

LAZINESS

A study from the series
What Keeps Me from Growing.

by Woodrow Kroll

Sir Isaac Newton's first law of motion states that an object in motion tends to remain in motion, and an object at rest tends to remain at rest. Well, we people are objects too, and this law applies to us as well as a formula one car whizzing around the raceway. You've noticed how some people are naturally driven to complete a project. They will work long hours. They will take few breaks. And they will never goof off on the job. They work until the project is complete. But others, well, they are apathetic. They have to have every task explained to them. They spend more time at the coffee machine than at the computer. They require constant supervision. They need frequent motivation to overcome inertia! They are lazy, and let's face it. While laziness is a lifestyle for some, it is at least a temptation for most of us.

This is how a lazy mind thinks, and what a lazy mind thinks a lazy body does. Do any of these describe something you've said recently? "Just five more minutes on my computer game, Mom, and then I'll do my chores," "My supervisor is off today so this will be a big goof off day at work." "I would have completed the job on time but let me give you a list of the things that held me up."

You see, lazy people spend more time making up excuses than the time it would take to complete their job. Lazy people are time-wasters, production-killers, excuse-makers and work-averters. As Solomon said in **Proverbs 18:9**, "Whoever is slack in his work is a brother to him who destroys." Being lazy isn't just a lifestyle; it's a death style as well. It destroys us in life and robs us in death.

Each day during this two-week series on the issues that you told us are the greatest temptations for you, we have been defining a particular temptation—like gossip—giving examples, probing a passage of Scripture to see what the Bible says about that temptation and then drawing some conclusions.

But today, I'm going to do something different. I'm going to take the 13 verses in today's baker's dozen and use them to describe the life and habits of a lazy person. These should give all of us a good check list to see if our feeling of being lazy is real or not. Women who responded to the Center for Bible Engagement's survey listed being lazy as their fourth greatest temptation; men listed it fifth.

There are many verses in the Bible that relate to laziness, but the Book of Proverbs contains enough of them to stand by itself. So today, I'll limit our Scripture references to Proverbs and we'll look for lessons from the lazy person as the writer of Proverbs saw him or her. Here goes.

1. Unflappable Example

Proverbs 6:6–11 "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."

This verse speaks of an unflappable example to the lazy person. It's the industrious ant. Ants are fascinating to watch. They are busier than beavers and they move a lot faster. Put a stick in the path of an ant and it will go over it, under it or around it. Proverbs offers the ant as an unflappable example of industry. While a lazy person just lies there, the ant prepares food in the summer and gathers food in the harvest for the long winter ahead. The lazy person relies on someone else to feed him or her all winter.

2. Unseasonable Timing

Proverbs 10:4-5 “A slack hand causes poverty, but the hand of the diligent makes rich. He who gathers in summer is a prudent son, but he who sleeps in harvest is a son who brings shame.”

The Book of Ecclesiastes, chapter 3, presents 14 polar opposites to encourage us to look at the broader scope of life. The first one is found in the first two verses. “For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted.” A lazy person robs himself of a healthy harvest because he was too lazy to plant his fields. Working hard doesn't always make you rich, but hardly working will always make you poor.

3. Unpleasant Irritant

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

Vinegar to the teeth is an irritant that is unpleasant to experience, and smoke to the eyes is a hindrance to progress because we can't see clearly where we are going. This little proverb portrays the aggravation in sending a lazy person on a mission or to do a job. You just know it isn't going to get done.

4. Undesirable Position

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

While it's true that it's important to work smart, I believe it is also important to work hard. The hand of the diligent will rule. In our Back to the Bible parking lot here in Lincoln, Nebraska, we have room for many more than a hundred cars. A few years ago one of our young female staff asked me, “Why do they reserve a place for you and not for the rest of us?” I was shocked at the question. My generation would never have thought of asking that question, but since we only had a few handicap spots reserved and none other I responded, “They don't reserve a spot for me.” She replied, “Well you are always parked in that first spot closest to the door.” I grinned and said, “Well, if you are the first person here every day, you can park in that spot.”

Diligent work rewards us with advancement; laziness rewards us with forced labor.

5. Unbreakable Principle

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

Closely associated with the last lesson the lazy person teaches us is this one. It is an unbreakable principle that if you are lazy and slothful, you will not hunt for your game nor will you have any of it to eat. Paul says it bluntly to the church at Thessalonica. Many had anticipated the imminent coming of the Lord so they quit their jobs and awaited His arrival. When He didn't come, they began to be hungry and tried to mooch off the more industrious in the congregation. **2 Thessalonians 3:10** is Paul's

answer to this dilemma: “If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat.”

6. Unfulfilled Longings

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

Lazy people want what industrious people have, but they seem incapable of understanding that it was hard work that richly supplied the soul of the diligent. Laziness makes us unfulfilled and provides for unfulfilled longings that we can only hope for. If the lazy person only realized that those longings may not at all be out of line and are clearly attainable, if they only worked harder to achieve them.

7. Unpleasant Path

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

Lazy people doom themselves to a life of thorn hedges. Without skills, an education or a drive to succeed, they are always going to find themselves in dead-end, low-paying jobs. It’s not a pleasant prospect, but it is what the slothful person has awaiting him or her.

8. Unreasonable Sleep

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

Everybody needs a different amount of sleep. I’m not here to tell you that you should sleep eight hours, work eight hours and spend the other eight hours in a way that counts for eternity. You may need more than eight hours, or you may need less. Need is not the issue; laziness is. Lazy people often sleep far more than they need and that in turn contributes to their laziness. While some people are getting too little sleep, a study out just last month said that the normal requirements for sleep may only be six hours and not eight hours as previously thought. Whatever amount of sleep you get, if it’s an unreasonable amount, it may be a sign of laziness.

9. Undiscovered Motivation

Proverbs 19:24–25 “The sluggard buries his hand in the dish and will not even bring it back to his mouth. Strike a scoffer, and the simple will learn prudence; reprove a man of understanding, and he will gain knowledge.”

You may not immediately pick up on Solomon’s humor here, but the sluggard burying his hand in the dish but not bringing it back to his mouth is the picture of a man so lazy he won’t even complete the process of taking in nourishment. It probably was meant more widely for anyone who starts a project but lacks the energy to complete it. Haven’t we all been there.

10. Unwise Planning

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

Lazy people are not good strategic planners. In fact, they usually do no planning at all. This verse speaks about a lazy farmer who doesn’t bother to plow his fields in autumn but somehow mysteriously assumes he will have a harvest nonetheless. This will be a shock to him. It’s the inviolate law of agriculture: “whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully” (2 **Corinthians 9:6**). And for those who do not plow or sow at all, they reap the harvest

of their laziness. They get nothing. Their unwise planning did them in.

11. Unfulfilled Desires

Proverbs 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.”

It is typical of the lazy to want what everybody else has but to think that it is not necessary to earn it like everybody else has. Look, there are people who are out of work today. Maybe you're one of them. You desperately want a job but in today's economy you just can't find one. Others have some disability that prevents them from employment. It is the duty of church and government to help you. But the lazy person is capable of earning wages, he or she just would rather collect from your wages. As this verse suggests, they crave and crave all day long and the righteous give to them because they have need. But what makes the lazy person believe the righteous God will not hold them accountable for their laziness? There unfulfilled desires here will have a big and not so delightful payoff in the future.

12. Unreasonable Excuses

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

The lazy person makes absurd excuses for not working. Again, the writer employs humor here. The verse portrays the sluggard as not being able to go out to work like everybody else because he might be eaten by a lion in the streets. When people are blinded by their own laziness, they are also blinded to the absurdity of their excuses for their sloth. It's hard to reason with a lazy person.

13. Unkept Life

Proverbs 24:30–34 “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 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.”

I don't know if you've noticed or not, but lazy people tend also to be sloppy people. If they don't have enough desire to work their fields and they are overgrown with nettles and thorns, imagine what their bedroom will look like. One of the telltale signs of an industrious person is that she or he will be well kept. A lazy person will be unkempt.

Let me wrap up today with this note of caution. Ladies, you saw being lazy as your fourth most severe temptation. But remember, there is a difference between being genuinely lazy and being tired. After you've chased around the house after kids all day, you may want to hit the sack early. That's not laziness; that's good sense. And men, don't think you are lazy because you don't get all the chores done your wife has for you around the house. If you are doing the right things at the right times, getting the most pressing things done right may mean putting off chores to another day.

The Bible teaches us not to be weary in well-doing. Only the person who refuses to do the truly eternally important things is lazy. Do what you can and don't worry about the rest.

A BAKER'S DOZEN OF VERSES ABOUT LAZINESS

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

Proverbs 24:30-34 “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 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.” (Unkempt life.)

Proverbs 26:13-16 “The sluggard says, ‘There is a lion in the road! There is a lion in the streets!’ As a door turns on its hinges, so does a sluggard on his bed. The sluggard buries his hand in the dish; it wears him out to bring it back to his mouth. The sluggard is wiser in his own eyes than seven men who can answer sensibly.” (Unbelievable self-assurance.)

Proverbs 28:19 “Whoever works his land will have plenty of bread, but he who follows worthless pursuits will have plenty of poverty.” (Unproductive use of time.)