

# **Proverbs: Living Just in an Unjust World**

**Study Guide**

**Topic:  
Laziness and  
Hardwork**

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Proverbs: Living Just in an Unjust World  
Family Study Guide: Laziness and Hardwork  
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Published by:  
Twin Cities Church  
Minneapolis/St. Paul, Minnesota  
[www.tccmn.org](http://www.tccmn.org)  
612-866-5848

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All Bible references and quotations, unless noted, are from the English Standard Version (ESV).

# Introduction

## Laziness and Hard work

There are few things as universally experienced and despised in others than laziness. Every father has chided their son or daughter at some point (but mainly sons) for sleeping in and not doing enough work. “You’re wasting away your day!” It’s a characteristic that is seemingly easy to discern in others and for which is there is no valid excuse in the eyes all of us. No one praises the laziness. It’s probably this fact that drives so many of us to be or at least seem busy all the time. There is an embarrassment that comes from telling people that you simply relaxed. Busyness is associated with importance. Laziness is associated with weakness.

However, we all feel this need to be lazy at times. “I just need to veg out tonight.” We all need to relax, but it becomes a fine line between relaxing and at least feeling “lazy.” Is not having anything to do being lazy? Or is not doing the things you have to do being lazy?

No one wants to appear lazy and everyone enjoys complaining about the laziness of others. Laziness and hard work are a huge part of our growth and development as men and women. We learn the value of work and the folly of wasting time. However, we struggle to find a balance between busyness and effort, and rest and peace.

There are few topics as widely addressed in all wisdom literature (Hebrew, Egyptian, Mesopotamian, Greek...Etc) than laziness and hard work. All people everywhere and at every time agree, we need to work hard at the tasks before us. Don’t neglect yourself, your family, your home. Work hard. But in the Proverbs, as only the Bible can do, we are drawn deeper into the situation. We are pulled face to face with ourselves, our motivations and our hope.

The following Proverbs are only a few from the book that deal with this topic, but they help to bring us further into what the text means for us today.

# The Text

**12.11 Whoever works his land will have plenty of bread, but he who follows worthless pursuits lacks sense.**

**28.19 Whoever works his land will have plenty of bread, but he who follows worthless pursuits will have plenty of poverty.**

As happens often in wisdom literature, a saying is repeated. This one carries with it a familiar and easy to understand principle and then a fateful warning to the reader. There is the instruction for this man to “Work his land.” That’s interesting. It implies that the other option is to work someone else’s land. The proverb is all about discernment, not effort. The implication is that the man is “active” but instead of “working his own land” he is “following” after things that are ultimately worthless. Being busy is not the same as being wise and hardworking. Will this effort result in nourishment or starvation? Is there a return for this work? Am I working “my land” or someone else’s? Overcoming laziness requires discernment among many things, not just greater effort.

**13.4 The soul of the sluggard craves and gets nothing, while the soul of the diligent is richly supplied.**

**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.**

These proverbs go even deeper...right to our desires and even to the life of our very souls. Again, the author points us away from simple effort but to our desires and if they will ever be fulfilled. The “sluggard craves and gets nothing.” “The desire of the sluggard kills him.” These are strong words. Being lazy doesn’t mean you don’t have desire. It means your desire is in fact killing you, because it can’t be met. The juxtaposition here is being the lazy man’s craving and the diligent man’s being filled to overflowing. The diligent is filled and freely gives from that “rich supply.” The lazy are overcome with desire to the point that their hands “refuse to labor.” He is slowly being killed by his desires, not his lack of action.

**19.15 Slothfulness casts into a deep sleep, and an idle person will suffer hunger.**

**20.13 Love not sleep, lest you come to poverty, open your eyes, and you will have plenty of bread.**

I love the connection between laziness and sleep. “Slothfulness casts into a deep sleep” and “love not sleep.” Maybe I find these ones so interesting because I love sleep so much myself. Much like the previous proverbs, the author is showing that “laziness” has a profound effect on ourselves. The desires it produces will kill us and the sleep that it produces will blind us. We will sleep through our chances to be fed. We will blindly come into poverty and ruin. This state of laziness (not necessarily inactivity, but this soul killing desire and pursuit of worthlessness) will blind us to the dangers and perils that we are fast approaching. It produces sleepwalking.

**22.3 The sluggard says, “there is a lion outside! I shall be slain in the streets!”**

**26.13-16 A sluggard says, “there is a lion in the road, a fierce lion roaming the streets!” As a door turns on its hinges, so a sluggard turns on his bed. A sluggard buries his hand in the dish; he is too lazy to bring it back to his mouth. A sluggard is wiser in his own eyes than seven people who answer discreetly.**

These are by far my favorite. It should read “the coward says” instead of “the sluggard says.” This doesn’t seem to be about laziness at all, it’s about showing coming sense. This seems like a very reasonable excuse for not going to work. Again, the author is drawing in deeper into the depths and dangers of our desires and thinking. Those desires that cause us to crave and crave without being filled, that slowly kill our soul, that blind us to the results of our actions and inaction, also control the way we think. Rather than wake up, stop following worthless pursuits and experience a filling of our souls, we would rather lie in bed paralysed with fear of a fictional lion. Our natural inclination is to “bury our hand in the dish” and never confront the reality of our state. Again, the proverb should read “The proud man is wiser in his own eyes” but rather is reads “the sluggard is wiser in his own eyes.” Does laziness produce arrogance? The state of our being when left unchecked is that we would rather delude ourselves and avoid the truth at all costs. Even when seven different people tell us there is no lion.

# Laziness and the Gospel

We have a serious problem. There is certainly a fundamental problem with just the need to buckle down and work harder, at our jobs, at our schools, at our relationships...etc. But scripture is telling us that the problem is much bigger than that.

Our desires are killing us. And worst of all, we are blind to this fact.

We have or currently are following “worthless” pursuits. We are giving ourselves to things that will never feed us. In fact, these desires and cravings are actually killing us. We are being drained dry by our un-filled desires and wants. And instead of it provoking us into action, it’s putting us to sleep. Our desire for the worthless is blinding our mind and thinking so that we are so filled with ourselves that we would rather hide from imaginary (and sometimes real) lions than come out into the light and confront what’s inside us.

**They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator** (Romans 1.25)

Unfortunately, it only gets worse. Our solution to this problem has been to get busy and “make things happen.” We have created a law unto ourselves to try and follow. If we can just rouse enough effort, we will be able to shake off our sleepiness and find some food. This works for a while, but it never addresses the real problem at it’s core.

The gospel is the only solution to the problem.

**Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you** (Ephesians 5.14 quoting Isaiah)

**Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. But that is not the way you learned Christ!-assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceit-**

**ful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.** (Ephesians 4.17-24)

There is only one cure for our problems and it's not effort. We have to wake up and let Christ shine on us. We have to let him take those old ways and desires and fill us with himself, clothing us in righteousness and renewing our mind and spirit. There is no amount of effort that will be enough if we have to do this on our own. You can just rely on yourself and hope for the best. Now is not the time to be lazy or blind. There is no lion keeping you from Christ today.

## **Discussion Questions**

1. Is laziness associated with age? (i.e. the young are lazier than the old)
2. When can relaxing become laziness?
3. What's the difference between busyness and hard work?
4. How can we practically overcome this tendency for laziness?

## **Further Study**

Read the following proverbs this week (in your personal time of study or even at the dinner table).

Proverbs 6.6-11

Proverbs 12.24, 27

Proverbs 14.23

Proverbs 24:30-34

Proverbs 27.23-27

Ask your self the following questions:

1. What is the message of each of these passages?
2. Are they true/fair? Do you know/are you someone like this?
3. What would it look like if you were to act according to these? What things would need to change?
4. How do you balance these hard words with the grace and mercy of the gospel?



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