

## 8. How not to be a lazy bones!

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, now we come to the reading of God's Word, and let's turn, if we may, to Proverbs, chapter 6. And if you'd like to follow this in our St. George's Tron Bibles, you'll find it on page 531.

We're continuing with this series of sermons from the book of Proverbs. We're not attempting to go all the way through Proverbs. I think that would be impossible without there being a very comatose congregation.

But we're picking out various subjects as we go along for these final few weeks of this series. So I want to read chapter 6, verse 6, and I'll read through to verse 19.

I want to think about the subject of the sluggard this evening. And you'll see I've taken the title, How Not to Be a Lazy Bones. But the sluggard and the slothful man, slothful, that's a good word, isn't it? It reminds one of the three-toed sloth, which is a slow beast that hangs upside down in the trees of Brazil, I think it is. So that's what we're on about tonight, the sluggard and the slothful man. So here we go, chapter 6 and verse 6, and this is the word of the Lord.

[ 1 : 14 ] Go to the ant, O sluggard. Consider her ways and be wise. Without having any chief, officer or ruler, she prepares her bread in summer and gathers her food in harvest.

How long will you lie there, O sluggard? When will you arise from your sleep? 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. A worthless person, a wicked man, goes about with crooked speech, winks with his eyes, signals with his feet, points with his finger.

With perverted heart, devises evil, continually sowing discord. Therefore, calamity will come upon him suddenly. In a moment, he will be broken beyond healing.

There are six things that the Lord hates. Seven that are an abomination to him. Haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood.

[ 2 : 25 ] A heart that devises wicked plans, feet that make haste to run to evil. A false witness who breathes out lies, and one who sows discord among brothers.

Amen. And may the Lord bless his word to us this evening. Let us again bow our heads for a moment of prayer. It is your words, dear Heavenly Father, that bring life to us and understanding. And by nature, we lack both life and understanding. And so we ask you to be our helper this evening. Open our ears to pay attention to what you have to say.

And we pray for all of us that you will encourage us and challenge us. And teach us to follow you. And to love and follow the Lord Jesus more truly and deeply. And we ask it in his name.

Amen. Well, as I said a few minutes ago, the sluggard is our subject for this evening.

[ 3 : 33 ] And that word sluggard is one of the great characteristic words of the book of Proverbs. Let me just give you two prominent examples. Go to the ant, O sluggard, chapter 6.

And how about this one from chapter 26? As a door turns on its hinges, so does a sluggard on his bed. So there's this sluggard man.

He's on his bed. He's not merely on it. He's so deeply attached to it that he's pictured as being hinged to his very bed. Have you ever felt like that? Now, this word sluggard comes in the book of Proverbs something like 10 or 12 times.

But interestingly, it's not found, at least as far as I know, anywhere else in the Bible. The subject of laziness does come up occasionally in the Bible, particularly in Paul's two letters to the Thessalonians.

But it's in Proverbs that this subject of sluggardliness receives its major treatment. Now, I'm conscious there's something quite comical about this word sluggard.

[ 4 : 35 ] It's because of the slug in it, isn't it? It makes it quite amusing. Whenever we come to one of these sluggard passages or the word slothful, that too. Again, it's the animal side, the slug and the sloth.

It makes us smile. Well, this sluggard is something of a tragicomic figure. He's tragic because he's pathetic. But he's comic as well because he's absurd and ridiculous.

And I think we can take it that the author of Proverbs means us to laugh at the sluggard. And this is the teacher's skill, the teacher of this writer of Proverbs, because if the teacher can get us to laugh at the sluggard, the teacher has begun to persuade us not to imitate the sluggard.

We don't admire or imitate figures of comedy. But although the sluggard is laughable, there is a serious point in having him here in the book of Proverbs, this book of practical wisdom.

And that is, here's the point of having him here. We need to see ourselves in the sluggard. There is a sluggard lurking in all of us. He's buried more deeply in some of us than he is in others.

[ 5 : 43 ] But if any of us thinks that we are a completely sluggard-free zone, we're kidding ourselves. You might be the most industrious, hardworking person sitting in this church.

But, friend, the sluggard is there inside. I was preparing part of this sermon last Tuesday afternoon. And you may remember Tuesday afternoon was a very warm July afternoon.

And it was about four o'clock in the afternoon. And I was sitting there assiduously, diligently, industriously working at my desk, writing pen in hand, these very words. And my head dropped forward.

Have you ever had that experience? If you're under 35, you may not have done, but you just wait. It comes, especially to men. And eventually I came to, I woke up, and I went downstairs to the kitchen to make myself a cup of tea, just to get myself back into action.

And my wife was there in the kitchen. I said to her, darling, I'm preparing a sermon on the sluggard, and I've just fallen asleep at my desk. Well, she fell about laughing.

[ 6 : 44 ] I've even heard of preachers who have fallen asleep while in the act of preaching. Have you heard of that? Have you ever seen it? No? It's happened. It hasn't happened to me yet.

But if it does, friends, have mercy upon me and do wake me up. Now, the point about the sluggard in the book of Proverbs is not that a person is either a sluggard or an industrious person, as though everybody is either fully one or fully the other.

That's not the point at all. The point is that there is a spectrum. There's an extreme idleness at one end of the spectrum, and there's a workaholism at the other end.

But all of us fall somewhere along that spectrum. Now, the sluggard passages in Proverbs are not designed to whip us into workaholism, and we'll see why in just a moment.

But they are designed to show us the dangers of idleness and to show us how idleness will, in the end, sap our characters and damage our lives and our usefulness to the Lord's work and our usefulness to society in general.

[ 7 : 52 ] So before we get into specific texts, we're going to get into the ant passage in just a moment. But before we do that, let's stand back from Proverbs and ask what the Bible has to say about work or industry.

Because if we can get that clear in our minds in a simple way, I think we'll better understand the force of these verses in Proverbs about the sluggard and the slothful person.

Now, the Bible teaches that human beings are designed by God to be workers. And this is for two basic reasons. The first is that God himself is a worker.

He shows that he's a worker right at the beginning because his acts of creation recorded in Genesis chapter one are described as his work. So Genesis two verse two says this.

On the seventh day, God finished his work that he had done and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. And we're taught in Genesis chapter one that we are made in the image of God.

[ 8 : 55 ] We are to be like him. We're to reflect him. So if he is a worker, then we too are to be workers. So that's the first reason we're made in his image.

He's a worker and therefore we're to reflect that aspect of him. Then the second reason why we're designed to be workers is God's specific commission to Adam. And this is how he puts it.

This is one of his early words, messages to Adam in Genesis 2 15. The Lord took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and to keep it.

That was his command, work it and keep it. So it was never God's intention that Adam should, as it were, unfold a deck chair, light a pipe and read a copy of the Sporting Times in the Garden of Eden. He had a job to do and his job was to work at cultivating and maintaining the beautiful and fertile environment in which God had placed him. So by the terms of, first, God's example that we follow him, we're to be like him.

[ 9 : 58 ] But secondly, God's specific commission, human beings are entrusted with the responsibility of working so as to maintain the productiveness and beauty of the world, the environment in which we're placed.

But, and here's the snake in the grass. In Genesis chapter three, when Adam and Eve have disobeyed the Lord and are then placed under his curse and his judgment, part of the curse is that Adam's work will no longer be sweet and easy.

It is now going to become drudgery and backbreaking toil. So the Lord says to Adam in Genesis three, verse 17, cursed is the ground because of you, not just you who have cursed, but the very environment that I've placed you in is now cursed.

In pain, you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Thorns and thistles, it shall bring forth for you. By the sweat of your face, you shall eat your bread.

Now, we people find today and all human beings find that somehow both the Genesis two command to work and the Genesis three curse that work becomes trial.

[ 11 : 14 ] Both of these things are experienced in our own lives. So on the one hand, we want to work. There's an impulse in us to work. We know that there is something profoundly appropriate in working.

And that's why if a period of unemployment is forced upon us, it is so frustrating for a human being, not only frustrating, but also to some degree dehumanizing.

Because work is an essential part of being a human being, being made in the image of God who is the worker. So we want to work. There's a big impulse in us that wants to.

We know that there is something fulfilling and rewarding in doing a job well. But on the other hand, we know that work is difficult and draining and demanding.

It involves, in Genesis two or Genesis three terms, wrestling with thorns and thistles. And that is why we are sometimes work shy and lazy.

[ 12 : 12 ] Work involves grasping nettles. It's tiring, sometimes very tiring. It can exhaust us. And that's why the deck chair can be so much more attractive than the workplace.

That's why there are so many long faces on the commuter trains and buses going into work on a Monday morning. And that's why there are so many laughing and relaxed faces on the commuter trains going home on a Friday afternoon.

It's the thorns and thistles aspect of work that makes us want to be lazy and to cut corners. I don't know if you know the musical My Fair Lady.

Well, in that musical, there's a great song called With a Little Bit of Luck. Bob, you remember that? With a Little Bit of Luck. I'm not going to sing it, but one verse goes like this. The Lord above gave man an arm of iron so he could do his job and never shirk.

The Lord above gave man an arm of iron, but with a little bit of luck. With a little bit of luck, someone else will do the dirty work. And so it goes on.

[ 13 : 18 ] Now, doesn't that sum up the situation of humanity perfectly? We've been given an arm of iron or, if you like, strength and ability. But if we can shirk our responsibilities and get somebody else to do things instead of us, we will let them.

Edward says somebody, do let me do that for you. Oh, thank you very much. How kind you are. I will. And off I go to my deck chair and the sporting times. So the situation is we have, first of all, the command to work in Genesis 2.

Secondly, we have the curse upon our work in Genesis 3. And it's those two factors together which make us, A, want to work, and B, not want to work.

The command to work stirs us into action, but the curse on work makes us shrink back. Because we see all those thorns and thistles and we know that our work is going to be demanding.

But let's be aware also of a third element in the Bible which fills out this picture a little bit further. And that is God's kindness to men and women expressed in the fourth commandment.

[ 14 : 27 ] The commandment concerning the Sabbath day. And let me ask this question. Is the fourth commandment a commandment to rest or a commandment to work?

Well, it's both, isn't it? Remember the words? Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God.

On it you shall not do any work. Now, Jesus teaches in the New Testament that this commandment is for our benefit and our blessing. The Sabbath was made for man, he says.

But the beneficial rest of the Sabbath day only makes sense in the context of a week where the other six days are days of work. So the Lord gives us this fourth commandment to teach us a proper balance between work and rest.

Through the fourth commandment, the Lord is keeping us from becoming workaholics. Anyone who tries to work seven days a week soon finds that it's impossible. It will do us no good.

[15:31] As Psalm 127 puts it, It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil. For the Lord gives to his beloved sleep.

So sleep and rest are part of the Lord God's kind provision. And he gives them to us because of the thorns and thistles nature of our work. Now, just one more thing before we turn to the sluggard.

Sluggardliness is really an attitude of mind, first and foremost. It's not measured by our outward circumstances. It's really to do with what goes on between our ears.

It's to do with our inner attitudes. As far as outward circumstances go, I guess there are six categories of people. If you're not in this six, tell me afterwards.

But I think these six will sum up just about everybody here. First of all, outward circumstances, there are those in paid employment. Secondly, there are children and young adults who are still at school or at college.

[16:34] Third, there are housewives and house husbands. In other words, women and occasionally men who work hard at running a home and raising a family, although they don't go out to paid work.

Fourth, there are those who are unemployed, not by choice, but because of their circumstances.

They've lost their job. They haven't been able to find another one. Fifth, there are those who are chronically unwell with either physical or mental illness.

And sixth, there are those who are retired. Now, it is possible to belong to any of those six categories and still be a sluggard.

You might be doing 40 or 45 or 50 hours of paid work each week, and yet you could still be a grade one sluggard, cutting all the corners possible. You could be a child or a teenager who never misses a day at school, and yet you're bone idle.

You could be retired, perhaps on a decent pension, and yet you're allowing other people to do lots of things which you could well be doing yourself. So it's not so much our outward circumstances.

[17:44] It's what goes on in our heads and hearts that determines how we need to listen to this teaching in Proverbs. So let's turn to Proverbs chapter 6 and verse 6, page 531.

So here's verse 6 again. Go to the ant, O sluggard, consider her ways, and be wise. Now, just notice that word wise, because wise is a big word in Proverbs.

Learning not to be sluggards is part of growing in wisdom, and wisdom is the subject of the whole book of Proverbs, how to live life in the best way under the gracious lordship of God himself.

So let's notice now some of the characteristics of sluggardliness. We'll start with this passage, but we'll move on to one or two other passages later on. Here's the first characteristic of sluggardliness.

The sluggard is not prepared to take responsibility. Look at the ant here in verse 7. Without having any chief, officer, or ruler, she prepares her bread in summer and gathers her food in harvest.

[18:50] Now, the point of verse 7 there is that she sees what needs to be done without having to be told. If she had some chief or officer or ruler, that chief would be cracking the whip and barking orders at her.

Pick up that grain of wheat and carry it forthwith to the ant's nest, then come straight back for another one. And there's to be no rest for you, young lady, until you've carried your daily quota of 30 grains of wheat to feed our community.

Now, none of that is needed with our particular Miss Ant. She looks around. She sees that the larder is empty. So off she goes. She's a self-starter.

She sees the need. She sees the work that needs to be done. And off she goes and she gets on with it. She doesn't sit about scratching her head and waiting for orders. She sees that the community has a need.

And she takes responsibility. So the author of Proverbs is saying to the sluggard, learn from the ant's example. Look around and ask yourself what needs to be done to help the community.

[ 19 : 53 ] Don't wait for orders from some authority figure. Roll up your sleeves and get on and do the job. So there's the first thing. The sluggard is not prepared to take responsibility.

Then secondly, the sluggard doesn't plan ahead. Verse 8. Do you see the ant prepares her bread in summer?

She's a great one for planning ahead. And she gathers her food during harvest time. In other words, she is preparing for the difficult months of winter by working hard in the easy months of summer to provide everything that's going to be needed.

Now, if she was a lazy ant who lived only for the moment, she'd be lying in the sun all through the summer, listening to the song of the cicadas and licking a cornetto.

But she's not that kind of an ant. She's thinking ahead. She doesn't want to be caught out. She doesn't want the lean months of winter to find her unprepared.

[ 20 : 55 ] Another way of putting this is to say that the ant does not procrastinate. Just in case any perhaps younger ones here don't know that word procrastinate. It's a good one to learn.

Procrastination. It means putting off to tomorrow the things that ought to be done today. Let me give a good example. A teenager brings back some homework from school.

And one of the parents says to the teenager, when does this maths homework need to be done by Sebastian? Oh, he says, not till Friday.

Now, it's Monday night. If Sebastian does his maths on Monday, he's going to feel much better about his maths than if he leaves it till Thursday, isn't he?

When we don't get ahead with things, they weigh on us. They sit on our heads like a dark thundercloud. It's much better, isn't it, to get on and do it as the ant does. I was much helped years ago when a friend of mine who was a fellow minister said to me, when you have a to-do list with a number of items on it, always do the thing you dread first.

[ 22 : 07 ] That's a great piece of advice. I've often followed that. There's usually something on your to-do list that you dread. You shrink from it because it's bristling with thorns and thistles.

There's a difficult letter you've got to write or a difficult email you've got to send or a painful phone call that you've got to make or a very large check that has to be written. The lesson from the ant is to get on and do things now.

So the sluggard doesn't plan ahead and gets caught out. Then thirdly, the sluggard manufactures excuses for inactivity.

We'll leave the ant for the moment. I think we'll come back to her. But let's turn on at this stage to chapter 22 and verse 13. Chapter 22, verse 13.

Great little verse, this. The sluggard says, There's a lion outside. I shall be killed in the streets.

[ 23 : 10 ] Now, that could be a single excuse. There's a lion outside which is going to kill me in the streets. Or maybe it's two different excuses. I'm not going outside because of two things.

First of all, there's a lion. But secondly, I may be set upon by bandits and murdered. Could be two things. Doesn't really matter. But let's think of what's really going on here. The basic problem is that this man is lazy.

It's seven o'clock or eight o'clock in the morning and he ought to be getting up and going to work.

But he doesn't want to get up and go to work. So he manufactures a fatuous excuse.

There's a lion outside. Now, the fact is that lions were quite common in the Middle East in Bible times. In fact, I discovered that there were wild lions still living in Syria as late as 1850 A.D.

It's 150 odd years ago. So there were plenty of lions in the Middle East at that time. It's only in the last century or so that they've been confined to Africa and that little corner of India.

[ 24 : 11 ] So it wasn't uncommon to see lions in Israel in Solomon's day. But to be killed by a lion was uncommon. So for this man to say, I'm staying at home and not going to work because there's a lion outside would be a little bit like you and me saying, I'm not going to work today because the train I take might crash or because I might be hit by falling masonry in Bath Street or even because I might catch the flu.

The force of Proverbs 22 verse 13 is to say, yes, there may be a 500 million to one chance of being killed by a lion as you walk to work.

But brother, it's not likely. So get up off your rear end and step forth. And we too can make excuses for not tackling something which we ought to be taking on.

I'm too old. I'm too young. I'm too inexperienced. I lack the right qualifications. Now, wisdom is needed here. Our own wisdom and the advice of wise friends.

Because sometimes we are too old or too young or too inexperienced to take on a particular challenge. But there are other times when we could do a thing, but we simply don't want to.

[ 25 : 25 ] And we make excuses. And the right diagnosis of our condition is sluggard. Then fourth, the sluggard brings grief to those he works with.

Let's turn back a page or two to chapter 18 and verse 9. Chapter 18, verse 9. Whoever is slack in his work.

That's the sluggard. Whoever is slack in his work is a brother to him who destroys. Now, just think about that. Imagine a place of work.

A shop or a factory, perhaps. But a place of work where a number of people are employed. And the manager or the boss has to set a number of tasks to be done.

And he expects them to be done properly. Now, imagine this situation. Many of you will have been in just this kind of situation. There's one employee there who is excellent. Excellent. He does his work to a very high standard.

[ 26 : 31 ] He does it quickly. He does it cheerfully. He's punctual. He's cooperative. He's thorough. He's absolutely honest with money. And he cuts no corners, whatever.

He's the kind of employee that makes the whole workplace smile. He's like a breath of sunshine when he comes in. But then there's another employee who's quite different. He's often late to work. He's grumpy. He cuts corners. He doesn't finish his tasks properly. He complains about the tea and biscuits. And when he arrives at work, his fellow employees rather wish that he hadn't come in at all.

Now, how differently the manager of the works regards those two men. The first employee is a joy to the manager. He's the sort of worker that builds the firm's reputation.

But the second man is rather like a mildew creeping over the workplace. He drags down morale. He puts off the customers. He spoils the atmosphere.

[ 27 : 31 ] The boss would gladly sack him tomorrow if he wasn't prevented by employment laws. Now, Proverbs 18.9 says that the one who is slack in his work is next of kin to him who destroys.

It's a very powerful verse. The sluggard is a destroyer. He's anti-work and therefore anti-God because God is the worker. The worker with a capital W, God.

He's the creator. But this man is the destroyer. To be anti-work is to erode the foundations of the whole human enterprise. The whole human enterprise is to cultivate and keep the world and make it productive.

Productivity is the nature of man's calling, whether it's producing cabbages or sewing machines.

But the sluggard, the slacker, undermines the whole enterprise.

He is on the side of destruction, not of creation. So the sluggard is the person who takes no responsibility. He doesn't plan ahead.

[ 28 : 36 ] He makes silly excuses for inactivity. And he brings grief to those he works with because he's bent on destroying the human enterprise. He wouldn't say that he was bent on that.

But that's the effect he has. Now, friends, as I said earlier, there is a sluggard in all of us. This teaching in Proverbs is here to enable all of us to recognize the sluggard within and to take steps to put him under lock and key and to feed him short rations.

We're never going to get rid of the sluggard within completely. But if we can recognize his activities and his ways, we're halfway to subduing him and learning how to be active and happy workers for the kingdom of God, people whose lives are not blighted by slackness.

Well, having looked at a few of the characteristics of the sluggard, let's turn now to see one or two of the consequences of sluggardly behavior. The first is poverty and hunger.

Let's turn back to chapter six, to the ant passage. We've seen the ant at work, that lovely example in verses six to eight. But let me read verses nine to 11 again.

[ 29 : 52 ] Chapter six, verse nine. How long will you lie there, O sluggard? When will you arise from your sleep? 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. Now, don't you think verse 11 is a chilling verse and a powerful one?

It packs a great punch, partly because it follows verse 10, which is deceptively peaceful. A little sleep. I'll just turn over and have another 20 minutes.

A little slumber. Do you remember slumberland beds? The greatest bed in England. Scott, I don't know where it was made. Slumberland. I used to watch those lorries going up and down the M1 and think how lovely it must be to have a slumberland bed.

If you're 55 plus, you might remember a song by the Beatles, which includes these words. Please don't wake me. No, don't shake me. Leave me where I am.

[ 30 : 52 ] I'm only sleeping. Da-da-da-da-da-da-da. Remember that, Bob? Yeah, of course you do. And just notice in verse 10, the use of that word little.

It comes three times. Just a little sleep. A little slumber. A little folding of the hands to rest. Just a little more. It's a series of small moral surrenders to the power of idleness.

And then, bang, like a robber, an armed intruder, poverty and want spring upon you. Hoof! It's the sudden intrusion of something very much unwanted.

And real and sudden poverty is something very much unwanted. I'm sure some of you here have experienced it, and you'll testify just how horrible it is. Now, you may be thinking, of course, we have social security in this country these days, and we've had it for well over half a century.

State provision to keep us from the worst kind of poverty. And indeed, we do. And it is a good, merciful provision for those in real need, including those who want to work but can't find work, and those who are chronically unwell and simply haven't got the strength to earn money.

[ 32 : 03 ] It's great to live in a society of that kind. But in some folk, it can cultivate the sluggard mentality so that a person might say, I won't really try to find a job.

I'll rely on the state to get me through. Now, if we say that, we're really saying, I will be like a leech. I won't work myself, but I'll expect other people to work, and I'll live off their earnings.

Now, the Bible gives that attitude very short shrift. The Apostle Paul writes to the Thessalonians, When we were with you, we gave you this command, if anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat. It's a strong way of putting it, isn't it? And underlying all this teaching is the understanding that an industrious, hard-working society will be a happy and purposeful society.

Industriousness is part of godliness. But when a society becomes more keen to play and to party than to work, you know that that society has become fairly rotten.

[ 33 : 12 ] One of my grandmothers grew up in the 1870s and 1880s in a small farm in South Devon. Her parents were small farmers down there. They weren't wealthy people, but they managed to survive through thrift and hard work.

And when my grandmother was an old woman, she never forgot the lessons of her early life. So, for example, if she was dressing a chicken for the table, a cockerel for the table, she would use every part of this bird.

Now, some of you will remember this. Maybe your own grandmothers used to do the same thing. But you know a cockerel has a big red comb on its head. She would take the big red comb off the head. She would boil it and skin it and use the gelatinous interior to make stocks and soups.

Now, some of you are saying, ew, aren't you? Not only the comb, but she would take the legs and feet, the scaly part of the legs and feet, and she would boil them up for the same purpose.

Now, my father, gently protesting, would say to her, mother, you don't really need to go to all this trouble in this day and age, do you? And she would reply, son, you weren't brought up on a nut.

[ 34 : 20 ] By which I think she meant, if you'd had as little as I had when I was young, you wouldn't even waste a chicken's feet. I just mentioned that as a small illustration of the industriousness that keeps poverty away from a person's door.

Who knows, friends, if the banking systems of the world fall apart in the near future, we might all of us be cooking cockerel's feet. And I promise I'll sell them to you for 20 pence a foot.

So there's the first consequence of being a sleepy sluggard. It's a very obvious consequence. We shall be suddenly overtaken by poverty and want.

Now, let me mention one more consequence, which is perhaps a less obvious one. But let's turn here to chapter 12 and verse 27. 12, 27. Whoever is slothful will not roast his game.

But the diligent man will get precious wealth. I think we could call this consequence of sluggardliness a sense of dissatisfaction.

[ 35 : 37 ] Do you see dissatisfaction in verse 27? Now, the verb which is translated there to roast is apparently a word unique in the Old Testament. And it's probably a hunting term which carries the idea of pursuit or pursuing something until you've caught it.

So look at verse 27. Here's this man who says to himself, I'll go hunting today. So he gets his gun and he sets off in the morning for the woods and fields. And lo and behold, his quarry jumps up in front of him and starts streaking away into the distance.

But he's just too lethargic to follow it up. He rushes forward for a couple of minutes. And then he says, oh, this is too much for me. I'm feeling so tired. I might have a heart attack.

I'll go home. So he never roasts his game. He's a sloth. But by contrast, look at the second half of verse 27. The diligent man will get precious wealth.

So just picture these two men at the end of the day. The slothful sluggard sits down to bread and water. Whereas the diligent hunter is able to sit down to roast pheasant, bacon, Brussels sprouts, potatoes, and courgettes drizzled in garlic butter.

[ 36 : 46 ] But this verse 27 is not simply about food. It's about life. The diligent person savors life.

Because he or she puts a lot into it. Whereas the sluggard has very little to enjoy. To be a sluggard in the end is to shrivel up like a prune.

The sluggard will imagine that sleep and slumber and endless rest will bring contentment. But those things will only bring dissatisfaction in the end. I remember when I was a youngster and just about to set off to boarding school for the first time, I received a welcome letter from the man who was to be my housemaster at the school.

He was a Christian man, as I discovered later. He wrote me quite a long letter. And I remember one sentence only from that letter. I'm sure he wrote the same letter to all the new boys. But he wrote this.

You'll find, Edward, that what you get out of school life is directly in proportion to what you put in. Now, that was an anti-sluggard message from a Christian man to an ignorant boy.

[ 37 : 57 ] I'm very grateful for it. So, friends, let's take this anti-sluggard teaching to our hearts. It's here for our good. It's here to spur us into usefulness as we serve the Lord.

How do we serve him? In prayer and evangelism. And we serve him also in the workplace, in the family and in the community. About ten years ago, just after the Queen Mother had died, I remember hearing our friend Dick Lucas say of her, she lived a distinctly useful life.

Interesting phrase. She lived a distinctly useful life. Wouldn't it be good at the end of our lives if it could be truly said of us that we had lived a distinctly useful life?

The challenge is to address the sluggard within and every day to make as sure as we can, by the grace of God, that he is hung, drawn, and quartered.

Chapter 12, 27 again. Whoever is slothful will not roast his game, but the diligent man will get precious wealth. And that is not just about money. It's about life in the service of the Lord.

[ 39 : 08 ] Well, let's bow our heads and we'll ask for his help. How we thank you, our gracious Father, that you are the great worker.

And as Jesus said, my Father is working still and I am working. How we thank you for your work of creation and redemption. And thank you so much, dear Heavenly Father, that you have graciously involved us in the work of cultivating and keeping the garden, the beautiful earth that you have given to us so that we should be productive in it.

We do pray that you'll encourage each and every one of us here tonight, whatever our situation, including those who are elderly or not well and can't work in the way that they used to.

We pray that much encouragement will be given to them too. But please help all of us, dear Father, to play our part as diligently and happily as we can in furthering your purposes, your kingdom purposes and in building your kingdom so that many will come to know and love and trust you and the Lord Jesus, in whose name we pray.

Amen.