

# Proverbs

## Wisdom and Sloth

June 18, 2017

Happy Father's Day.

Fathers operate like an umbrella shield that protects the people in their care from the world caving in on them. Life is hard and the world is brutal. Bills to be paid, food to be bought, things to be repaired. The Bible says that fathers and mothers are worthy of honor. In my opinion our society doesn't do a lot of honoring dads. We tend to make fun of dads. In most of our TV shows the dad is a buffoon who can't do anything right.

You have an incredibly hard job. And I want you to know that your heavenly father sees and smiles at your diligence. He sees those times when you are exhausted from your day and you say "yes" to playing. He sees the diapers changed as an act of service. He sees the provision, the protection, all the ways you sacrifice so that your family is taken care of. It is beautiful man work. My assumption is that you don't get affirmed in it very often. I want to affirm you and honor you and I hope you enjoyed your kabob.

Turn with me to Proverbs chapter 24. The sermon won't be about fathers, it's an everybody issue. In fact, I didn't even realize it was Father's Day when we mapped out the series.

I want to talk to you about what Proverbs calls slothfulness. It's one of the so called seven deadly sins. *Acedia* is its Latin term.

Proverbs uses the term "sluggard" for a person who is slothful. I didn't understand what sloth was until recently. I had always thought it was simple laziness. That's a bit of a shallow understanding of it. Recently I heard someone teaching on it and I want to basically take what they taught me and share it with you.

### **Proverbs 24:30-34**

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. 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 26:13-16**

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.

Proverbs says funny things about slothfulness.

- Lion in the streets. Silly excuse for not doing what he should be doing.
- Turning in bed. Unmotivated to get up and get to work.
- Buries hand in dish. Starts things and doesn't finish them. Too much of a burden.

Proverbs presents sluggard as person who makes excuses, can't finish tasks, leaves work undone.

It's not mere laziness.

Eastern University professor RJ Snell wrote a book called "acedia and its discontents: metaphysical boredom in an empire of desire" - as you can tell from the title, it's a real page turner.

## **RJ Snell**

It is a mistake to think that sloth is laziness. More than indolence (or apathy) sloth rejects the burden of order, choosing instead the breezy lightness of freedom. Loving self more than relation, and autonomy more than the good, in sloth one rejects the weight and density of living in an ordered creation. In sloth, we abhor what is there. We abhor what is. We abhor limits and place and order and being. Our misguided addiction to freedom without truth is a revolt of the self against any charged world which might demand attention, care, obligation, or respect. And certainly, against any mandate of working to fill God's beautiful kingdom. They are seen as insufferable demands. As illegitimate restrictions on our unbridled freedom. And so, we find ourselves hating the place God has provided, the work God has given to us, and the proper ways of laboring.

It's a refusal and rejection of purpose. That's what's happening in the heart of a sluggard. Really what's going on at the heart of a sluggard is that they have rejected God's purposes for their life.

- Sloth is a rejection of being designed for a purpose and particular ends.
- The thought that I would have demands or expectations on me is too burdensome.
- Lust for complete unfettered freedom. Disdain for responsibility. Encroaches on my freedom. And introduces into my life restraints and I don't want those things.
- Telos - end, design for which they are created.
- Slothfulness is a revulsion and rejection of being designed for a particular purpose, particular ends.

In other words, you can be very busy and yet still be eaten up with sloth. It's not an absence of activity per se.

Think about this with me. God the Father pours self-giving love out into the Son, Son pours self-giving love towards the father, all in the unity of the Spirit.

God is always at work. And our world is created out of love.

Genesis - let us make man in our likeness. Dominion.

Work is before The Fall. Not a product of sin. In a perfect creation, people are given work to do.

As humans, we are in God's image. With a higher calling and purpose. And sloth is a rejection of that calling. Sloth continues to attack the original purposes that God created humanity for.

### **1 - We are made to relate to God.**

To know Him, glorify Him, and enjoy Him forever. To worship Him, submit our lives to Him. To love Him with all our energy and zeal and strength. Slothful people reject this purpose. They don't see their life as meant to relate to God. They don't pursue God with zeal. They don't exert energy in glorifying God with their lives. It's a burden for them to do so. That kind of purpose brings tremendous restraint on our lives. Too constricting to me. Too much of a burden. To love God with all my strength and energy? I'd rather lay here.

Speaking of the sluggard turning on his bed like he's hinged,

## **Matthew Henry**

It is an elegant hyperbole...showing how his sin is his punishment. Those that are slothful in the business of religion will not be at the pains to feed their own souls with the word of God, the bread of life, nor to fetch in promised blessings by prayer, though they might have them for the fetching.

## 2 – We are made to relate to each other.

Adam and Eve are to love one another, just as God has loved them. They are to pour out their lives for one another.

But sloth rejects this purpose. Finds relationships too difficult. Too infringing on personal freedom and autonomy. Self-donating love infringes on my autonomy. It's hard work. Sluggard resists relationships, particularly difficult ones.

## 3 – We are made to have dominion.

Harness the earth's resources to create culture. Harness resources for the good of humanity. Take the raw materials of creation and do something with them to make life better. Fill the earth with beauty and goodness. To be a help to other people.

Educators fill the earth with people who have knowledge. Artists take raw materials and draw out beauty. Accountants take the chaos of numbers and bring about order. We could go on and on.

Sluggard rejects this purpose. Too much effort.

Proverbs says the land of the sluggard was filled with thorns and thistles, walls in disarray. Earth is languishing under the failed dominion of the sluggard. Contributing nothing to creation, nothing to humanity. This is failed dominion. No one is helped, nourished,

He's turned inward. Folded his hands, sleeps, slumbers, personal comforts and freedom, personal rest and pleasure are his pursuits. By rejecting work and diligence as he was created for, he has not profited himself, others, or God. Instead of turning outward in love towards God, others, and creation, the sluggard turns in on itself. Sloth does not want to give itself in love.

- Prefers to be left alone to no responsibilities and no demands.
- It is anti-love. No restraints, no expectations, no demands, no obligations, just leave me alone.
- Abhorrence of place and calling. God put me in this place, marriage, in this family, in this job, in this town, in this school. And I hate the demands that places on me, the restrictions I'm under. I just want to free from all of it.

I think sloth drives delayed marriage, delayed kids. We don't want to settle down. It's a desire for a life without demands and responsibilities.

I think this is what's happening when we say someone had a mid-life crisis. That's what we call it. It's really a "slothfulness explosion". I realize that term doesn't exactly roll off the tongue so I'm not pushing for us to change the name.

It shows up in small ways. For me, if I not careful my day becomes a race to get my kids in bed. "My life begins when their day ends."

What are the consequences of slothfulness?

## 1 – Metaphysical boredom

- Think about how much time we spend trying to cure our boredom.
- Americans check their social media accounts on average 17 times per day. We spend an hour and 40 minutes per day on social media. Adults spend more time on social media than teens.
- 7.5 hrs per day teens spend engaging media. YouTube, Netflix, whatever.
- We are inundated with media as a cure to our boredom.

There is a difference in having a momentary boredom of nothing to do and living in a persistent state of boredom. Metaphysical boredom is not saying “I don't have anything to do. It's saying, “I don't know what I am meant to do.” So, I have nothing to give myself to. Boredom is the result of being unhinged from your purpose and design.

We are intoxicated by the idea of living in ultimate freedom with no obligations. Purpose means I exist for these things and these things over here are not for me. You have to cut off your options. You cannot both keep your options open and have purpose in your life. These are not possibilities for me, regardless of circumstances. Purpose requires limiting yourself, restraining yourself, restricting yourself.

If you want to become a world class musician, then you must limit yourself and practice and train. There will be things you cannot do in pursuit of this.

If you want to be an athlete then there will be hours of practice that you cannot spend doing other things. It limits you.

To have a purpose means other things are not for you.

We don't know why we exist but we reject any answer that places limits on us.

The problem is not there is nothing to do, but that I don't know what I am meant to do.

We aren't gripped with something bigger than ourselves to give our lives to. We aren't gripped with purpose. We have not let anything great take our imagination. Nothing is bigger than our own convenience and comfort and pleasure and desires.

When I am not pouring myself out I will try to fill myself with something. So, we consume. Social media, celebrity gossip, inner workings of sports teams, TV show after TV show, shopping.

I've got a friend who says you can know how he's doing spiritually by looking at his phone data usage, “A couple months ago, I had a very slothful month... and my phone data usage tripled. I went way over my limit.”

Consumption without contentment. No deep peace and lasting joy. Because we are not fulfilling our purpose for which we were created. We are meant to love God, love people, and do good work for the good of humanity.

### **Proverbs 13:4**

The sluggard craves and gets nothing, but the soul of the diligent is content.

The sluggard does not embrace his purpose of giving himself in love and contributing something. Consuming is easier. But it's also emptier.

## **2 - We lie about God**

Slothfulness is speaking lies about God. We are made to be thrilled with God. To be used for His purposes. The bored sluggard is saying, "God is boring to me." There is nothing about Him that would make me want to put the remote down and pursue Him with everything I have. He is not worth my awe and attention and service. His words are irrelevant to me.

Our misuse of time says something about our view of God. Living in a persistent state of sloth and boredom is a denial of God's worthiness.

- What if you prayed when you felt like killing time with your phone?
- What if you picked up your bible sometimes when you felt like scrolling through social media, or shopping for fun, or whatever you spend hours doing as a way to numb your boredom.

Of course, these things are fine in measure and moderation. But we are gorging ourselves on them.

Our conversations can also be an indicator here.

You might pay attention to how much your conversation is filled with chatter, as compared to how much is about the purposes for which you exist. How much of your talk with others is about God, relationships with the people you have been given to, and the work you've been given and ways you are to be producing...versus how much of your talk is filled with chatter about shows and sports and movies and clothes and complaints.

We are saying with our time and energy, "God, TV and media and clothes and whatever is so much better than you!" So, we continue looking online at pictures of other people's vacations and we look up and hours have passed.

## **3- Brokenness**

The language of Proverbs is that the surroundings of the sluggard are in disarray. Overgrown, broken. Where sloth reigns, you will find brokenness. Where people shrug off the work of cultivating relationships you will find people around them struggling. You will find that their life is breaking down.

Courtney and I have a good friend who is leaving her husband right now. Her husband is a great dude. He has not wronged her in any unusual way. He's a great dad. She says the romantic spark isn't there and she doesn't want to be tied down. That's sloth. "I don't want to be obligated to stay, to continue, to limit my options." So, with no apparent concern for the damage she is causing to her husband and children, she's walking away.

The slothful person leaves a wake of hurting, frustrated people in his wake.

How do we break free? Three answers.

### **1 - Carry your load**

Galatians 6:5 says that each of us has a load to carry. Work to do. It's different from burdens which are unusually heavy things that one person can't carry themselves. We are to carry each other's burdens. Your load is the work that God has given to you. It's a demand, an expectation. Reject false freedom and embrace your design. Embrace the call to give yourself to God, to others, your spouse, your kids, your roommates, your neighbors. Embrace the call to give yourself to the work God has given you.

RJ Snell again speaking about carrying our load.

## **RJ Snell**

We do this in concrete ways. Finishing the report. Paying our bills. Wiping away childish tears. Washing the car. Caring for our tools. Doing the dishes. staying in mundane, ordinary work, while perhaps unromantic, allows for virtue since natural virtue requires repetition. There is no virtue without repetition. And so, we stay put. We sink our roots deep. Parents can confirm this. Exhausting? Yes. But a new character forms with every nap, meal, diaper, wet bed, and smile. We become the people we are by what we choose to do, again.

Carry your load in your work. We all have work that God has given us.

- If you're a middle or high school student, part of your work is to honor your father and mother. In school, get the report done. Read the assignment.
- If you have a job, you carry your load by getting to work on time, being reliable.
- Follow up with the client. Put the finishing touches on the painting. Keep setting the alarm and getting to work on time. Don't be late. Take care of your tools. See the project through.
- If you primarily stay at home with children, your work is built into them. Draw out their potential.

Carry your load in your relationships. Your relationships end up forming you.

- Allow yourself to be inconvenienced by others.
- Do the hard work of pursuing difficult people. Including your difficult, weird roommate. Isn't there always one roommate who is a little weird?
- If you don't have a weird roommate then it's because you are the weird one.

Carry the load in your relationship with God. Some of you lack any sense of discipline and energy in your pursuit of God. You are shirking your created responsibility to pursue God with all your heart. Your reasoning for your lack of consistent quality time with Jesus, reading the Bible and praying and reflecting, sounds exactly like how proverbs describes the sluggard. "I don't know, I was just, I didn't really feel like it and I just get distracted and..." You were made to relate to God. Pursue him with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength.

When you carry the load that God has given you, over time, you develop virtue. Your character develops over time. The more you give yourself in love to others, you are formed over time through that. You cannot become the person God is shaping you to be without the people he has given to you.

When you stay in your marriage and serve your spouse, even when you're in a difficult season, you end up being shaped by it. When you serve your roommate again, you are taking yet another step in the direction of becoming a servant hearted person.

A lot of life is doing the same things, over and over. I'm dead in the middle of this right now. We can't clean a room without kids coming behind us making a mess. These small things are not just monotonous tasks, they are small ways you are pouring yourself out in love and carrying your load. The repeated acts that are beautiful are the ones that create beauty in us.

Your character is shaped with every load of laundry.

"We become the people we are by what we choose to do, again." The big moments in life are not the ones that will shape you the most. All the other moments in between the big moments are the ones that will really make you who you are.

You are formed by the things you do, again.

### **Proverbs 21:25-26**

The desire of the sluggard kills him, for his hands refuse to labor.

All day long he craves and craves, but the righteous gives and does not hold back.

The righteous man has become the kind of person who gives, invests, labors.

I want to brag on my dad. Real estate agent for over 30 years. Works hard and does great work, people love working with him. He's honest. I love that I get to recommend him to people because I truly believe he is the best out there. Growing up he was always ready to play. Or at least that's how it seemed. No telling how many hours of basketball games he played with me when I was little. I don't remember him saying no. I'm sure he did at some point but they didn't stand out compared to all the times he said yes. All of us who have been around him our lives are better because he carried the load that God gave to him.

You are becoming a certain kind of person by staying under the weight and continuing to carry the load that God has given to you. The demands on your life will form you into the person God has called you to be. You cannot become who God intends you to be unless you embrace the load he has given you.

## **2 - Distinguish between rest and escape**

Rest is when I am recharging, in a Godward way, so that afterwards I am ready to get back to work...to get back to things.

Escape is a false substitute and is often what we do when we are tired we just want to turn our brains off. Escape doesn't make us want to get back to work. Escape makes us want to be lazy. What happens is, we work hard and are tired and we go home and instead of resting we escape and then we don't know why remain tired and exhausted.

You can watch TV, but it isn't rest. You can play video games but that isn't rest. Rest needs to have some Godward component and needs to make you ready to get back to your work.

What is restful for you might not be what is restful for me. So, some amount of self-awareness is necessary. I'll give you a place to start. Sometimes what is restful is the opposite of what your work is.

So, my job as a pastor involves lots of reading, lots of talking, and it's never finished. All of us will keep on sinning until Jesus takes us home which means I am never finished.

So, things that are restful and restorative to me usually involved working with my hands and things that I can work at and finish and not have to think about again.

Yard work, sometimes, is restful for me.

Cooking. I love to cook, be creative, eat the meal, enjoy it, and never think about it ever again.

I don't know what is restful for you. But you need to learn. Otherwise you will just escape and never understand why you are so tired and exhausted all the time.

## **3 - Look to Jesus**

Jesus carried the load given to Him.

He was obedient to His parents.

He did work as a carpenter. Showing there's dignity in all work. God incarnate spent most of His time working with His hands. He made good tables. Jesus didn't make wobbly tables.

He said my food is to do the will of Him who sent Me.

He stayed on the cross, embracing the demands and responsibilities. He could save Himself or save us. And He chose to save us.

Renounce false freedom and the path of the sluggard, and through the power of the Holy Spirit let's embrace our design.