

Laziness

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[0 : 0 0] It would be worth having these little sheets kind of accessible to you. We've just put all the verses together so you're not having to flick through your Bibles too much. One of the ways that Proverbs sometimes gets its point across, that it helps us learn about these various topics that we've been looking at over the last few weeks and how to be wise in them, is by introducing us to these different characters who are a kind of a personification of these different traits.

We've met Lady Wisdom, who is kind of everything that we would strive to be like. She is wisdom itself almost. We've met The Fool, who is kind of the counterpoint to that.

He demonstrates how not to live well. This week we're kind of meeting one of perhaps my favorite characters, almost a kind of a comical character, and yet at the same time I think an incredibly challenging character.

And that character, you'll have heard his name mentioned, is The Sluggard. I just think, by the way, what a brilliant word that is, isn't it? The sluggard. It's one of those words, even if you've never heard it before, you can still kind of tell just by the way it sounds what it means.

The lazy, the slothful, the idle. These are the issues that Proverbs is going to give us a spiritual angle on this morning as we meet, as we think about the sluggard.

[1 : 2 0] Perhaps immediately certain people come to mind. I won't ask for suggestions, don't kind of catch anyone's eye at this point, but let's always remember that these are words to us, that actually none of us here don't need to hear this.

There's none of us here who can say, I could have stayed in bed and had a lie-in this morning because idleness is not something that affects me. No, as one commentator says, let's all admit it, there is a sluggard deep inside each of us.

What we're going to do this morning looking through these verses, and you'll see the headings on there, is first just to see, I suppose, the nature of laziness, being honest with ourselves, trying to identify our weaknesses.

Where do we see this sluggard inside each one of us? And then looking at the problem of laziness. Why is that an issue? What are the warnings that Proverbs gives about laziness?

And then finally looking at the solution to laziness. How does Proverbs, how does the Bible, how does the gospel speak into this issue? That if we're honest, I think we can often just think is more to do with kind of a motivation issue or just how much sleep we have or haven't had, rather than anything to do with God.

[2 : 3 0] What does God have to say about this issue? So that's the plan. One thing, just as we start, just before we dig into that, which I think is always important, but is perhaps especially relevant in this topic that we're looking at this week, is to remember the very purpose of us being here at church this morning.

That the goal of church, contrary to what people might have you believe, that the goal of church is not to make you feel bad. The idea is not to make people go away and say, well, Ali did a great job at really kind of racking up the guilt this morning, so I'll set my alarm for about 15 minutes earlier.

No, the point of us gathering week by week, the point of us encouraging one another throughout the week as a church, is to increase our enjoyment in God, is to increase our joy in Jesus and the gospel and all that he's done.

And yes, to be challenged, yes, to change, and yet for that challenge and for that change to be rooted in the gospel, to be done in response to what God has first done, not to be from some kind of self-help or moralizing or feeling of guilt or anything like that.

And again, that's what Proverbs is all about, isn't it? I think I've said this each week. I wasn't here last week, so I can say it twice as many times this week, that Proverbs is not a book of tips and tricks.

[3 : 57] Proverbs is not a book of rules and suggestions. Proverbs is a gospel book. Proverbs is a book, remember, about fearing the Lord, about recognizing truly who he is and who we are, that that is the beginning of wisdom.

Proverbs is a book about trusting in him and not ourselves. And it's ultimately about our need to accept Jesus and the difference that makes in every area of life.

That is what Proverbs is all about. And that is what Proverbs is going to apply to this very average, very normal, very day-to-day issue of laziness. And so first up, the nature of laziness.

And again, the first thing that Proverbs makes really clear here is that laziness is a spiritual thing. Laziness is a moral thing. And I think that sometimes surprises us.

As we've said, we don't often think of laziness as that big a deal. I've got terrible eyesight. Maybe you've got a dodgy knee. You struggle with your spelling. You're not good at maths. These things aren't ideal.

[5 : 00] But you live with it. You deal with it. Often, I'm a bit lazy. We kind of put it in in that category. It's just kind of part of who I am. It doesn't really matter. And yet that's not how Proverbs speaks about laziness.

It says it's a spiritual thing. It's a moral thing. How do we know that? Well, first of all, it's here in the Bible. We're reading about it. Proverbs, as we've said time and time again, it's quite a different type of book.

It might be different to what we're used to when we open our Bible. But it is still God's word to us. It is still entirely inspired, breathed out by God for our good.

So this is something that God is interested in, that God has something to say about. A bit more specifically, let's look at some of these verses. Again, in loads of these Proverbs, as we've seen before, we'll find two lines held kind of in parallel.

And this parallelism, as it's called, is inviting us to compare and contrast what is said in these two lines. So often the idea of laziness or the sluggard is contrasted with the diligent.

[6 : 04] You'll see that in chapter 10, verse 4 there, chapter 13, verse 4 as well. That's perhaps what we'd expect, laziness and diligence. But some verses are stronger than that.

Have a look at chapter 15, verse 19. The one is the sluggard with the upright. Have a look at chapter 21, verses 25 and 26 on the sheet.

They there contrast the sluggard with the righteous. The type of laziness that Proverbs is speaking about here is a moral issue. It's something that works against God's plan and against God's creation.

Ultimately, it's a sinful thing. And it's really important as we begin that we see that, because I think then that gives us the kind of the motivation, that gives us perhaps the kick that we need, the push to get this right and to deal with this in the right way.

If this is a sinful thing, a moral thing, then what we need, as we said, is that kind of gospel solution to it. And so the nature of laziness is that it's a spiritual thing, a moral thing.

[7 : 08] What does it actually look like? A few things that these Proverbs point out to us that I think help it to hit home a bit in our lives. Number one, laziness is always looking for excuses.

Proverbs 22, verse 13 on the sheet there, and this is repeated again later in chapter 26. The sluggard says, There is a lion outside. I will be killed in the streets.

This verse is not a warning about kind of dangerous animals. The point here is that the lazy, the sluggard, will make up any excuse, however ridiculous it might be, to try and get out of doing something.

They will always have a reason for not doing something. Again, straight away, I find this hitting home. I've not yet tried the lion outside excuse. I don't know if people have used that one.

But I do know I'm incredibly prone to putting things off. I'm very good at thinking of reasons why today would not be a good day to start doing the plans I have.

[8 : 12] Why this morning would not be the right morning to start getting up early or whatever else it is. Why this season of life would not be the right season of life to start this new thing.

If you're anything like me, straight away, you start to recognize that sluggard inside of all of us. What else does Proverbs say about the nature of laziness?

Well, it says that the lazy person is always wanting things. It's just they can't be bothered to do them. Chapter 13, verse 4, Chapter 21, 25 and 26 again, it speaks of this lethal cocktail.

It says it is the sluggard's desire that kills him because he wants stuff but refuses to work for it. Proverbs points out, it highlights to us, this inconsistency in laziness between our desires, between what we want and what we're actually willing to do.

It shows us, it makes clear to us that laziness is not the same as being easily content or relaxed. Laziness actually works against that contentment.

[9 : 27] In Proverbs, it is the sluggard who is agitated, worried, dissatisfied because they won't actually do anything about the situations in their life. Again, this is something that has really kind of poked me, I suppose, as I've been looking at that this week.

I can think of a number of times where I've been worried. I've had things kind of stuck in my head. What is the reason that they're there? Well, it's just because I haven't got round to dealing with them. I haven't got round to writing that email.

I haven't kind of plucked up the courage to have that awkward conversation. I just haven't bothered to do that piece of work. And then when the time and the opportunity is there, well, I would rather switch off.

I'd rather distract myself. I'd rather push those things to the back of my head than deal with them. And again, it comes hand in hand then with these excuses that we make, doesn't it? I can't really deal with that now because it's been a busy day.

I can't really deal with that now because I've got this kind of alert on my phone and I just need to check this instantly. I can't deal with that now that there's a lion outside.

[10 : 32] Whatever it is that we make up to keep us from doing what we know that we need to do. And so the nature of laziness, it's a moral thing, a spiritual thing. It works itself out in really average ways, making excuses, not dealing with things that we want to deal with, and that it's something that affects all of us.

And so the nature of laziness. Let's move on because you might say, well, so what? Does it really matter? What difference does it make? Let's see a couple of things now that Proverbs says about, well, what's the problem with laziness?

We see what it looks like. What does it result in? Again here, two things to highlight. Firstly, we just can't ignore in these verses and throughout the book of Proverbs, a repeated link that the general outcome of laziness, it says, is poverty.

Chapter 6, verses 9 to 11 there. 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.

Chapter 10, verse 4. A slack hand causes poverty, but the hand of the diligent makes rich. Chapter 20, verse 4. The sluggard does not plow in the autumn. He will seek at harvest and have nothing.

[11 : 57] And again, if you look through their book of Proverbs, we could have picked countless more examples on that same theme. There's this general truth that hard work yields results, but refusing to do anything means we don't get anything.

This whole kind of concept would have been especially obvious, especially black and white, I suppose, in the original setting in which these Proverbs were given, an agricultural setting, a land of kind of subsistence farming, as we would call it, living from season to season.

It would have been very clear. If you can't be bothered to plow, you're not going to have anything to harvest. You're not going to have anything to eat. Again, one of the key things of Proverbs is that it observes the general realities of life in the world that God has created.

And I know what it doesn't say. It doesn't say that poverty is always a result of laziness. That's not true. And yet we can't miss, we don't need to over-spiritualize this truth that as a general rule, laziness leads to poverty, not having what we need.

And that is one of the problems of laziness that Proverbs highlights. The second problem is this, that my laziness affects other people. That laziness is inherently self-centered.

[13 : 14] Now we've already spoken about the lazy craving things for itself in chapter 21, verse 25. The desire of the sluggard kills him, for his hands refuse to labor all day long.

He craves and craves. Look there, the second half of verse 26. What's the contrast? What's the alternative that Proverbs gives us? It doesn't go on and say, but the hard worker gets what he wants.

No, it says, but the righteous give and does not hold back. The righteous, the upright, the diligent, don't just get for themselves. They work so that they can also freely give to others.

They are people who have this positive effect on those around them, on their community, on their family, on their church. As with so many other things, the Bible takes what we consider as a purely personal issue.

So what if this is how I choose to live my life? And it turns our eyes to those around us and how we affect others. Chapter 10, verse 5 there, he who gathers in summer is a prudent son, but he who sleeps in harvest is a son who brings shame.

[14 : 25] Again, bringing this kind of collective idea to mind. Chapter 18, verse 9, whoever is slack in his work is a brother to him who destroys.

As we say, you know, cutting a few corners, it won't hurt anyone. The Bible says actually it's on par with knocking something down and destroying things for other people. The problem with laziness is that it leads us personally to poverty and in the process, others around us suffer.

We don't help others. Instead, we hinder others. Kind of the big picture really is that laziness works against life as it should be.

It works against life as God has designed it to be. Work in all its forms, whether that's a kind of a nine-to-five, whether it's bringing up a family, whether it's work at home, whether it's study, whatever it is, work is not a curse.

Work is part of God's good creation. Right back in the opening chapters of Genesis in the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve are put there to work it. That work is affected by the fall in chapter three, but it doesn't mean that work is bad.

[15 : 36] Work is a good gift from God. It's engaging in that, makes life work well. Refusing that, rejecting that, it goes against the grain of God's creation.

Chapter 15, verse 19 there, the way of the sluggard is like a hedge of thorns. It's a mess. It's not how things are supposed to be. It doesn't help them or others.

But the path of the upright is a level highway. It's a picture of journeying through life in a way that makes sense. The smooth road for us and for others.

And so the nature of laziness, the problem of laziness, we've basically seen so far in Proverbs that we're lazy, and that that is a bad thing. It's bad for us.

It's bad for others. The great thing about Proverbs is that it points us to the solution for laziness. And that's what we're going to look at now, the solution to laziness. What does Proverbs say?

[16 : 35] Well, Proverbs does not just say, so stop it. Proverbs doesn't say, laziness is bad, stop being lazy. That's probably the approach we've tried before, hasn't it? We've all had New Year's resolutions, or we've had a birthday, or we've kind of drawn a line in the sand, and we've said, from now on, I will do this.

And probably all these things, we've found that long-term, very little changes. So what is Proverbs' solution to laziness? What we need is not a new set of rules.

Proverbs is not going to tell us the acceptable time to get up in the morning. Proverbs is not going to tell us how long it's reasonable to watch TV for in an evening. Instead, it's going to remind us of a new motivation that means that we can decide these things for ourselves using real wisdom, this wisdom that is at the heart of the book of Proverbs, this wisdom that is the key to the book of Proverbs.

Proverbs, remember, points us back to that big picture time and time again that we saw in those opening chapters to fear God, to trust in God, and through all that Jesus has done, his life, his death, his resurrection, to have a relationship with God.

Proverbs says that is what true wisdom is all about and that is where wisdom in these different areas of life is going to come from. That is the solution that Proverbs applies to this very day-to-day issue of laziness.

[18 : 07] So how does that deal with laziness? How do we connect kind of the big picture to the small detail? Let me read this quote from an author called Dorothy Sayers. This is something that I think really kind of helps this all fit together.

She says this, Laziness finds root in the sin which believes in nothing, cares for nothing, enjoys nothing, loves nothing, hates nothing, finds purpose in nothing, lives for nothing, and only remains alive because there is nothing for which it will die.

What is really behind our laziness, she says, it's a lack of purpose. It's a lack of desire. Nothing really matters and so what's the point?

And yet the gospel transforms that. The gospel says there is a purpose in life. There is a meaning to life. What is that? It's to bring glory to our creator.

It's to honor the one who has saved us. That is Jesus gave everything for us. In response, we give everything for him. One of the great kind of historic catechisms of Christianity, these question and answer formulations of what Christians believe is called the Westminster Shorter Catechism written hundreds of years ago, 1646.

[19 : 27] It begins question one with this question, what is the chief end of man? What is our purpose? What are we here for? And it gives this brilliant answer that generations of people, generations of Christians have clung to.

What is the chief end of man? The answer to glorify God and to enjoy him forever. Christianity and the gospel gives the answer to one of the biggest questions in life.

What's the point? Christianity says we're here for a reason and that reason is to glorify God and enjoy a relationship with him.

As we've just been saying, that is the message at the heart of the book of Proverbs. That is what the fear of the Lord is all about, recognizing his greatness and living in light of that, putting our trust in him and living in response to that.

And it's that purpose in life that that brings is what motivates us out of our tendency to apathy, our tendency to laziness, instead to be diligent, to be upright, to be righteous, because that is how we glorify and truly enjoy God together and he deserves that glory.

[20 : 44] And so the book of Proverbs and the gospel gives us that motivation. The solution also goes beyond that as well. Not only does the gospel motivate us to work hard, it also empowers us to do that.

In accepting the gospel, all who trust in Jesus, we're told, are given the gift of the Holy Spirit who is God working in us and through us. In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul writing after Jesus, after his life and death and resurrection, as he seeks to spread the good news about what Jesus has done, he says this, that he toils, that Paul toils struggling with all God's energy, that he powerfully works within him.

Paul is saying that he works hard. He is motivated by God's glory. That's what he's speaking about in this verse, proclaiming the gospel. But he does that not just motivated by the gospel, but also with the energy, with the strength, with the enabling that God himself gives him.

The God's energy that powerfully works within him. The solution for laziness is living for God's glory and doing that in God's strength. And that all flows from that key theme of Proverbs, of a right recognition and a right relationship with God, to fear God and to trust in him.

I just want to finish this morning by looking at this, I suppose, as a kind of a worked example in two areas of life, two different spheres of life. The first is our work generally.

[22 : 19] I suppose by this I mean what it is that occupies us for the majority of the time on the average day. It might be work that we travel to, it might be work in the home, it might be looking after a family, it might be going to school, it might be a combination of all these different things and more, different things at different times on different days.

I think the point to see is that everything that we've said applies in all of these areas. In every area of our life, whatever we do that kind of counts as work for us, we are tempted to laziness, we are tempted to excuses, we are tempted to putting things off.

When we do that, the problem is actually it makes things worse for us and for other people. And the solution again is to remember that whatever we spend our time doing, we are to do it for God's glory.

Again, you'll see on your sheet there the Apostle Paul writes, I put it down because in some ways I think this is the solution to laziness kind of in a nutshell, one verse, 1 Corinthians 10 verse 31, so whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.

Whatever it is that you'll be doing at 9 a.m. tomorrow, Monday morning, it is something that is to be done in God's strength for God's glory. And that means giving it our all.

[23 : 40] And that means toiling at it as Paul says. It means not being that the sluggard, the one who people expect to be late, the one who people expect to have to cover for, the one who people expect to do half a job and someone else will pick up the slack.

And all that means being those who are diligent, who are upright, who are righteous. Now, all those terms that Proverbs contrasts with laziness. And what's the outcome of that?

The Proverbs says it will help things to go well for you, that this hard work is working in line with the grain of God's creation, that you prosper in that work. It also says, as we saw, that means it will be an encouragement, it will be a help to others.

But ultimately, and most importantly, in all of these different things that we're doing, it means that we are able to glorify God. That is our motivation and that is the outcome when we do these things well in his name.

And we're going to do something slightly different now. Just take 10 seconds to think what is the one or perhaps two things that I could start or stop doing tomorrow that would move me in that direction.

[24 : 50] Again, not motivated by guilt, but rather motivated by the purpose in life that the gospel brings, to glorify God and enjoy him forever. This is something we can talk more about over coffee, but 10 seconds now just to kind of start thinking what might that look like for you.

Go for it. Okay. 10 seconds feels like a long time when you're standing up here, but do you think about that?

That might have just kind of got the ball rolling for you. We want to keep this big picture in mind, but we do want to work that out in practical and day-to-day ways. A final area that I just want us to think about as to how we work this out in life is for those of us who are Christians in regards to our Christian lives.

Because again, if we're honest, we can be so lazy here, can't we? So often we find easy excuses for not working at our relationship with God, and that relationship needs work, as any relationship does.

What's the danger? What's the problem with that? Well, again, I think the problem is it leads us to poverty, not material poverty. The Bible doesn't speak about God making us rich, but I suppose what we could call a relational poverty.

[26 : 12] A poverty in terms of the joy, the peace, the hope, the security, the life in all its fullness that God promises us through Jesus. If we trust in Jesus, those are things that we have.

They are ours, one for us, by him. And yet so often, if we're honest, we let ourselves drift so far from Jesus that we have a real poverty of these things in terms of what we experience.

And again, the problem there is not just for us. As we struggle with that, we then struggle to encourage others. Our slackness affects our walk with God. It stops us encouraging others in their walk with God.

Now, please don't misunderstand this as me saying if we did everything kind of right, if we're really committed in our Christian walk, in our relationship with Jesus, that we'll always feel full of the joys of spring.

That's not what I'm saying. I don't think that's what the Bible says. But I think if we're honest, our problem is not that we're kind of beating down God's door day after day looking for him to comfort us.

[27 : 16] It's much more common that actually we haven't got round to making our way to his door in the first place. We don't wrestle with God in prayer. We don't read and meditate on God's word, the Bible, as a priority in our life.

We're perhaps not as committed to one another as his people as we could and should be. Again, what's the solution when we see these areas of laziness in our Christian lives?

Well, again, it's not to feel bad and so try harder. It's certainly not to say, okay, well, I'll really give it my best shot and then God will love me. I think the solution is the same.

It's to remember God's love for us, to remember that he has given everything for us through the death of his son, Jesus Christ. It's to remember that if we accept Jesus, we have that gift of the Holy Spirit, God himself living inside of us.

And it's with that as our motivation and with that as our power that we remember that through the gospel we have a real purpose to glorify God with our lives, to glorify God in our relationship with him in response to what he has first done for us.

[28 : 31] Again, that's something that you could think about. What steps could I take to put those things in place this week? Where could I be proactive in response to the gospel in strengthening my relationship with Jesus?

Perhaps a good idea to talk to someone about, perhaps a good idea to share with someone over coffee or sometime this week to keep one another accountable. That's not, again, a kind of a legalistic thing.

That's not Big Brother watching over you. Rather, it's a way that we can help one another draw closer to God and live with this fuller experience of the joy and peace and security and all the other wonderful things that God promises to his people and that are ours in Christ if our trust is in him.

And just as we close, let me say one last thing. Perhaps you're here this morning and you're not a Christian. You're not yet convinced by what the Bible says about Jesus and all that he's done. As always, we are delighted that you're here.

I suppose my challenge this morning, as it is really a challenge for all of us, I suppose, is to say, what are you finding your purpose in in life? Where does your motivation come from and is that something that will last?

[29 : 45] It's, again, to remind you, to remind all of us of the invitation of the gospel that says that Jesus has given everything for those who trust in him. And that to follow him gives great security but also gives this genuine purpose.

It is something that changes the whole of life in a way that nothing else can. It's something that makes us think, how could I be lazy when I have so much to thank God for and so much day by day, hour by hour even, in which I can glorify and enjoy him now and forever.

The gospel changes everything. That gospel invitation is for everyone. And it is that gospel that Proverbs is all about. Let's pray together.