challenged about the way he was living. In John chapter 5, he just put it very simply, my father is working until now and I am working.

He was always doing his father's will. He died on the cross so that the sluggard in you would be crucified as well.

he died on the cross so that we could take that sluggard and crucify him. He was raised to life again so that you would become a man or a woman who knows and lives the life and peace of the Holy Spirit.

[ 39 : 24 ] Jesus gives you his spirit, his very own spirit so that by faith in him you can be a man or a woman of diligence exactly what God made you to be.

And to be that man or woman of diligence you will need to set your mind on the spirit. You will need to walk by the spirit taking action in spirit-led ways. How do we live with spirit-led diligence?

Spirit-led diligence. So much could be said about this so I'll just outline three steps. And if we would follow these three steps consistently in our lives I can't even begin to imagine the change that would happen in ourselves in our families in our church and then spilling out into our community and our world.

Three steps the diligent person takes in order to walk by the spirit. First step is simple to pray. To pray. the most simple obvious step and the one most neglected and most set aside by Western Christians.

You pray. You practice lament. You pour out to God where you're hurt, where you've suffered, where the lions of your life actually did attack you, actually did tear you apart.

[ 40 : 44 ] You're honest with God. You hold nothing back. You tell him the truth. You practice repentance. You pour out to God how you've responded to the hurt, how maybe some of that hurt you even brought on yourself by your own folly.

You tell God about the bed that you've been hinged to. You tell him about the dish in which your hand is buried. You're honest with God about the sin that is present in your life.

You call it sin just as he does. You hold nothing back. You practice supplication. Supplication means just asking. Asking for help.

You pour out to God. You tell him what your needs are. You tell him about the problems you're facing. You tell him about the hole that you're stuck in. And you ask him to fill you with his spirit. Lord, give me the creative wisdom. Give me that energizing power that only you can give in the person of your Holy Spirit to not only show the way through what I'm facing, but to show me who I need to become, how I need to live dependent on him.

[ 41 : 55 ] Lord, what do I do in this situation? What do I say to this person? Who do I ask for help? I need help. Who do I go to?

What's the next step? Lord, show me the way. Teach me, oh Lord, the way of your statutes and I will keep it to the end. you pray by yourself.

But remember, the sluggard is happy to do everything by himself, but you're not a sluggard anymore. So you start recruiting other people to pray for you. Hey, hey, hey, I've got this situation, this person in my life, I need help, I'm not sure what to do, I feel stuck, we just keep repeating the same patterns over and over again, and what do I do?

Would you pray for me? Would you pray with me? So often when I counsel people, they think of prayer as though prayer is some sort of alternative to taking action.

You either act or you send your thoughts and prayers, but you don't do both. That's the way a fool thinks. The truth is, prayer is the first step of spirit-led action.

[ 43 : 08 ] Prayer is the first step the non-negotiable, necessary first step of spirit-led action. If you are not praying first, your activity will be of the flesh.

If it works at all, that's just the mercy of God, not because you did anything great. You'll be a dog returning to your vomit. Why would you think that would work?

When we pray in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, it is an act of faith in his wisdom and his power. So you have to start with prayer. Step two is to prepare.

You prepare. Now that you've poured out your heart toward God, you've been lamenting, you've been repenting, you've been asking for his help, now it's time to start preparing.

That's the second step of action. It's so funny, we don't think of praying and preparing as part of the action, but it is. It's necessary. I used to live in the state of Indiana and where I lived, there was a very conservative denomination of churches and these churches believed as part of their doctrine that being spirit led meant that you were spontaneous.

[ 44 : 23 ] You didn't plan, you didn't prepare because that wasn't of the spirit. That was just human wisdom. So in order to be spirit led, the preachers in those churches wouldn't do any sermon preparation.

They would get up there with their Bibles and they would wing it. Well, let me assure you I did prepare for this. I did not wing this.

Because people who left those churches, they would tell me that the quality of the sermons was disappointing. We kind of laugh at that. But where do we do that?

Where do we launch into action without any preparation? And we expect the spirit to just show up and bless us. we put no effort. We put no thought. We're like, Lord, just would you bless us with this?

And then we just go off and do whatever we do. I say this is a challenge to us as individuals, as leaders of families, and to us as a church.

[ 45 : 22 ] I don't know if there's something about Squamish or the West Coast in general, but we just don't have a culture of prayer. We do not have a culture of preparation. We want to just show up on Sunday morning and just wing it.

Hope something good happens. We just don't prepare well for worship. I mean, perhaps this is the wrong day of the year to warn us about staying up late on Saturday night and making sure you get enough good sleep on that.

You can show to church alert on Sunday morning. Do you show up alert, prepared, praying that you would receive God's help, praying, Lord, who can I look for to encourage? Who can I look for to speak on your behalf to?

And then we expect the Spirit to be at work when we haven't prepared. What does our preparation for our various areas of ministry look like?

This is the way a sluggard thinks, but it's no way to run a church. And that's no way to live in the kingdom of God. It's not led by the Spirit. And I speak to you as someone who has been very guilty of this.

[ 46 : 25 ] I've showed up and winged it a lot of times when I ought to have been preparing. And that's wrong. That's the way a sluggard acts. Anything more that we do as a church in 2023 and onward, it has to come first with a great deal of prayer, second with preparation.

The same is true in our own lives. And I'm going to call out the men of the church right now. How are you praying for your family first? How are you preparing?

How are you praying to know how to lead them in a gracious and loving way? How are you then preparing by providing the structure, the direction, the encouragement, planning to do that towards your family?

And I say the same to anyone, man or woman, who has an area of responsibility or an area of ministry or souls under your care. Pray first, then prepare. And it's important to pray first because sometimes we prepare and then we say, oh Lord, just bless what I'm going to do.

No, no, no. We start by praying because here's the funny thing, when I spend time praying, oftentimes the Lord brings to mind or brings advice from somebody that takes me in a whole different direction than what I expected.

[ 47 : 40 ] and the preparation goes way better. When the Lord is at work and his spirit is at work. And then you can do the third and final step.

The step that we think is the action step, but really the other two steps were action steps too. But this third step is you put it all into practice. Put it into practice. Put into practice the new patterns and habits and ideas that the spirit has led you to.

you've been praying with wise believers, you've sought their counsel, you've worked with them to prepare, and now you've prayed, you've prepared thoroughly, and if you've prayed well with others and prepared well with others who are wise, guess what?

This third step is actually the easiest step because you set yourself up for success. You have the wisdom and the power of the Holy Spirit behind you, with you.

You have the encouragement of people who love you and who are walking alongside of you. So all you have to do now is do it. I'll tell you what, I prepare well so that when I get up here and preach, everything's ready to go and I can just do it.

[ 48 : 55 ] I don't have to think on the fly, what am I going to say next, what am I going to do next? It's already prepared and now we do it. That makes it so much easier.

That doesn't mean things won't be hard because they will be hard because when you start living diligently, you invite trouble. I read in Colossians chapter 4 at the beginning how Apostle Paul said that he struggled to speak clearly.

His words could get him in a lot of trouble and there's a temptation to be not bold and not clear in the way you speak and communicate in situations like that. So it was hard for him to do and that's why he asked for prayer.

That's why he invited other people, please pray for me so that I would do this. But this is the right kind of hard. Those are the right kind of struggles to have because that's the kind of hard that lets you sleep well at night when you're doing the hard thing and it's hard but you know it's right and you go to bed with a clear conscience.

Oh, what a wonderful thing to go to bed with a clear conscience. You're not turning on your bed anymore. You just fall sound asleep. The kind of clear conscience that leaves you eager to press on the next morning.

[ 50 : 09 ] The kind that leads you to a diligent life. The kind of hard that leads you to a diligent life in which you are finally fulfilling the purpose that God gave to you.

What does the Christian life look like when it is free from sabotage? it is an experience of life and peace. It is a life that's hard but full of love and good works.

It is a life in which you glorify God and enjoy him forever. Our God and our Father, we confess how we have lived as though we are sluggards.

God and I know you have called us to something better. For everyone who has put their faith in Christ, Lord, I know that you have forgiven us of our sins. That when we confess our sins, you are faithful and just to forgive us and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

All our sin has been forgiven. All our shame is cleansed and washed away as we remember that we belong to Christ and he has welcomed us in. He has given us a mission and a charge not to hammer us in the head and to hammer us to do better and try harder, but say, look at what I have called you to.

[ 51 : 30 ] Isn't this so much better? Will you let go of your sluggardly ways? This is how we live in the family of God. Lord, may we listen to that charge and that call. May we live lives characterized by wisdom.

May we take that first step of going to someone who is wise and saying, I need help. I need help to see the things that I don't see. I need help to get unstuck from the things that I am truly stuck in. I want to live the freedom, the life, the peace that belongs to those who are children of God. Lord God, give us eyes to see, ears to hear, and hearts to understand.  
Amen.