

An Idle Soul Shall Suffer Hunger

Proverbs 19:15

“Slothfulness casteth into a deep sleep; and an idle soul shall suffer hunger.” - Proverbs 19:15 (Cf. 6:9–11; 10:4).

I’ve always been tickled by the Bible use of the word “sloth” or in this case, “slothfulness” in describing either laziness or a failure to pursue a task or objective with appropriate energy. I did a little looking around and discovered that the word comes from the late 12c. And speaks of the “indolence, sluggishness,” which formed from Middle English *slou, slowe*. It actually replaced the Old English *slæwð* “sloth, indolence.” It gives the sense of “slowness, tardiness” and is from the mid-14c. It was considered to be one of the deadly sins, and as such it translates an old Latin word: *accidia*. Once it began to move over in to common usage, the unfamiliar Latin and Middle English forms changed in a reference to the slow-moving mammal first so called @1610s, a translation of Portuguese *preguiça* “slowness, slothfulness,” from Latin *pigritia* “laziness” and is comparable to the Spanish word *perezosa* “slothful,” also “the sloth”). In George Washington’s journals, interestingly, we find an attributing of one of his victories to an energetic pursuit of tactics compared to the “slothfulness” of the British General Howe who was his adversary in the battle in view.

Interestingly, the actual word “slothfulness” (or laziness, depending upon what version you are reading) appears only 18 times, as “lazy” or “laziness”, 15 of those times in Proverbs, one other in Ecclesiastes, and two in the NT, once in Matthew and once in Titus. It is not surprising that all of the OT references occur in the writing of Solomon, who had a great concern that men conduct themselves in a way that best and most fully serves the purposes and end goals of their Lord and Master, Yahweh. The Hebrew word translated here actually refers to slackness (as opposed to rope or line being pulled tight). It can speak of sluggishness, thinking of the idea, perhaps of a stream or river that is not moving as rapidly as it might, but has little current. One can see that it is a very graphic or picturesque word that carries a very powerful, useful and instructive concept for us to take to heart and to put into action.

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One thing that we must not comes in the very first phrase: slothfulness or laziness has a very damaging (or counter productive) effect. “Casts” treats the prior word (slothfulness or laziness) as the “doer” of what it describes as the effect here. The word means “to fall” or collapse, to be inferior to another thing. If used in certain contexts it can speak of ore negative and even violent ideas, like bringing a thing to ruin, casting or throwing down. Used metaphorically, it can speak of being or causing to be inferior to another thing. It is fascinating

how careful Bible writers, Solomon here, in the use and application of the word to this concept makes a particularly useful point for us.

The “sleep” that is spoken of here is NOT speaking of the slumber that we undergo each night in our beds. It is not even talking about the sleep we chance to fall into when comfortable in front of the TV. The meaning here is a deep sleep that normally gives good rest. By application in given contexts it can also speak of lethargy, being dazed or stunned. Notice that Solomon speaks of this “deep sleep” and compounds that idea with a common adjective “deep” that highly emphasizes the depth or profoundness of the experience. Remember that we are not talking about actually eye’s shut sleeping; but rather the torpor or the daze that is much the same as the unawareness that accompanies normal sleeping.

We keep in mind that it is laziness, failing to apply the proper and needful energy to the task at hand that causes the dullness that is in mind here. This can speak of anything from the pursuit of our personal life, married lives, church lives, to our business and work lives. It can also apply to our spiritual lives as well. If we so seek to achieve and excel at those things, then Solomon, in other Proverbs, tells us that God will bless and “success” will result. It is not a failure to know the steps or faulty tactics or the like that brings the equivalent of sleep as Solomon tells us here. It is sloth, laziness, that brings the stated result.

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The result that Solomon tells us of is actually two-fold. “Sloth” or laziness, The failure to put the proper and necessary effort into really, pretty much any pursuit or task has, this passage says, these results:

- **Deep Sleep** – obviously seems to be a result to lost time, missed opportunities, responsibilities failed, and perhaps even more applications.
- **Suffering Hunger** – lack of provision or the securing of needed materials for self and for family.

Solomon, in any number of places, makes clear the necessity of a father, or the head of the family’s duty to care for his family, including making provision for their needs, in their entirety. In at least a general sense, the failure to do this, in Solomon’s mind is, at least to some degree, caused by “sloth”, the failure to be as energetic as needful in the pursuit of what God will use to provide for those needs.

Just by way of application, we should that, using the verse as a metaphor, we can fail to achieve the needful levels for any spiritual goal or need, if we do not pursue those goals energetically. Thus, sloth is to be avoided in spiritual matters and in the service of our Lord.

By way of rehearsing of our interpretation, slothfulness, or the habitual avoidance of exertion, leads on to a lethargic state which becomes irresistible. The consequence of idleness, sooner or later, must needs be suffering - that kind of suffering which an ungratified appetite creates. The proverb may be applied

to the physical, intellectual, or spiritual life of a man. It is sure that such an energetic pursuit of our spiritual lives would be wonderfully beneficial and would grow our relationship with the Lord tremendously and continually.

By way of illustration we can see:

- “Abundance of idleness” was among the causes of that grievous infatuation which overtook the inhabitants of Sodom, as well as of their vicious habits (Ezek. 16:49). So sunk in a moral lethargy were they that all the warnings of “righteous Lot” fell unheeded upon their ears, and even to his own sons-in-law “he seemed as one that mocked” (2 Pet. 2:8; Gen. 19:14).
- Our Lord has illustrated this truth by parables.
 - Dives, after a life of voluptuous ease, suffers torment from an unappeased appetite.
 - The rich fool, having completely overtaken his very soul, is snatched away from his stored-up treasures, with no provision made for the future.
 - The foolish virgins wake out of their sleep to find themselves debarred the Bridegroom’s feast.
 - The slothful servant is deprived even of that which he seemed to have, and condemned to gnash his teeth in disappointment at the loss of what he might have had.
- Once more—to turn from parable to fact—it is a part of the punishment of the Jews who, in a state of judicial torpor (Isa. 6:10), neglected the Word of God (both written and Incarnate), that they suffer now of long time from a famine of that Word (Amos 8:11).

Just think of the matter of application – We should note that the law is preeminent and of wide application, “*that if any will not work neither should he eat* (2 Thess. 3:10). To be sleeping instead of toiling in sowing and harvest time is the way to starve. But this is also true of the mind and of the spirit. Idle habits, contracted in youth and habitually indulged, produce gradually a state of intellectual torpor which is fatal to self-improvement. Then, sooner or later, the acute pain of hopeless ignorance, of gnawing necessity, is felt. Even worse is the effect of spiritual sloth upon the soul. A man may be wide awake to the claims of physical or intellectual labour. But of “the things which accompany salvation” a drowsy disregard may have led on to spiritual paralysis of the highest faculties of his nature. Then, what remains but that “he awake” (at the archangel’s trumpet, if not before), “and his soul is empty” (Isa. 29:8)? Then, since the soul was made for God, and nothing less will satisfy it, there must needs follow those unappeasable cravings which are compared to “*the worm that dieth not.*”

Oh, may I be wise in time, and cease to dream, and awake to the realities of life, and hunger after righteousness, and work out my own salvation!
