

Industriousness and Laziness

I. Proverbs on Industriousness and Laziness

A. From Prov 1-9

1. 6:1-5 - Work hard to get out of debt
2. 6:6-11 - The example of the ant

B. From Prov 10-31

- 10:4 Poor is he who works with a negligent⁶⁸ hand,
But the hand of the diligent makes rich
- 10:5 He who gathers in summer is a son who acts wisely,
But he who sleeps in harvest is a son who acts shamefully.
- 12:24 The hand of the diligent will rule,
But the slack⁶⁹ hand will be put to forced labor.
- 12:27 A lazy man does not roast his prey⁷⁰,
But the precious possession of a man is diligence.⁷¹
- 13:4 The soul of the sluggard craves and gets nothing,
But the soul of the diligent is made fat.
- 13:11 Wealth obtained by fraud dwindles,
But the one who gathers by labor increases it.⁷²
- 14:23 In all labor there is profit, But mere talk leads only to poverty.
- 15:19 The way of the lazy is as a hedge of thorns,
But the path of the upright is a highway.
- 18:9 He also who is slack in his work Is brother to him who destroys.⁷³
- 19:15 Laziness casts into a deep sleep,
And an idle man will suffer hunger.
- 19:24 The sluggard buries his hand in the dish,
But will not even bring it back to his mouth.
- 20:4 The sluggard does not plow after the autumn,
So he begs during the harvest and has nothing.
- 20:13 Do not love sleep, or you will become poor;

⁶⁸ It is interesting to note that רַמִּיָּה means both treacherous/deceitful and slack/loose

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⁷⁰ This line is difficult. לֹא-יַחְרֹךְ רַמִּיָּה צִידוֹ "The slack one does not set in motion his game/hunting." חָרַךְ means "to set in motion instead of "roast." The "roast" translation comes from Jewish tradition. This word is used only once in the Old Testament, hence the difficulty of translation.

⁷¹ This line is also difficult - וְהוֹן-אָדָם יָקָר חֲרוֹץ "but the wealth of a man precious diligent." Most translations have made an emendation to make this make sense. The Septuagint reads, ...κατῆμα δὲ τίμιον ἀνὴρ καθαρός. "...but a precious possession is a pure man.

⁷² The second line is: וְקָבַץ עַל-יָדוֹ יָרְבָּה "But the one who gathers by the hand makes much."

⁷³ Interesting phrase for "him who destroys." In Hebrew it is בֹּעַל מַשְׁחִית "lord of destruction"

- Open your eyes, and you will be satisfied with food.
 21:25-26
 The desire of the sluggard puts him to death,
 For his hands refuse to work;
 All day long he is craving,⁷⁴
 While the righteous gives and does not hold back.
- 22:13 The sluggard says, "There is a lion outside;
 I will be killed in the streets!"
- 22:29 Do you see a man skilled in his work?
 He will stand before kings;
 He will not stand before obscure men.
- 24:10 If you are slack⁷⁵ in the day of distress,
 Your strength is limited.
- 24:27 Prepare your work outside
 And make it ready for yourself in the field;
 Afterwards, then, build your house.
- 24:30-34
 I passed by the field of the sluggard
 And by the vineyard of the man lacking sense,
 And behold, it was completely overgrown with thistles;
 Its surface was covered with nettles,
 And its stone wall was broken down.
 When I saw, I reflected upon it;
 I looked, and received instruction.
 A little sleep, a little slumber,
 A little folding of the hands to rest,"
 Then your poverty will come as a robber
 And your want like an armed man.
- 26:13-16
 The sluggard says, "There is a lion in the road!
 A lion is in the open square!"
 As the door turns on its hinges,
 So does the sluggard on his bed.
 The sluggard buries his hand in the dish;
 He is weary of bringing it to his mouth again.
 The sluggard is wiser in his own eyes
 Than seven men who can give a discreet answer.
- 27:23-27
 Know well the condition of your flocks,
 And pay attention to your herds;
 For riches are not forever,

⁷⁴ Verse 26 says in Hebrew, כָּל־הַיּוֹם הַתְּאֵנָה תִּתְאֵנָה וְצָדִיק יֵתֵן וְלֹא יִתְשָׁךְ "All the day he desires desire, But the righteous gives and does not hold back..

⁷⁵ רָכַח - To sink, relax. The same word is used in 18:9 of the one who is slack in his work, and in 4:13 of the one who is not to "let go" of instruction. The idea is that a person is not to let up, but persevere.

Nor does a crown endure to all generations.
 When the grass disappears, the new growth is seen,
 And the herbs of the mountains are gathered in,
 The lambs will be for your clothing,
 And the goats will bring the price of a field,
 And there will be goats' milk enough for your food,
 For the food of your household,
 And sustenance for your maidens.
 28:19 He who tills his land will have plenty of food,
 But he who follows empty pursuits will have poverty in plenty.
 30:24-28
 Four things are small on the earth,
 But they are exceedingly wise:
 The ants are not a strong people,
 But they prepare their food in the summer;
 The shepherds are not mighty people,
 Yet they make their houses in the rocks;
 The locusts have no king,
 Yet all of them go out in ranks;
 The lizard you may grasp with the hands,
 Yet it is in kings' palaces.

II. Principles regarding industriousness and laziness

- A. Laziness will cause poverty, difficulty, and danger
 - 1. 10:4; 12:24; 15:19; 18:9; 19:15; 20:13; 24:10
 - 2. Biblical examples:
 - a. 2 Sam 11:1-2ff
 - 1) Kings were supposed to lead in battle in ancient times
 - 2) David stayed home, apparently with some idleness
 - 3) David involved himself in adultery
 - 4) The incident started a chain reaction of events that caused sorrow, danger, and difficulty the rest of his life
 - b. Judges 1:28ff
 - 1) They were supposed to drive all the Canaanites out
 - 2) Instead, they put some of them to forced labor
 - 3) The Canaanites eventually drew them away from God
 - 4) God allowed their enemies to oppress them after this
- B. The desire for leisure or rest can be dangerous
 - 1. 20:13; 21:25-26; 24:30-34
 - 2. A sluggard's desire is rest and relaxation
 - Rest and relaxation without work equals poverty
- C. A lazy tendency can always find excuses not to work, or put it off

- 22:13; 26:13

D. Laziness is kin to arrogance and foolishness

1. 26:16
2. Example: Amos 6:1-8
 - a. Riches and lazy days can lead to pride
 - b. God loathed the pride of Jacob, and was preparing to judge

E. A lazy person won't even take care of the most basic things

- 12:27; 20:4; 26:15

F. Work brings satisfaction and prosperity

1. 13:4; 13:11; 14:23; 28:19
2. Eccl 5:12 - Even if you don't make a lot working, there is still more satisfaction from working than not working

G. A person will be noted for his good work

- 22:29

H. Good work involves planning ahead and prioritizing

- 10:5; 24:27; 27:23-27

I. Sometimes you have to push yourself

1. 6:1-5; 6:6-11; 30:24-28
2. Example: Judges 4:17-21
 - a. Sisera stopped to rest
 - b. He fell asleep, and Jael killed him

J. Other passages:

1. 2 Thess 3:6-15
2. 1 Thess 4:9-12
3. Col 3:22-24
4. Eph 4:28
5. Titus 2:10
6. Matt 25:13-40

H. NOTE: Rest is not a bad thing

1. God himself rested on the seventh day
2. Exo 23:10-12 - The Principle of rest
 - a. Work six days, rest and refresh yourself on the seventh
 - b. God had to "command" this for the people, slaves, and animals
 - c. Num 15:32-36 - They were to take this command seriously

III. Other related material

A. Related Thoughts:

1. "Lost time is never found again."

2. Sheer laziness has probably been responsible for more shortcuts, not to mention valuable inventions, than we are ready to admit. Most of us are continually on the lookout, at least subconsciously, for easier ways to perform onerous or routine tasks. An example of imagination spurred on by outright lethargy is contained in the story of an old mountaineer and his wife who were sitting in front of the fireplace one evening just whiling away the time. After a long silence, the wife said: "Jed, I think it's raining. Get up and to outside and see." The old mountaineer continued to gaze into the fire for a second, sighed, then said, "Aw, Ma, why don't we just call in the dog and see if he's wet."

- Bits & Pieces, April 29, 1993, p. 3.

3. A significant and often overlooked way that we serve God is in our everyday tasks. Martin Luther understood this when he wrote, "The maid who sweeps her kitchen is doing the will of God just as much as the monk who prays -- not because she may sing a Christian hymn as she sweeps but because God loves clean floors. The Christian shoemaker does his Christian duty not by putting little crosses on the shoes, but by making good shoes, because God is interested in good craftsmanship."

- Our Daily Bread, September 5, 1994.

C. A related story:

"Do all in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Col. 3:17).

When I was a boy, I felt it was both a duty and a privilege to help my widowed mother make ends meet by finding employment in vacation time, on Saturdays and other times when I did not have to be in school. For quite a while I worked for a Scottish shoemaker, or "cobbler," as he preferred to be called, an Orkney man, named Dan Mackay. He was a forthright Christian and his little shop was a real testimony for Christ in the neighborhood. The walls were literally covered with Bible texts and pictures, generally taken from old-fashioned Scripture Sheet Almanacs, so that look where one would, he found the Word of God staring him in the face. There were John 3:16 and John 5:24, Romans 10:9, and many more.

On the little counter in front of the bench on which the owner of the shop sat, was a Bible, generally open, and a pile of gospel tracts. No package went out of that shop without a printed message wrapped inside. And whenever opportunity offered, the customers were spoken to kindly and tactfully about the importance of being born again and the blessedness of knowing that the soul is saved through faith in Christ. Many came back to ask for more literature or to inquire more particularly as to how they might find peace with God, with the blessed results that men and women were saved, frequently right in the shoe shop.

It was my chief responsibility to pound leather for shoe soles. A piece of cowhide would be cut to suite, then soaked in water. I had a flat piece of iron over my knees and, with a flat-headed hammer, I pounded these soles until they were hard and dry. It seemed an endless operation to me, and I wearied of it many times. What made my task worse was the fact that, a block away, there was another shop that I passed going and coming to or from my home, and in it sat a jolly, godless cobbler who gathered the boys of the neighborhood about him and regaled them with lewd tales that made him dreaded by respectable parents as a menace to the community. Yet, somehow, he seemed to thrive and that perhaps to a greater extent than my employer, Mackay. As I looked in his window, I often noticed that he never

pounded the soles at all, but took them from the water, nailed them on, damp as they were, and with the water splashing from them as he drove each nail in.

One day I ventured inside, something I had been warned never to do. Timidly, I said, "I notice you put the soles on while still wet. Are they just as good as if they were pounded?" He gave me a wicked leer as he answered, "They come back all the quicker this way, my boy!"

"Feeling I had learned something, I related the instance to my boss and suggested that I was perhaps wasting time in drying out the leather so carefully. Mr. Mackay stopped his work and opened his Bible to the passage that reads, "Whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of god."

"Harry," he said, "I do not cobble shoes just for the four bits and six bits (50c or 75c) that I get from my customers. I am doing this for the glory of God. I expect to see every shoe I have ever repaired in a big pile at the judgment seat of Christ, and I do not want the Lord to say to me in that day, 'Dan, this was a poor job. You did not do your best here.' I want Him to be able to say, 'Well done, good and faithful servant.'"

Then he went on to explain that just as some men are called to preach, so he was called to fix shoes, and that only as he did this well would his testimony count for God. It was a lesson I have never been able to forget. Often when I have been tempted to carelessness, and to slipshod effort, I have thought of dear, devoted Dan Mackay, and it has stirred me up to seek to do all as for Him who died to redeem me.

- H. A. Ironside, *Illustrations of Bible Truth*, Moody Press, 1945, pp. 37-39.