

A Study in Proverbs  
**Laziness – A Common Cause of Poverty**  
August 18, 2013

One common cause of poverty is *laziness*.

The lazy man is a common category in Proverbs, and, therefore, we should expect to find a lot of lazy people in life. The word often used to label the lazy man is “sluggard”, which has reference in English to a *slug*—not very fast! The opposite term to the “sluggard” is the “diligent” (10:4; 12:24, 27; 13:4). Just as the righteous and the wicked are opposite kinds of people, so are the diligent and the lazy.

### ***The Traits of Laziness***

#### **1. Missed Opportunities**

*“The sluggard does not plow in the autumn; he will seek at harvest and have nothing” (20:4).*

Timing is everything. When opportunity knocks, we must work.  
The lazy person is slack in opportunity, and so lacks in necessity.

*“He who gathers in summer is a prudent son, but he who sleeps in harvest is a son who brings shame” (10:5).*

Prudence is the virtue of working ahead for a foreseen time of need.  
Interesting, God grants to a need a particular time for filling it; however, the time may be before the need.  
Also, when the time is not seized, it does not return, nor is there necessarily opportunity later to meet the need.  
Do not rashly assume that there will be another opportunity later to meet that need.  
Please note: The mention of sleep is not accidental. Harvest often demands early mornings and late nights.

In contrast, the ant—a little insect in God’s creation—shows more sense than a lazy person:

*“Four things on earth are small, but they are exceedingly wise:*

*the ants are a people not strong, yet they provide their food in summer;...” (30:24-25).*

*“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” (6:6-10).*

Note the following traits:

1. The ant prepares food ahead of the time it is needed.
2. The ant does not need a boss to tell him to prepare ahead of time.

Therefore, the ant is both prudent and self-disciplined.

Wisdom involves the proper order of things and then seizing the opportunities as God brings them:

*“Prepare your work outside; get everything ready for yourself in the field, and after that build your house” (24:27).*

*“Whoever tends a fig tree will eat its fruit, and he who guards his master will be honored” (27:18).*

#### **2. Incomplete Projects**

*“Whoever is slothful will not roast his game, but the diligent man will get precious wealth” (12:27).*

Again, laziness is not simply the lack of working at all, but also the lack of finishing off a project.  
Diligence includes follow-through to the end.

*“The sluggard buries his hand in the dish and will not even bring it back to his mouth” (19:24).*

*“The sluggard buries his hand in the dish; it wears him out to bring it back to his mouth” (26:15).*

Again, it is not the start of work that counts, but the finishing of work.

Also, giving a meal to a lazy man may not help him, for he lacks initiative to make use of good things he has.

### 3. Involuntary Labor

*“The hand of the diligent will rule, while the slothful will be put to forced labor” (12:24).*

The lazy man will not work unless forced to work.

*“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” (21:25-26).*

The lazy man is stubbornly insistent about not working.

He also will complain and complain of lack until it “kills” him, but even then he refuses to work!

In contrast, the ant works in due season without being told by a boss:

*“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” (6:6-7).*

### 4. Excuse-Making

*“The sluggard says, ‘There is a lion outside! I shall be killed in the streets!’” (22:13).*

*“The sluggard says, ‘There is a lion in the road! There is a lion in the streets!’” (26:13).*

Lazy people are full of excuses and extreme thinking: “I shall be killed!”

Oddly enough, what will truly kill him is refusing to work (21:25)!

Please note that the lazy man may truly believe his irrational fears, and not think that they are excuses.

Therefore, in seeking to help the lazy, be skeptical on the reasons given for not working.

*“The sluggard is wiser in his own eyes than seven men who can answer sensibly” (26:16).*

The lazy man does believe his own reasoning, and even considers it to be true wisdom.

However, the facts never prove this wisdom out—he lacks and lacks and lacks.

### 5. Insomnia

*“As a door turns on its hinges, so does a sluggard on his bed” (26:14).*

A lazy person does not sleep well, in contrast to the satisfying sleep of a laborer (Eccl. 5:12).

### 6. Oversleeping

Twice the Proverbs quote this little saying, both times as traits of the lazy man:

*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” (6:6-10; 24:30-34).*

## ***The Results of Laziness***

### 1. Poverty

*“A slack hand causes poverty, but the hand of the diligent makes rich” (10:4).*

Diligence implies the persistent plodding of a hard worker.

Laziness is not simply the lack of work, but the lack of persistently working to completion.

### 2. Loss of Freedom

*“The hand of the diligent will rule, while the slothful will be put to forced labor” (12:24).*

Freedom requires diligence.

### 3. Unemployment

*“Like vinegar to the teeth and smoke to the eyes, so is the sluggard to those who send him” (10:26).*

It hurts to depend upon a lazy person.

#### 4. Unfulfilled Desires

*“The soul of the sluggard craves and gets nothing, while the soul of the diligent is richly supplied” (13:4).*

Laziness and diligence are opposites; both deserve a word study.

#### 5. A Hard Life

*“The way of a sluggard is like a hedge of thorns, but the path of the upright is a level highway” (15:19).*

Lazy people encounter lots of obstacles in life, and find it difficult to make progress.

#### 6. Ruined Property

*“Whoever is slack in his work is a brother to him who destroys” (18:9; cf. 28:24).*

Vandalism and laziness both result in broken possessions, in which things are found incomplete.

To be lazy leads to ruining things.

*“I passed by the field of a sluggard, by the vineyard of a man lacking sense,  
and behold, it was all overgrown with thorns;*

*the ground was covered with nettles, and its stone wall was broken down.*

*Then I saw and considered it; I looked and received a little instruction.*

*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” (24:30-34).*

It is publicly obvious to others that the cause to this ruin is simply laziness.

Take too many breaks and you will go broke.

Too many naps and you will be nabbed by poverty.

#### 7. A Comatose Existence

*“Slothfulness casts into a deep sleep, and an idle person will suffer hunger” (19:15).*

Sleepiness is both a cause and a result of laziness.

Laziness is the cause of a coma (“deep sleep”), which in turns leads to hunger.

In other words, laziness produces a deeply-ingrained pattern of living that is as innervating as a coma.

In many regards, a lazy man is just plain oblivious to the big picture.

### **Conclusion**

The essence of laziness is not the absence of work, but the absence of initiative and diligence.

In practice, laziness appears in taking too many breaks, in not finishing projects, and in working only when required.

In contrast, diligence seizes opportunities before need arises, and perseveres to the end.