



"Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise" (Proverbs 6:6).

A Rebuke of Laziness

Lesson Subject: Natural order reveals the folly of the sluggard.

L30. Date: June 1984. **Text:** Proverbs 6:6-11; 24:30-34.

Topic: Laziness: Rebuked.

What shall we call the person who has no desire to engage in productive labor or finds no joy in doing so? Is he slothful, sluggish, unambitious, indolent, lethargic, apathetic, inactive, or just plain lazy? By whatever term he is called, the Bible speaks a great deal about him. The Bible rebukes the sluggard and warns against the sin of laziness.

This study on "A Rebuke of Laziness" is not designed to instruct the sluggard, for *"the sluggard is wiser in his own conceit than seven men that can render a reason"* (Proverbs 26:16). This study is for wise people who can recognize the errors of laziness and learn from the mistakes of the lazy person. The truly wise person will come away from this study saying, *"Then I saw, and considered it well: I looked upon it, and received instruction"* (Proverbs 24:32).

Laziness does not mean a person expends no energy. It means he does not invest his energy in productive ways that benefit himself and others. A person may spend much time at sports and be too lazy to work at a productive job.

Laziness may manifest itself in spiritual areas as well. It might be shown in the failure to engage in the work of prayer, Bible study, and service to people in the name of God.

The lesson will show that the natural order reveals the folly of the sluggard.

I. LAZINESS IS CONTRARY TO NATURE (Proverbs 6:6-8)

Nature is God's schoolroom for mankind. We can learn from the creatures God has made (verse 6). The Bible speaks of ants, bees, fleas, flies, grasshoppers, gnats, hornets, locusts, moths, spiders, cows, sheep, goats, lions, dogs, etc. Someone has said, "Nature is God's Braille for a blind humanity." Even Jesus used birds and flowers to teach us of God's loving care for His dear children (Matthew 6:25-33).

God has put a natural instinct in living creatures which prompts them to work (verse 7). The ants have no judiciary, police, or executive which requires them to work; yet they are constantly busy. Pause before an ant hill and ask God to speak to you about your quality of service!

The natural instinct in living creatures causes them to prepare in advance of the need (verse 8). In the summer they gather and store their food for the winter. How do they know winter is coming when food will be needed? The prudent person foresees and makes provision, the Bible teaches (Proverbs 22:3). Foresight is a gift of God by which our needs are met.

The natural instinct in living creatures teaches the importance of redeeming the time. Diligent activity at the opportune time is wise. The old adage has it, "Make hay while the sun shines."

Nature teaches us that labor for livelihood is assigned to all, mankind and beast. It has been wisely observed that God feeds the birds, but He does not throw it into their nests. He requires the birds to gather the food He supplies. Why would any person think he is an exception to that rule?

God assigned man work to do before sin entered human experience (Genesis 2:15). He commanded His people to work as well as rest (Exodus 20:8-12). He set the standard, *"that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread"* (II Thessalonians 3:12). *"If any would not work, neither should he eat"* (II Thessalonians 3:10). Laziness is contrary to the law of God for all His creatures and is a sin.

II. LAZINESS ARISES FROM A SLUGGISH SPIRIT (Proverbs 6:9, 10; 24:33)

A. The sluggard is challenged to engage in productive activity.

"How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard?" (verse 9). God warns, *"Love not sleep, lest thou come to poverty; open thine eyes, and thou shalt be satisfied with bread"* (Proverbs 20:13). There is no substitute for work which

produces income. There is a New Testament appeal for people to awake from spiritual sleep (Ephesians 5:14). "*Let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober*" (I Thessalonians 5:6). "*Now it is high time to awake out of sleep. . . . The night is far spent, the day is at hand*" (Romans 13: 11, 12). Sluggishness in spiritual matters is a sin also.

Who reads these words and feels the pricking of conviction because of a lethargic spirit? Let him hear as from the Lord and hasten to repentance.

B. The sluggard responds with thoughtless postponement, .. Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep" (verse 10). Some of those words are in the plural in the Hebrew text to indicate the self-deception involved. The "*yet a little*" becomes a lot for the careless person. Such a spirit leads to poverty (Proverbs 20: 13; 24:33, 34).

An act of the will, in which one deals sternly with himself, is the only remedy for a sluggish spirit. One must take himself in hand and act on duty rather than on feelings. It will be a difficult battle, but one of the most profitable in which a sluggish person can engage. God will help the one who asks.

III. LAZINESS RESULTS IN NEGLECT (Proverbs 24:30-32)

A. Neglect bears tragic fruit in nature (verse 31). All things tend to deteriorate. Let a field lie uncultivated and it will soon be filled with thorns, nettles, and shrubs. No uncultivated field keeps itself clean or produces a profitable harvest. If a new house is left untended, its paint will peel, its boards will rot, and its roof will leak in due time. If a person goes without exercise of his body, his muscles will become weak, his heart will become susceptible to disease, and his tone of health will decline. Yes, neglect bears tragic fruit in nature.

B. Neglect bears tragic fruit in the spirit. Make a spiritual application of Proverbs 24:30-32 in this way, The "*thorns*" are the evil habits which choke good deeds and make the life unfruitful (Matthew 13:7, 22). The "*nettles*" are things which are hurtful and offensive to others. The "*wall*" is the defense of the soul which protects a person from attacks by the devil and keeps him from sin. The "*poverty*" which comes is the loss of those true riches of tranquility of spirit, peace of mind, and righteousness in conduct.

Our danger from indolence and neglect is far greater than our danger from a thief who would break in and steal.

Nothing protects itself. Nothing preserves itself. Anything worth having

must be kept at some investment of time, effort, and interest. Therefore, take heed to your material and spiritual treasures. Be careful lest the tempter lull you into a spirit of lethargy and you lose your most valuable treasures by neglect.

IV. LAZINESS LEADS TO TRAGEDY (Proverbs 6:11; 24:34)

God gives a solemn warning in the words, "*The recompence of a man's hands shall be rendered unto him*" (Proverbs 12:14). That is enough to strike fear in the heart of one who is negligent in material or spiritual matters.

God warns the lazy person, "*So shall thy poverty come as one that traveleth, and thy want as an armed man.*" That truth is so serious He stated it twice (Proverbs 6:11; 24:34).

"*One that traveleth*" is a vagabond, a sneak thief, who comes quietly. He slips in, takes your valuables, and slips out without your knowing of his coming or going.

"*An armed man*" (literally in Hebrew, "a man of the shield") is one who attacks to rob. He injures his victim, leaving him wounded or dead.

The grammar of the Hebrew text indicates the sudden, unforeseen, hostile attack and the irretrievable loss involved. That is what laziness does to a person. It not only causes him unknowingly to lose what is valuable to him; it also leaves him injured and suffering in his loss.

The Bible makes a list of the hardships suffered by the indolent person. He suffers unsatisfied desire (Proverbs 13:4; 21:25), continual waste (Proverbs 18:9), personal problems (Proverbs 15:19), lack of resources (Proverbs 20:4; 23:21), loss of potential (Proverbs 20:13; 23:21; Ecclesiastes 10:3), and much sorrow.

Be warned not to follow the example of the lazy individual. He may be smarter than all others in his own eyes, but he is a fool before God and mankind. The wise person conquers his spirit and disciplines his life to make himself productive (John 15:8).

QUESTIONS

1. What causes a spirit of laziness?
2. Why is laziness a sin against God?
3. What is the remedy for laziness?
4. How does nature teach against laziness (Proverbs 6:6-8)?

5. What are the tragic results of lazy neglect?
6. How can you guard your spirit from temptation to neglect?
7. What can you do today in the work of God?