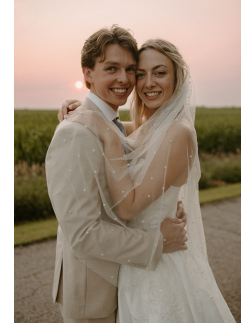


Proverbs — Wisdom For Work

August 4, 2024

Good morning, CrossWinds! It is great to be back after being gone for a few weeks. While gone, I took a Sunday off. I taught on the Spencer campus for another week. Most exciting of all, I helped officiate my daughter's wedding. Deanna is no longer a Trucksess. Her new last name is Ammermann. Her husband's name is Ben. When they visit in a few weeks, be sure to say, "Hello."



This morning, we continue our summer series in the book of Proverbs. As we learned a few weeks ago, Proverbs is a book of the Bible with short, pithy sayings describing how life usually works. They are not iron-clad promises about the way life always works. Most of the book of Proverbs was written by King Solomon. Their purpose was for Solomon to teach his son how to make wise choices in a foolish world. God gave them to us so we can learn to make wise choices in a foolish world as we study them.

We are not studying the book chronologically. This summer, we are picking a key theme in Proverbs each week and looking at what Proverbs teaches us about that theme. This morning, we are looking at what the book of Proverbs says about work. That is an important topic for most of us. When we are not sleeping, most of us will spend most of our time working. Since we spend so much of our life working, it is good for us to learn to work wisely, not foolishly.

This morning, we will look at wisdom for work under three headings. 1. What are the biblical basics of work? 2. What does Proverbs teach us about laziness? 3. What does Proverbs teach us about diligence?

What are the biblical basics of work?

God is a worker.

When we open the Bible, the first thing we find in Genesis 1 is that God is a worker. In Genesis 1 and 2, God created everything in the universe. Hebrew 1, we find there was a division of labor. God the Father will the creation. He planned creation. It was God the Son who made everything in the entire universe. God worked really hard because he made everything in only six days. After that, God rested from his work on day seven.

And on the seventh day God finished *his work that he had done*, and he rested on the seventh day *from all his work that he had done*. So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested *from all his work that he had done in creation*. Genesis 2:2–3 (ESV)

One of the words that is emphasized is *work*. God did a lot of work in only six days! God is a worker. God is not a workaholic. He rested on the seventh day and enjoyed what he made. God set a pattern for us to follow. Work hard six days a week. Rest on the seventh day and enjoy the work of our hands and worship the God who gave it to us to enjoy.

God created us to work.

The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden *to work it and keep it*. Genesis 2:15 (ESV)

Just as God worked hard, he created us to be like him and also work hard. Even before sin entered the world, God took Adam and Eve and put them in the Garden to work and keep it. Just as God was at work making the creation, we are to be like him, caring for creation and using the resources he gave us to be creative. Working hard, like God, is a good thing. Remember that before sin entered the world, work was in the world. One of the core things we were created

to do is to work. This means work is not a bad thing. It is a good thing. Work is not a drudgery to be avoided; it is one of the core tasks God created us to fulfill.

Sin made work difficult and painful.

And to Adam he said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' **cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.**"
Genesis 3:17–19 (ESV)

When sin entered the world, part of the curse of sin was on work. Work, which was enjoyable, became hard and tedious. This doesn't mean we should avoid work but that now pain is part of work. Sin influenced the earth. God's creation, which used to work with us, now fights against us. As farmers, gardeners, and anyone trying to maintain their lawn knows, there are thorns, thistles, and weeds that grow everywhere we don't want them to be. You kill them with Roundup one day; three more grow in its place the next day. Murphy's law holds true. If something can go wrong, it will go wrong. While sin made work hard, work is still good. It is still what we were created to do.

Sin doesn't just make earning a living hard but it influences people. James 5 reminds us that sometimes those who are rich oppress the poor by work. They hold back their wages or don't pay fair wages.

Another way sin influences work is we are now disinclined to work. We want to avoid work. We want to be lazy instead of work.

This is our bridge to Proverbs. Proverbs has a lot to say about laziness, the deep-rooted sinful desire we have, to avoid work.

2. What do Proverbs teach us about laziness?

The book of Proverbs has an interesting term for laziness: "the sluggard." The word sluggard is synonymous with laziness, but it is picturesque. Sluggards don't get anything done fast, and they do their best to avoid work. Let me give you an important definition.

Sluggardliness can be more than a negative character trait. It can be rooted in a sinful rejection of our biblical call to work.

When we see sluggardliness showing up in our lives, it may be from a deep-rooted sinful desire to avoid work. If that is the case, we should simply repent. Thank God for showing us our sins and for using the Scriptures to help us recognize our sin. That way, after we repent, we can run to Jesus for strength and grace to help in our time of need.

Remember that God didn't create us to be lazy people. He created us to be productive people. He created us not to be slugs but to be engaged in productive work. Our work brings glory to God, does good for others, and brings happiness to us.

Let's look at what Proverbs tells us about the sluggard and see if we see any sluggardly characteristics in our lives of which God is calling us to repent.

A sluggard doesn't maintain their possessions.

I passed by the field of a sluggard, by the vineyard of a man lacking sense, and behold, it was all overgrown with thorns; the ground was covered with nettles, and its stone wall was broken down. Then I saw and considered it; I looked and received instruction. Proverbs 24:30–32 (ESV)

I thought I would begin with this one because all of us know this on a personal level at this time of year. The weeds are growing everywhere. Our yards need constant mowing. Many of you can pay someone to mow the yard and kill

the weeds. I am too cheap. When it comes to the yard, I am a DIY guy. Mowing the lawn and spraying the weeds saves money, but it takes work and time. When I come home from work, and I am tired, I want to sit on the back porch and drink iced tea. I remind myself that when my yard starts to look shaggy, and I try to ignore it, that is laziness in me. There is nothing wrong with taking a break and drinking iced tea but I either need to pay someone to do the yard work or I need to start mowing. If I keep ignoring it, that is sluggishness in me. Adam and Eve were put in the garden to work it and keep it. God gave each of us little gardens called our homes. Like Adam and Eve, we are responsible for working with them and keeping them.

Sometimes, we see homes with overgrown lawns, houses that need maintenance, or houses that are falling apart. What do we think when we see the homes of people who don't take care of their possessions? They appear lazy. Of course, there are exceptions. Sometimes, people are sick. Sometimes, people are financially challenged. Sometimes, people are struggling with alcoholism or drug addictions. Many times, not caring for our possessions boils down to sluggishness, a sinful disdain of work of which we need to repent.

This is not just true of what we see outside the house, but it is also true of what we see inside the house. There is a lot of maintenance that needs to happen inside the house too. The garbage needs to be taken out. The house needs to be vacuumed. It needs to be dusted. The food in the back of the refrigerator, which has longer hair than your daughter's, needs to be thrown out. Why do we ignore the lasagne in the back of the refrigerator that has been there

so long it looks like it is growing broccoli? It is sluggishness, our sinful disdain of work.

A sluggard pursues rest instead of work.

How long will you lie there, O sluggard? When will you arise from your sleep? 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. Proverbs 6:6–11 (ESV)

A sluggard has a snooze button and knows how to use it. A diligent person gets out of bed early in the morning and starts their day early, while the sluggard wants to stay in bed. They get up at the crack of noon.

I told you my daughter married a few weeks ago. When she was dating Ben, and brought him home to meet me, one of the reasons I liked him is he is not lazy. He is disciplined. He will work hard so I am confident he will provide for my daughter. He likes to go to bed around 9:00 PM because he gets up at 5:00 AM. He is not someone who wastes hours of pointless time watching useless television late into the night. He goes to bed early because he is excited to get out of bed early. He is eager to work.

Some of us are retired, and we can sleep as late as we want. I understand that. I would contend that it is still good to get up and get going. Sleeping too much can be a sign of sinful laziness in our lives. Remember, we were created to work. If we avoid work because we prefer to keep a pillow over our head, it is good to ask ourselves, “Do I love sleep too much because I have become lazy? Am I becoming a sluggard?” If so, simply confess to Jesus and repent. Ask Jesus for the strength and grace to get your day started earlier.

A sluggard sees even a blessing as hard work.

The sluggard buries his hand in the dish; it wears him out to bring it back to his mouth. Proverbs 26:15 (ESV)

There is some humor mixed with this Proverb. One way to recognize sluggardliness in our lives is we see everything as work to be avoided instead of a blessing to be enjoyed. In this Proverb, a guy has a nice meal in front of him. I don't know who prepared it. I don't know who paid for it. What I know is that he complains about all the hard work of lifting his fork to his face instead of being filled with gratitude for a meal. Someone buys him a Jersey Mike's sub, but he complains it is too hard and hard to lift.

This may sound irrational, but there is a lot of truth in this Proverb. We all know people who claim to be overwhelmed by even a little work, even if only a little work will lead to a big payout. We see it in our children when they are young. We ask them to clean up their room. It should take 5 minutes. What do they do? They complain and whine about the hard work of picking up their toys. When my children whined about picking up their room, sometimes I reminded them they should be thankful because many children don't have a room. Other times, I reminded them that they should be thankful for their toys because many children would be glad to have their toys. Sinful sluggardliness in our hearts leads us to gripe about work instead of being thankful for what we have.

For example, do you find yourself complaining about cleaning the house, or are you grateful to have a house? Do you find yourself complaining about cooking a meal, or are you grateful to have a meal? Do you find yourself complaining about the work of your job, or are you just thankful to have a job? Do

you feel gripeing when they ask you to serve at church, or are you grateful to have a church?

A contemporary application of this would be college scholarships. Each year, millions of dollars in college scholarships go unclaimed simply because students haven't applied. It seems so hard to write a 500-word essay for a \$10,000 scholarship.

If we find ourselves whining about doing a little work to enjoy a good blessing, the chances are good that sinful sluggardliness has crept into our hearts. If that is the case, repent and call out to Jesus for help.

A sluggard doesn't take the time to eat healthy.

Whoever is slothful will not roast his game,... Proverbs 12:27 (ESV)

This one may hit close to home for many of us. This Proverb reminds us that laziness shows up in our lives when we don't want to take the time to prepare healthy meals because it involves too much work. We would rather eat everything raw.

When my sons were first out of college, their default was to either food from a restaurant, which was too expensive, or to buy everything from a gas station, which was quick and cheap. The problem is that bags of Doritos, hot dogs, cheesy fries, and energy drinks don't lead to a healthy body. After a year or two of that kind of diet, both of our boys felt sick. They took their parent's advice to heart and were reintroduced to these things called vegetables. They bought healthy meat, not something that sat under a warming light for 24 hours. They learned to cook. Today, both of them love to cook, and they prepare family meals when we get together as a family.

What happened in their lives? They had become lazy. It showed up in their diet. They didn't want to do any of the work needed to eat healthily. It came from a sinful, sluggish attitude deep in their souls.

Let me be clear. There is nothing wrong with food that comes from a gas station or McDonald's. Yet, we should ask ourselves if, if that is what we eat all the time simply because we don't want to do the work of preparing something healthy, we have become lazy. Are we avoiding our biblical call to work?

A sluggard always has an excuse for why they can not work.

**The sluggard says, "There is a lion outside! I shall be killed in the streets!"
Proverbs 22:13 (ESV)**

This Proverb has a bit of humor mixed with its truth. Here is someone who can't go to work or complete his work because he is afraid there is a lion in the streets. The humor of this is a lion lives in the wilderness. Lions avoid populated places like the city streets. Many times, sluggards don't just have excuses for why they can't get their work done, but they often give lame excuses for not getting it done. Behind all of a sluggard's excuses is sinful laziness and a heart that doesn't want to work. They don't understand that we are created to work. Our work brings glory to God. It serves others. It brings that satisfaction of a job well done to our hearts.

My middle son manages a knife sharpening company in Ames, IA. He has a team of about ten employees. The other day we were talking about some management issues. He told me it is always the same two employees who have an excuse for why they are late to work, for why they need to leave early from work, and for why they can't get their job done at work. In the minds of those

employees, they have legitimate excuses. They overslept their alarm. Their car wouldn't start. The problem is these are not one-time occurrences. They have overslept their alarm more than once. Their car hasn't started more than once. My son now sees their excuses as lame excuses, like a lion in the streets. If you oversleep your alarm, set more than one alarm. If your car doesn't start, have a backup plan before you go to bed.

Those who want to work never have excuses to avoid work. Those who just want money are always finding excuses to escape work. If we make excuses to avoid work, it may be a sign of sinful sluggishness in our soul. If so, we need to repent.

A sluggard doesn't prepare for the future.

The sluggard does not plow in the autumn; he will seek at harvest and have nothing. Proverbs 20:4 (ESV)

This is interesting. You would think that a sluggard would not plow in the spring. This is plowing in the autumn, the fall. It is turning over the fields after the harvest so there is a clean field in the spring to plant for harvest next year. The point of this is as soon as the harvest of one year is done, a wise farmer is already thinking about the future and preparing for the future, while a lazy person doesn't think about the future or prepare for it until it is right in front of them

This is another verse that hits close to home for many of us. How many of us are preparing for the distant future? Do we have a retirement account? Are we saving for retirement? If we are not saving anything for retirement, is it because of laziness? We are procrastinating. We are not planning for the inevitable.

If you are a student in school, when do you write the paper? The night before it is due? When do you study for the test? The night before you have to take it? If you don't plan ahead and read ahead, is that sinful sluggardliness in your heart?

I wrote a note next to that verse in my Bible years ago. "If I want a successful marriage tomorrow, I need to invest in my wife today. What my marriage looks like in 20 years will be the accumulation of the relational deposits I make today."

Are you planning financially for the future? Are you planning relationally for the future with your spouse and children by making deposits of good memories with them today? If not, is it because of a sinful desire to avoid the work?

A sluggard lacks initiative.

Go to the ant, O sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise. Without having any chief, officer, or ruler, she prepares her bread in summer and gathers her food in harvest. Proverbs 6:6–8 (ESV)

Look at the ant. Ants are self-motivated. There is no boss telling them what to do. There is nobody using a carrot to motivate them or a stick to threaten them. They see what needs to be done, and they have the natural drive to get it done. One of the ways we can recognize sinful laziness in our lives is we need someone to constantly tell us what to do because we don't have the initiative or drive to see what needs to be done and do it on our own.

When our children were growing up, we talked about this a lot. I assume you had the same talks in your home. When the garbage is full, don't keep stacking it up to see how high you can get it before it falls; empty the garbage. You don't need to be told to empty it when you see it needs to be emptied. When

the dishes are stacking up in the sink, take the initiative to wash them. Don't wait for your mother to tell you to wash them. Don't hope she will wash them for you. She is your mother, not your maid. A lack of initiative and the inability to see work that needs to be done and then get it done can be a sign of sinful laziness in our lives.

The payday for Cindy and me is when we talk to our sons on the phone and hear their stories from work. I love to hear them talk about how frustrated they become with employees who don't clean up their workspace, empty the garbage, vacuum the shop, or turn off the lights when they leave at night. They say, "How can they live that way?" Cindy and I look at each other with a little sparkle in our eyes and say, "We have no idea how people can live that way either."

A sluggard is all talk but no action.

[In all toil there is profit, but mere talk tends only to poverty. Proverbs 14:23 \(ESV\)](#)

A sluggard talks about doing things but never makes them happen. When I read this, I thought of my wife's mother. She went through a divorce, which was very painful for the family. Whenever Cindy asked her mother why she divorced her first husband, she always gave the same answer: He was all talk and no action. He would promise things but never do them. He was not a man of his word.

We all know people who promise us things but are known for not keeping their word. In some cases, that is because they are deceptive people, but in most cases, it is a form of sinful sluggardliness in us.

Let me give you practical examples. Do you ever see people at church and say, “We should get together sometime.” Then you don’t do anything about it? Do you ever say to someone, “I will pray for you.” Then you don’t pray for them? All of us do this. We can be all talk but no action.

When it comes to praying for people, I usually don’t promise to pray for them. I try to offer to pray with them right there on the spot, so I keep my word. When it comes to meeting with people, I try to schedule a time to get together on the spot. Do you have next Thursday free? If I can’t immediately schedule a time, I put that on a list that needs to be accomplished within the next 24 hours.

A sluggard will experience a hard life.

The way of a sluggard is like a hedge of thorns, but the path of the upright is a level highway. Proverbs 15:19 (ESV)

What a great picture. Imagine trying to walk down a hedge of thorns. Anything you did would be full of pain. That is what life is like for a sluggard. They want to avoid work. They want to take life easy. Instead of work, they end up with a life of suffering and pain everywhere they turn. This is why it is good for us to pursue a life of diligence.

3. What does Proverbs teach us about diligence?

In Proverbs, the sluggard is contrasted with the diligent person. What does it mean to be diligent? In Hebrew, it means two things.

Diligence means exercising care in our work and perseverance in our work.

It means exercising care in our work, which means doing a good job. It also means perseverance in that work. It is taking care to do your work well and doing it well for a long period of time. Look what Proverbs says about this leads to.

Diligence leads to financial success.

A slack hand causes poverty, [but the hand of the diligent makes rich.](#) Proverbs 10:4 (ESV)

While laziness and a lack of initiative lead to poverty, doing a really good job at something for a long period of time leads to success. What happens is over time, you slowly rise to the top, and your paycheck rises with it. When you are known for doing good work for a long period of time, people will pay for it.

This past week, I listened to an interview with Dr. Ben Carson. In the interview, he shared how he went from a poor child growing up in Detroit in a single-parent home to a world-famous brain surgeon. He said it took a lot of hard work. It took a lot of studying, sacrifice, and perseverance. When he began as a surgeon, he wasn't paid well. When people started realizing he was a good surgeon with many successful surgeries, people paid him more and more. The rest is history. The recipe for success that he gave in that interview is the biblical definition of diligence.

Diligence leads to positions of leadership.

The hand of the diligent will rule, while the slothful will be put to forced labor. Proverbs 12:24 (ESV)

Those who do their work with excellence and consistency over a long period of time do not just do well financially. They usually find themselves rising to positions of leadership in their place of work. I used to tell my sons, if you want a promotion, work now like you deserve a promotion. That promotion may not come overnight, but, as a general rule, diligence in your work will lead to positions of leadership at work. Those who lack initiative will find themselves stuck at the bottom of the ladder.

Diligence opens doors of opportunity.

Do you see a man skillful in his work? He will stand before kings; he will not stand before obscure men. Proverbs 22:29 (ESV)

If you do a good job in academics or athletics or whatever your chosen vocation, you will find doors of opportunity opening. You will find yourself going places you never expected to go doing things you never expected to do.

Diligence opens doors of opportunity.

Diligence leads to eternal rewards.

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 3:23–24 (ESV)

The Bible reminds us that we are not just working to please our boss. We are working to please Jesus. This is my greatest motivation for diligence.

Diligence may lead to financial success, but it doesn't always work that way.

Diligence may lead to leadership positions, but it doesn't always work that way.

Sometimes, office politics are involved, and the wrong person gets promoted.

While diligence may pay off in this life, it doesn't always pay. Thankfully, there is one area where diligence will always pay. That is with Jesus. Jesus is watching how we live. He knows about our integrity, effort, quality, and sacrifices we make for him. In eternity, he promises to reward us for how we live today.

Jesus is so good. He didn't just suffer the agonies of the cross to die for our sins and bring us to heaven; he is also looking forward to rewarding us when we get to heaven. He will reward us then for how we live now. Your boss may not pay you what you are owed, but in eternity, Jesus will. You may be skipped over

for a promotion in this life, but I guarantee you that Jesus will honor you in the next life.

Proverbs are the way life usually works, but heavenly rewards from Jesus are the way eternity always works.

When my sons went to work, I used to tell them to remember that they worked for an audience of one. At the end of the day, there is only one person that they need to please. That is Jesus. One day, Jesus will reward them. Jesus sees their lives. Jesus knows the truth. More important than putting a smile on your boss's face is putting a smile on Jesus' face. That is what matters.

Conclusion

The book of Proverbs may have surfaced areas in your life that have grown sluggish, which we must repent of. We were created to work, not be lazy. The book of Proverbs gives us a goal for how we work: We are to work with diligence. The goodness of Jesus is that in the next life, he promises to reward us for how we live in this life. No matter what happens to us now, we look forward to being rewarded for our diligence then. That is the greatest motivation to move from sluggishness to diligence in all we do.



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