

# Proverbs

## *“Our Inner Sloth”*

### Selected Proverbs

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#### INTRODUCTION

- **(SHOW SLIDE 01)** We are doing a series through the book of Proverbs, which is about becoming wise. To be wise means you know how life in God’s world works and so you are able to make decisions that honour God and make your life go better. And, on the flipside, you know how to avoid things that will wreck your life.
  - This may surprise you but one area that Proverbs talks a lot about is how laziness or slothfulness can wreck your life. Slothfulness – that’s just a good word to say!
- It makes me think of Sid the sloth. **(SHOW SLIDE 02)** He’s a character in Disney’s Ice Age movies. If you haven’t seen any of these movies, Sid is the comic relief. He’s lazy and foolish. He makes endless mistakes that get himself and his friends in trouble.
  - **(SHOW TITLE SLIDE 03)** Now all of this is really funny in an animated movie, but Proverbs says we all have an inner sloth that wrecks our lives.
    - It’s that part of you that neglects important responsibilities because you are spending hours scrolling social media, watching silly videos, or laying in front of the TV.
- As animals, sloths love to take it easy. They do not engage in much activity and when they do start on a task, they are very slow.
  - Sloths are also good at hiding. Our family used to go to the tropical area in the Vancouver aquarium. In this big room filled with trees, the kids would always search for the sloth that lived there. They would point at something in the trees and we’d say, *“That’s not the sloth. Keep looking.”* He was hard to find, but eventually they would spot him and say, *“There’s the sloth!”*
    - No one wants to admit that a sloth lives in their hearts. But today Proverbs will help you to see what is not a sloth in your life, what is a sloth, and then how to kick the sloth out so it doesn’t wreck your life.
- Once again, Proverbs is addressed to people all ages, but it is particularly addressed to those who are young. If you are a teenager or a young adult, learn wisdom on this topic now and it will save you a lifetime of problems.

#### THAT’S NOT A SLOTH!

- So, in part one of the message, let me point at a few things and say, **(SHOW SLIDE 04)** **That’s not a sloth.**
  - Author Jared Wilson gives a good list of what we might wrongly identify as laziness or slothfulness in our lives or the lives of others. I will add to it.
- **(SHOW SLIDE 05)** **First, stillness is not slothfulness.**
  - Jesus intentionally took time away from his busy, hectic, and exhausting life to pray and reflect on God’s word. We must follow Jesus, who is ultimate wisdom, in taking times of stillness to rest.

- It is not wrong to watch TV or sit on a couch after finishing the many things you are responsible for in the day or week.
- **(SHOW SLIDE 06) Second, Sabbath is not slothfulness.**
  - Working seven days a week is *not* a sign of wisdom. Workaholism is foolishness. It wrecks your life and your family's life. God has created us to work more than we rest but we also must rest and worship.
- **(SHOW SLIDE 07) Third, recreation is not slothfulness.**
  - As part of God's command to rest we are to enjoy the good gifts he gives us like hobbies, going for hikes, watching sports, painting, enjoying a good meal, and just having fun. Recreation could become slothfulness if you neglect your responsibilities, but we should not feel guilty for enjoying the world God has given us.
- **(SHOW SLIDE 08) Fourth, retirement from a job is not slothfulness.**
  - If you retire and do nothing for 20 years, that is slothfulness. But you don't have to get paid to do meaningful work. Retirees may not have the health and energy to work as hard they once did, but those who use their lives to help others, volunteer, and use their lives for Christ are to be commended.
- **(SHOW SLIDE 09) Finally, inability to work is not slothfulness.**
  - There is a world of a difference between someone who wants to work but cannot for any number of reasons and someone who can work but does not.
    - **(SHOW TITLE SLIDE 10)** So that is me pointing to five areas that we might accuse ourselves or others of being lazy in, but we need to say of each one, *"That's not a sloth."*

## THERE'S THE SLOTH!

- Let's turn now to part 2. Here we will see how Proverbs points to numerous things in our lives, and says, **(SHOW SLIDE 11) There's the sloth!**
  - Let's begin at the most basic level. In one sense we all understand that laziness or slothfulness is not doing something. But we need to be more precise in our definition. Slothfulness is not doing something when we should be doing something.
    - God has given us all certain responsibilities in life. When we don't do the things we should, we fail to honour God and we can easily wreck our lives and the lives of others.
- So, how can you tell if there is an inner sloth in your life? Here are a bunch of ways to identify a sloth.
- First, **(SHOW SLIDE 12) Sloths don't take responsibility** This is the easiest one to spot. Listen to Proverbs 24:30-34: **(SHOW SLIDE 13)**
  - <sup>30</sup> I passed by the field of a sluggard,  
by the vineyard of a man lacking sense,  
<sup>31</sup> and behold, it was all overgrown with thorns;  
the ground was covered with nettles,  
and its stone wall was broken down.
  - **(SHOW SLIDE 14)**

<sup>32</sup> Then I saw and considered it;  
I looked and received instruction.  
<sup>33</sup> A little sleep, a little slumber,  
a little folding of the hands to rest,  
<sup>34</sup> and poverty will come upon you like a robber,  
and want like an armed man.

- **(SHOW TITLE SLIDE 15)** So here is a man who owns a vineyard, but he is neglecting it. The wall that protects it has fallen down. Thorns have taken over.
  - Thorns recall Genesis 3. God created us to work. Work is good. But because of human sin, work is now more difficult than God originally made it to be.
    - Thorns are an image of how work is hard. And the image here is that poverty is always creeping up on you, like thorns slowly growing. If you are lazy just for a short time, if you relax just a little too much, thorns will overtake the vineyard of your life.
- The application here is very simple: If you are lazy, you will ruin your life. Too much goofing off in high school may hinder you from getting further education and a good job. Too much fun as a young adult and you may miss opportunities for a career.
  - At a most basic level, becoming wise simply means taking responsibility for your life. Get a job. Work hard. Manage your money. Pay your bills.
- So here is a question to ask yourself: **(SHOW SLIDE 16) Am I facing problems because I have neglected important responsibilities in my life?** If so, then there's the sloth.
  - Yet, at this point I think most of us will say, ***"I am not lazy person. I work hard."*** That's great, but Proverbs warns that there are many forms of slothfulness. As we said, the big thing about slothfulness is that it hides itself.
- Proverbs 26:16 says, **(SHOW SLIDE 17)**
  - **The sluggard is wiser in his own eyes than seven men who can answer sensibly.**
    - In other words, no one wants to admit they can be lazy. That is why Proverbs points out numerous other ways we can be lazy. It shows us these and says, ***"there's the sloth!"***

#### **FAILING TO START WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE**

- Here then is a second sign there is a sloth in your life. **(SHOW SLIDE 18) Sloths fail to start what needs to be done.**
- Look with me at Proverbs 6:9-11. **(SHOW SLIDE 19)**
  - <sup>9</sup> **How long will you lie there, O sluggard?**  
**When will you arise from your sleep?**
  - <sup>10</sup> **A little sleep, a little slumber,  
a little folding of the hands to rest,**
  - <sup>11</sup> **and poverty will come upon you like a robber,  
and want like an armed man.**
- So, notice that the one asking the questions is very annoyed and frustrated with the lazy person. The same questions keep getting asked.

- *How long?* How long are you going to keep relaxing before you actually start doing what you are supposed to do?
- *When?* When will you actually start doing what needs to be done?
  - But the implied response is, **“Stop nagging me. I’m busy right now.”**
- **(SHOW TITLE SLIDE 20)** Ah, but here is the big question: You are indeed busy, but are you busy in the right things? Laziness shows itself when we prioritize what we *want* to do rather than what we *need* to do. We don’t think we are lazy because we are very busy, but meanwhile the important responsibilities aren’t getting done. Could it be that all our busyness is just an excuse for being too lazy to start the jobs that need to get done?
  - Ask yourself this question: **(SHOW SLIDE 21) do other people get frustrated because I don’t prioritize my life enough to start doing what I should be doing?** If so, there’s the sloth!
- The correction is to look an ant. **(SHOW SLIDE 22)**
  - <sup>6</sup>**Go to the ant, O sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise.**  
<sup>7</sup>**Without having any chief, officer, or ruler,**  
<sup>8</sup>**she prepares her bread in summer and gathers her food in harvest.**
- An ant is self-motivated. She doesn’t need others to tell her to start working. And the ant doesn’t wait to start something until she feels like.

#### FAILING TO FINISH WHAT YOU START

- **(SHOW TITLE SLIDE 23)** So you can see slothfulness if you are the kind of person who has problems starting what *needs* to be done in your life. But then Proverbs also says, **(SHOW SLIDE 24) Sloths fail to finish what they start.**
  - Proverbs uses a lot of humour and sarcasm to try and make us see how important this topic is. Listen to Proverbs 19:24: **(SHOW SLIDE 25)**
    - **The sluggard buries his hand in the dish; it wears him out to bring it back to his mouth.**
- So the person who starts things but can’t be counted on to finish them is like a person who cooks a meal, puts their fork down into the dish, but then just thinks it is too much work to lift the fork up to their mouth and so they quit.
  - Proverbs 12:27 says the same thing: **(SHOW SLIDE 26)**
    - **Whoever is slothful will not roast his game, but the diligent man will get precious wealth.**
- So people who start things but don’t finish them, are like a hunter who goes to all the trouble to hunt his game but then is too lazy to cook it.
  - These two images are so ridiculous, but Proverbs is saying that is what we are like when we start things but can’t be counted on to finish them.
- So here is the next question for self-reflection: **(SHOW SLIDE 27) is my reputation that of a person who can’t be counted on to finish a task?**

- Can you hold down a job? In your job can you be trusted to complete tasks that are given to you? Again, we can see how important this subject is because people will get very frustrated with you at work or at home if you can't be counted on to finish important tasks. There's the sloth!

## LAME EXCUSES

- Fourth, **(SHOW SLIDE 28) Sloths make lame excuses.**
  - Here comes some really sarcastic humour. Listen to Proverbs 26:13 **(SHOW SLIDE 29)**
    - **The sluggard says, "There is a lion in the road!  
There is a lion in the streets!"**
- Let me translate that to life on the west coast: ***"sorry, I can't come and help with that job because there might a grizzly bear roaming the inner harbor."*** Is that possible? Maybe, but probably not. That is a really lame excuse to get out of work.
- **(SHOW TITLE SLIDE 30)** Now just think of all the lame excuses people give for not doing what they're supposed to.
  - I didn't call in sick because my phone died. You couldn't find another way to do it? Why am I in trouble with Revenue Canada? How was I supposed to know my taxes were due at the end of April?
- Again, the whole reason Proverbs brings this up is because slothfulness will ruin your life and cause problems with others. I remember watching a talk show where a group of people were confronting a woman about how she was late for everything. Late people always have an excuse, but after a while people get sick of hearing the excuses.
  - The host finally said, ***"Do you know what your problem is? You're arrogant. You think everyone else's schedules should revolve around yours."***
    - See on something like this there is no Bible verse. But Proverbs says that wisdom is being able to discern what to do when there is no Bible verse. Other people will only put up with lame excuses for so long before you ruin the relationship and maybe lose your job.
- Ask yourself this question: **(SHOW SLIDE 31) do I make a lot of excuses in my life?** Of course there are legitimate excuses, but if you are continually having to give excuses for why you can't start or complete important tasks then, then...there's a sloth!

## PROCRASTINATION

- Fifth, **(SHOW SLIDE 32) Sloths procrastinate.**
  - Look at Proverbs 14:23. **(SHOW SLIDE 33)**
  - **In all toil there is profit,  
but mere talk tends only to poverty.**
    - Here is a person who talks about work, discusses the project, but takes so long to actually doing it that it's too late. Again, we all know how procrastination ruins our own lives and causes other people a lot of frustration.
- Here is the question for self-reflection: **(SHOW SLIDE 34) Is procrastination a mark of my life?** If so, then there's a sloth in your life.

## RELAXATION

- Here's the last one: **(SHOW SLIDE 35) Sloths relax too much.**
  - Again, Proverbs uses sarcastic humour to try and wake us up to this problem. Listen to Proverbs 26:14: **(SHOW SLIDE 36)**
    - **As a door turns on its hinges, so does a sluggard on his bed.**
- What a picture. A lazy person is attached to their bed, like a door is attached to its hinges. The lazy person only moves to turn over, like a door opening and closing, but the lazy person never actually goes anywhere.
  - So relaxation has taken over life.
- **(SHOW TITLE SLIDE 37)** This is a major problem in the workplace. People get sidetracked by all kinds of diversions. Like the guy in one TV show who says, ***"In an average week, I'd say I only do about twenty minutes of real, actual work."***
  - Why? Because people are constantly checking their social media, playing games on their phone, calling in sick when they're not.
    - When the game *Angry Birds* came out a few years ago there was an article saying that game cost businesses \$1.5 billion in lost wages. Someone wrote about this saying, ***"At least 15 people I work with are playing Angry Birds continuously while they talk to customers 7 hours a day."***
  - It is slothfulness that just wants to relax and avoids working hard or volunteering extra hours.
- So here are two questions for self-reflection:
  - **(SHOW SLIDE 38) When people are asking for help, do I try to keep a low profile to avoid being asked?**
  - **(SHOW SLIDE 39) Would I be embarrassed (or fired!) if my employer knew how much work time I spend doing non-work things like scrolling social media, chatting with friends, or just wasting time?**
- So there are six ways to spot a sloth in your life. Six ways that laziness will wreck your life and cause problems with others. Did you spot a sloth in your life?

## HOW TO KICK THE SLOTH OUT OF YOUR LIFE

- If you did then listen now as we come to our third and final point, which is **(SHOW SLIDE 40) How to kick the sloth out of your life.**
- **First, (SHOW SLIDE 41) identify where there is a sloth in your life.**
  - Is it an all-consuming thing in your life or is it just one area like finishing what you start? Identify it.
- **Second, (SHOW SLIDE 42) repent of your slothfulness.**
  - If you are grieved in your heart over how much you have failed to do the tasks God has called you to do then you are in the right place to experience change. Come before God. Confess your sins.
- **Finally, (SHOW SLIDE 43) let Christ's work for you kick the sloth out of your life**

- Remember that because of our sin, God cursed the ground so that it would produce thorns and thistles. Work would become toil. We have to sweat in order to eat. And in the end the curse means that we will all die.
  - God sent Jesus into the world to work. What was his job? To work to reverse the curse.
- **(SHOW TITLE SLIDE 44)** What we need to see is how Jesus had every right to relax up in heaven for all eternity. But he intentionally chose to give up that right and become a man. Philippians 2 says he took the form of a servant. He came to work as a servant. Jesus said he came to do the work the Father had given him.
  - Look at Christ as he pours out his life in work to serve others.
  - Look at Christ as he is so exhausted that he falls asleep in a boat during a storm.
  - Look at Christ fulfilling the ultimate responsibility he was called to, which was to give his life.
    - Behold his effort in trying to carrying the crossbeam and falling under its crushing load.
    - Behold him toiling up the hill of Golgotha.
    - Behold him taking on the crushing work he had to do on the cross.
- What work was that? To bear the curse of our sins in his body so that we could be set free from the curse of sin, the curse of death, and curse of work that is difficult.
  - Oh praise the One who did not make any excuses but took up the task he was appointed to do.
  - Oh praise the One who did not quit what he started, but completed the work to its end and cried out, “it is finished!”
  - Oh praise the One who bore the curse of death, so that we could be raised to eternal life.
  - Oh praise the One who had a crown of thorns pressed into his skull so that we could be brought into a world where there is no more curse. This is why Christ came. He came reverse the curse and bring us into a world free of the curse of sin. That is why we sing **(SHOW SLIDE 45)**
    - **No more let sins and sorrows grow,  
Nor thorns infest the ground;  
He comes to make His blessings flow  
Far as the curse is found**
- **(SHOW TITLE SLIDE 46)** Do you see how Christ’s work for us changes everything?
  - It changes your slothful heart into one that gladly serves others. That is Philippians 2. When you see how Christ put your interests above his own, it drives the sloth out of your heart so that you serve others and put their interests above your own.
  - It changes your slothful heart because you want to pour out your life in service to Christ for what he has done for you. You want to please him. This is why Paul writes: **(SHOW SLIDE 47)**
    - <sup>23</sup> **Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men,**  
<sup>24</sup> **knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.**

- This is what should make Christians the greatest employees and employers in our society. Because we are working to serve Jesus, not just our bosses.
- **(SHOW TITLE SLIDE 48)** What will drive the sloth out of your heart is seeing all the work Christ has done for you. You will then want to please him by fulfilling all the responsibilities he has put in your life. May God enable us to do this!