

THE ANT & THE SLUGGARD**Proverbs 6:6-11****(Read Proverbs 6:6-11)**

Intro: We have two extremes in our culture. We have the person who never stops working and as a result rarely has time for their family. It seems that they're so addicted to working that it becomes a detriment of their families, their health, and even their reputation. This extreme deserves its own sermon and sometime we will cover it. But what I want to talk about today is a case of the lazies. It's other extreme from the workaholic that I just described and is known by its scientific name Couch Potatoism.

In an age where there are more jobs than there are job applicants I fear that we are infected with a lack of motivation to simply work and provide for one's family and for one's one's future. Let me also point out that the pool of workers that are available for the many job openings we have is not at all exhausted – the are plenty of able workers for job openings and it would appear that there are enough people to fill employment needs, it is just that many Americans do not want to work.

God created us to work and we'll look at that in a bit. As we do we will eventually look at the industriousness of the ant we just read about in Proverbs 6, and the lack of motivation of the sluggard, which is the term Proverbs uses for such people.

Our text isn't the only place in Proverbs where the writer addresses the issue. He gives us a vivid word picture in Proverbs 26 that is crystal clear. Listen, *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.* Proverbs 26:14-15 ESV

The Sluggard

- I'm certain you can picture this sluggard in your mind's eye? He is quite literally a couch potato, turning back and forth, like a door on its hinges that moves a lot but it goes anywhere. This person lays there with an attitude that says "*Somebody else will take care of it. Somebody else will take care of me. I don't have to be responsible. Someone will surely provide for me because I'm entitled. I've got it coming.*"
- The description in Proverbs 26:15 is very vivid. The sluggard can't bring his hand out of the dish because he's just too lazy to move. This is vivid for me because we had chicken farmers in several of our previous congregations who raised broiler chickens. The chickens that you buy in the grocery store are raised to grow fat and to grow fast. They are placed in the chicken house when they're cute little peeps, but by the time they reach market weight they are so big and fat that they just stay by the feeder and eat. They literally sit there at the feeder because it's too much effort to move. When I think of the sluggard, I think of those fat white birds.
- On the other hand . . .

Work takes effort

- I know that's a no-brainer statement, but it's true. The Bible says we've got to get off the couch and get to work. I know that I'm preaching to the choir here at ABC, but a good reason for having a job is to earn money and support those we are responsible for. Paul, who supported his ministry by being a tentmaker, wrote, *But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.* 1 Timothy 5:8. Paul never pulls punches, but he's exactly right.
- My point is that Christ followers cannot and should not refuse to work. No one can say there are no jobs out there. I agree that they may not be the perfect job, but there is work for anyone who seeks it. It's our job as Christ followers to support our families. I find these words from Paul effective when I see guys who are in danger of being deadbeat dads when they don't buckle down and take care of their families – especially after a separation or divorce. Paul makes it as plain as day. No matter what it takes you need to persist and support your family. So if you can't get a job that brings down \$25 an hour, work at McDonald's until you do. Those are tough words but its truth.
- Another good reason we work is so that we can be givers. Not only must we support our own, but we must also help others in need. Paul is giving a list of instructions to growing Christians in Ephesians 4 when he says, *Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.* Ephesians 4:28. True, there are a lot of people out

there who are like the door on hinges sluggard, but there are also a lot out there, who for a variety of reasons, are as helpless as a door that's been knocked off of its hinges. We need to help them. ABC's good at this. We always have been. We help people and our community knows it. I also hear, on a regular basis, of the generosity you have for one another. But I'm just stating facts – we work to help others.

- Another reason we've got to work is the mental health aspect. This is one of my favorites. Good honest labor is really satisfying. So often when I get to the end of a Saturday, which is my day off, and I've been working in the yard, spreading mulch, or cleaning out spouts, or cleaning up the basement, I can look at my day and enjoy a deep sense of satisfaction. It happens when I've had a productive day as a pastor as well. A pastor is often on duty 24/7, but he also knows when he's accomplished much.
- How about when you've had a great day at work? I see this when Keith Crone posts a picture of a newly restored Farmall tractor. I hear it in the description that Mike Guttshall gives when he describes a large paint booth housing unit that he's built. It's obvious in the proud words that Terri used last week when she talked about how much a happy crew of ABCers accomplished on our spring cleanup work day. It's a huge satisfaction.
- God gave each of us talents and gifts that he intends for us to use for the good of Creation, and using those gifts brings tremendous satisfaction to both God and to us. Notice then, that the person who refuses to work never has that satisfaction, and as he lays there on his couch his self-worth plummets. Couch potatoes are often very depressed. The writer of Ecclesiastes, very possibly the same person who wrote much of Proverbs, Solomon, writes, *The fool folds his hands and eats his own flesh.* Ecclesiastes 4:5. The NIV clarifies that verse this way and I think it's helpful, *The fool folds his hands and ruins himself.* Ecclesiastes 4:5 (NIV) With little effort the picture is clear in your mind's eye, of this person just lying there, seemingly without a care in the world, but missing out on the satisfaction of the job well done, **BECAUSE HE'S NOT DOING ANY WORK!**
- God's desires and has designed us for purposeful labor. As you read the Bible on the subject of work you will soon see the correlation of slothfulness, and a loss of self-respect. Work satisfies. Lying on the couch leads to destruction. Being a sluggard is the way to nothingness.
- Part of the problem is the idea that work is equated with punishment. But . . .

Work is not punishment!

- I've heard it, "Well if it hadn't been for Adam and Eve, we'd be frolicking about in the garden enjoying a perpetual Paradise vacation." But if you look in Genesis, you will see that God put Adam and Eve there with the instruction to work the Garden. In fact, the exact words are, *The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.* Genesis 2:15. Notice that work came before sin. Don't hear what I'm not saying: I'm not implying that work was the cause of sin. I'm talking about the fact of Creation order. Labor was part of the process. Work is not a punishment that came with the fall of Adam and Eve. It's been God's purpose for his children to engage in work since Creation.
- The problem is often that there are some people who work at not working. They'll go to great lengths to avoid it. Do you remember the Ernest movies? A couple that come to mind are *Ernest Saves Christmas* and *Ernest Goes to Jail*. I'm not sure which one it was, but I remember Ernest had an elaborate system to take a shower. It was the quintessential Rube Goldberg device that had many moving parts. It was part of the fun of the movie, but it certainly would have been much easier for Ernest TO JUST TAKE A SHOWER!
- The text that I read at the beginning of this talk from Proverbs 6 shows that it is much better to be an ant and, like her, be diligently and vigilantly working, in order to have the promise that you will not experience poverty. The sluggard starves and freezes in the winter cold while the ant is quite literally snug as a bug in a rug.

Conclusion: Paul writes to the Colossians, *Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.* Colossians 4:24.

- Whatever you do, work at it. You know now that the idea of labor is important and you know why too.

- Whatever you do work at it with all your heart. Is your heart in your work? Do you go at your work with the enthusiasm that says, “*I’m getting a charge out of this!*” or at least that you appreciate what you’re doing? You can get great satisfaction out of doing something pretty menial or dirty when you know that you’re not doing it for you. Cleaning the house for Mom or mowing the lawn for Dad. And it’s even better if they don’t even know you’re doing it!
- And how about this? It’s in the last part of that first sentence where it says that you are *doing it for the Lord and not for men*. Do what you do for God. You represent Christ as you work. How would you work, if Jesus was your supervisor? How often would you be late? How long would your breaks be? Do people know you are a Christian by how you work? Are you representing the Church well by how you work? John Maxwell calls this the “*and then some*” principal. Christ followers should do what’s required, AND THEN SOME.
- That secular phrase, “*What goes around comes around*”, is actually a truism. If you work hard as unto the Lord, you will be compensated. You might get a raise or if a layoff is coming you might be the last to go. Promotions often come for people who work hard. When you add value to where you work, you will be compensated. It works. I’m not saying these are the reasons why we work hard. We don’t work hard for a promotion and we don’t work hard for higher pay. We work hard because we represent the Lord.
- A quick aside here as I finish up: The Bible takes a dim view of get rich quick tactics. Lotteries, gambling, and playing in the stock market when you don’t have the money to do so are bad use of money. An honest day’s work for honestly earned compensation is always what God has intended.
- God’s people are ants and not sluggards. Amen? Amen.