

Go to the Ant

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[0 : 0 0] Presbyterian Church, and it's my joy to bring God's word to you today. A special welcome if you're new or visiting with us. We're glad that you're here, and we're glad that you're here not because we're trying to fill seats, but because we're following Jesus together as one community, and as we follow Jesus together, we become convinced that there's no one so good that they don't need God's grace, and no one so bad that they can't have it, which is why we come back week after week to hear what God has to say in his word because he has something to say to everyone. This morning, we are continuing our series in the book of Proverbs. We're going to be in Proverbs chapter 6, verses 6 through 11, and you'll remember that the book of Proverbs is a book about wisdom, and wisdom is skill and the art of living. Remember, wisdom starts with the fear of the Lord, and it continues with humility. We have to be people who want to learn. We realize we have something to learn to be able to grow in wisdom. Now, one of the fun things about the book of Proverbs is that we get to talk about all sorts of practical, everyday things. So last week, we got to talk about the very nitty-gritty topic of co-signing loans at the beginning of chapter 6, and now we're going to proceed to talking about the issue of work and working hard, the challenge of work. Of course, all of us who have been in this world for any amount of time know that sometimes work can be something we're very passionate about. Sometimes it's something that's very discouraging and mundane. Something's, it's just boring. And so the question then is for us, how can we be wise in our work? What does wisdom have to say about our work? Of course, it has many things to say. And this morning, we're going to look at what it means, what it looks like to work hard. And so I invite you to turn with me in your Bibles to Proverbs chapter 6. It's printed also near the end of your worship guide, or you can find it in your phone.

No matter where you find it, remember that this is God's Word. And Proverbs chapter 30, verse 5, tells us that every word of God proves true. He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him. And so that's why we read now starting at verse 6. Go to the aunt, 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.

I invite you to pray with me as we come to this portion of God's Word. Our Father in heaven, we thank you again for the gift of your Word that you give to us, that it is life.

We thank you that your Word is what brings dead things to life, brings things out of nothing. We saw you bring something out of nothing when you created the world, and we've seen you bring life out of death when you soften hard hearts and you turn them from stone into flesh. We ask that you would use this word this morning to give us life, that you would give us ears to hear and eyes to see, minds to understand, and hearts to believe. We ask these things thankful that we can ask them with confidence because we ask them in Jesus' name. Amen.

Many of you may be familiar with a man named Jim Elliott who was famous for being a missionary to Ecuador, and he met an early death as a missionary. And his love story with Elizabeth Elliott became famous in the evangelical world for many years. They wrote a book called Passion and Purity.

[4 : 06] And Elizabeth talks about what it was that caught her attention when it came to Jim, what she was attracted to. Now, Jim was known for being handsome or being good-looking, but that was not what made her take note to notice him. Instead, what made her realize that this was a man that maybe she should pay attention to and be interested in was she would see him. They were both undergraduate students at Wheaton College, and she would see him in the cafeteria line. And as he was waiting in line, he would have his flashcards with him, and he'd be going through reviewing things that he needed to know.

And she thought, here's a man who's serious. Here's someone who works hard. It wasn't his looks that attracted her to him. It was his work ethic. And in fact, that's the kind of work ethic that we see here in the book of Proverbs. We're told to work hard. There's a contrast that's drawn between the ant, which is wise, right? Verse 6, we're told we can be wise by learning from the ant and the sluggard.

We learned, first of all, that wisdom is a self-starter. Wisdom doesn't need anyone to tell her what to do. They're looking for opportunities to get to work, right? Verse 7, this ant doesn't have any chief or officer or ruler. It doesn't make excuses. It doesn't wait around for someone to tell it what to do. Instead, wisdom immediately gets to work. If no one's telling it something to do, wisdom finds something to do. Wisdom does not say things like this. Maybe you've heard this.

Well, you didn't tell me what to do. No one said that to me. No one mentioned that to me. Instead, wisdom takes the initiative. General Stanley McChrystal became famous for instructing the soldiers underneath him to, if, when they got on the ground, the order that we gave you is wrong, execute the order that we should have given you. In other words, take initiative. Analyze the situation. Know what needs to be done, and then go and act. Now, sometimes you need direction, right? It's not that you're never supposed to ask someone for advice or ask for direction, but the sluggard is fundamentally passive. The foolish person is fundamentally passive. They look for excuses. The sluggard looks for excuses. The wise person looks for opportunities, and so we see the sluggard here in verse 9. There's this question, how long are you going to lie there? When will you arise from your sleep? The sluggard here is sitting there probably thinking, well, no one told me what to do, right? No one's giving me any instruction. I didn't set my alarm clock. No one else is waking me up, so I'm just going to sit here. There's nothing for me to do, and the principle here is that comfort is more important to the sluggard than anything else. Comfort is more important to the sluggard than anything else. They may look hardworking, but only when it comes to easy and enjoyable things.

Now, many of you know I was a teacher before I was a pastor, and I taught many students who were ants, many students who were hard workers, and I also taught many students who were sluggards. And every once in a while, when it came to a sluggard, you'd have conversations with their parents about it, and it would go something like this. You know, we don't understand why this is so hard for Johnny. He is so dedicated when it comes to baseball. He never misses a practice. He just works so hard at it. We just can't understand why that same work ethic hasn't transferred over to what he's studying in school. Well, I think the answer is, I wouldn't say this, but I think the answer is pretty clear. Johnny loves to do things that he enjoys, and he hates to do things that he doesn't enjoy. It's not that he's diligent. It's just that he really likes baseball. It's easy sometimes for sluggards to look like hard workers. The real test is when it comes to things they don't enjoy doing. The real test is when it comes to things that matter. They don't do things they don't like. They don't do things they don't like because it's hard. Remember, we talked in chapter one about the fact that there's something that the simple person gets out of being simple. Solomon asks this question, how long, oh simple ones, will you love being simple? Why does the simple person love this? Well, because it's easy.

[8 : 43] They love not having to do things that are hard, and so the simple person looks like this. They're the person who gives up easily. It's the kind of person, maybe you've met this person who just quits their job because it's not their favorite. They don't have another job lined up, but this is not the most fulfilling task they've ever had, and so they quit it. Now, I try to defend millennials when I can, but millennials are especially bad at this. The sluggard could also be someone who does work, but they only do work when someone's on top of them. So they will do work. I mean, if you have this experience with your children, you ask them to do a task. They'll do it as long as you're there, right there in the room. Maybe you're like that. Your boss asks you to do a task. You'll do it as long as they're there on site, but your slogan is this, when the cat is away, the mice will play. That's the attitude of the sluggard. The sluggard's the type of person who takes an unusual number of sick days. They look to figure out how little they can do and stay in the system. The sluggard figures out the path of least resistance in their work, but we're meant to be ant people, not sluggard people, and so Solomon's telling us this. We stick with our work day after day, week after week, month after month. We do it in season and out of season, whether we enjoy it or not. Work is part of what we do as humans. Work came before the fall. God created work for Adam and Eve before sin entered the world. God calls us, again, this gets back to the eighth commandment, to support ourselves, not to rely on others to support us. We ask, what is it that we don't enjoy, right? If we want to know if we're a sluggard, what is it that you hate doing, but you know that you need to do? The ant goes and does that.

The sluggard finds excuses. The ant gets to work. Whatever we're doing, we're thinking ahead, right? We're working whether someone is directing us or not. If someone hasn't told us the next project that we need to work on, we have time at work. We figure out what that project is and we pursue it.

Kids, the time to learn to be a hard worker is now. If you have great dreams for your future, don't buy into the lie that you're suddenly going to start working hard one day when it's something that you care about. That is a lie from the pit of hell. It's not how virtue formation works.

That's not how habit formation works. Hard work is something that you learn. It is a discipline. It's a practice. The earlier you learn to work hard, the better off you will be. Learn to work hard now.

Be an aunt kind of son or daughter. Don't be the person who needs your parent to be there in the room to complete a task. Don't be the person who needs to be told multiple times to get something done.

[12 : 03] If you ask anyone who's older, you will have confirmed for you it is much harder to shape and form character when you're older than when you're younger. There's a reason that the book of Proverbs is written to a young son, an adolescent male, because it's young people especially. All of us need to hear the admonition to work hard. But there's a special word for children here.

Wisdom is a self-starter. It takes initiative. We also see that wisdom is forward-looking. It's constantly working. Remember that part of the characteristic of the simple person is a simple person has a hard time connecting present actions to future consequences. They do not know how to draw the dots between those two. The wise person knows very well how to draw a straight line between present actions and future consequences. That's one of the main characteristics that separates the wise from the foolish. And that's what we see here in verses 8 and then 10 and 11. It's not just that the ant works hard. The ant works for the future. Verse 8, she prepares her bread in summer and gathers her food in harvest. There's a future orientation to it. On the other hand, the sluggard has poverty waiting for it in the future. Verses 10 and 11, 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. In other words, as we've talked about before, you can get away with foolishness for a time. The consequences of foolishness will not catch up with you right away or immediately, and they will catch up with you.

It will feel like it's a robber and an armed man. In other words, it will seem like poverty just came upon you in a moment. Actually, it's going to be the consequence of days and weeks and months and years of laziness. The sluggard here is able to sleep in bed for a while, right? At some point, he's going to lose his bed. It may not be tomorrow. It may not be next week, but when it happens, it's going to happen fast. It's going to be hard to protect against, hard to reverse. The aunt, on the other hand, is constantly looking at what's ahead. She's looking at what's to come. She's planning. She's thinking.

There are seasons involved. There are seasons involved in our work, right? So there's a season to get education. There's a season to get more job training. When those seasons come, we take them.

We know the future is coming, and so we prepare for it. There's a season for building relationships, knowing we will need that network to move forward in our jobs. Those are things we're doing now, knowing that we'll need them in the future, and when the time comes, it will be too late to form them.

[15 : 01] There's a season for working hard. We know there's going to come a time, right, when we need certain types of savings for certain things. We know there are certain expenses that might be coming up 5, 10, 15, 20 years in the future. The aunt thinks about those things, right? The aunt is able to connect present actions to future consequences. There is a constant rhythm of future orientation to the life of the aunt. It shows itself in consistent work, season after season, week after week.

The sluggard, on the other hand, is doing something that will work for a time, but will not work forever. It might be five years. It might be 10 years. It might be one year, but it will catch up with them.

It might catch up with them in this way. Maybe they don't get the promotion that they want, that they need. The sluggard hasn't been working hard, and so they stay at the same level. They're not able to increase their income to the place they need it to be to support themselves and their family. Maybe even worse, the sluggard is able to get away with it for a time, and then the sluggard loses his job.

The aunt, on the other hand, is asking, what do I need to do today to prepare for tomorrow, especially when it comes to my work? Now, it may not look like a promotion. It may just look like staying on top. What's the next project?

What's the next thing that we need to be working on so that we can be where we need to be? Now, just like last week, I asked you this question, why in the world are we talking about co-signing loans when it's Sunday morning in a church?

[16 : 42] And you might be asking, what in the world does this have to do with the Bible and our faith as Christians? Everything that I've just told you, basically, maybe take out the reference to Jim and Elizabeth Elliot, everything I've just told you, you could find in a blog or a book or a resource written by someone who's not a Christian.

In fact, many of you probably know non-Christians that are great aunts. They are good at working hard and preparing for the future. Some of you probably know Christians who are sluggards. They don't work hard.

They're not good at preparing for the future. And so what are we to do with this as Christians? What is Christian about work and wisdom and work? Well, I'll give you a couple things. Remember that this is in the context of a book about wisdom.

And so it's in the context of embracing wisdom, of loving wisdom. And the first principle, the first rule of wisdom is that it begins with the fear of the Lord, which just to review, as one man has put it, the fear of the Lord is an attitude of submission, respect, dependence, and worship.

So there's a type of work that's based on the fear of the Lord and a type of work that's not. Remember when I talked at the very beginning about the book of Proverbs, about what it means to have the fear of the Lord, what it means for wisdom's foundation to be the fear of the Lord.

[18 : 03] I talked to you about a house. Now, this house might have a wonderful paint job on the inside, right? It might have granite countertops. It might have many things that are beautiful and wonderful. But if the foundation is falling apart, that's not a wonderful house.

It's a dangerous house. In other words, it doesn't matter how wise externally things are if they're on the wrong foundation. Same is true of our work. I'll give you a different illustration, though, now.

Instead of foundation, I want you to think about direction. I want you to think that you get on a plane, and you've bought a ticket, and that ticket entitles you to a trip to Paris. You get on the plane, and you're hoping to go to Paris, but you land in the Sahara Desert.

Is that pilot a good pilot? No, it does not matter how smooth the flight was. It does not matter how wonderful the food was that was served.

It does not matter how excellent the stewards and stewardesses were on the plane. It does not matter whether the lights and the air conditioning worked for you to read on the trip.

[19 : 10] If the destination is wrong, that pilot is not a good pilot. No matter how hard we work, if our destination is wrong, our work is in vain.

No matter how hard we work, if our destination is wrong, our work is in vain. Jesus is coming back to this world in person.

He is restoring everything in this world. He has promised that because of his death, he is going to make this world new again. Romans chapter 8 tells us that that newness does not just apply to us and our relationship with God, but it applies to the entire creation.

God is making this world right again. And in our work, we are either looking forward to that and working with God in that, or we are not.

And so wise work, true work, the kind of work that Solomon is telling us about here, is work that is based in the fear of the Lord.

[20 : 23] It is work that is headed towards Paris, not towards the Sahara Desert. That is why being Christian in our work matters.

It gives a hope and a purpose to our work. It tells us, it reminds us that if we do not have faith in Jesus Christ, we may have many comfortable things in this life.

That plane might have wonderful food on it, right? But we're still headed for a collision. We are still headed for God's judgment and his wrath for our sin in this world, unless we can have the confidence that we talked about from Hebrews 4, that we look to Jesus as our great high priest, unless we're people that have repented of our sins and are following Jesus in faith and obedience.

And so what does being Christian have to do with our work? Well, our work is work that comes from the fear of the Lord. Second, remember, Jesus is our great wisdom teacher.

Solomon here gives us negative reasons that we should work hard. He gives us a threat, right? If you don't work hard, you'll end up in poverty.

[21 : 43] Well, Jesus, our great wisdom teacher, gives us something even better. He doesn't just give us negative motivation. Jesus gives us positive motivation. He gives us a better motivation and a better destination for our work.

In Matthew chapter 25, Jesus tells the parable of the talents. In the parable of the talents, there's a master. This master leaves his servants behind because he needs to go on a trip.

And remember, he gives them talents, which is a type of money, although it could be a wonderful play on words in our day because talents also for us now means gifts or abilities, right? And he gives them different types of talents.

One man he gives five talents to. Another man he gives two talents to. And then one man he gives one talent to. And they're all supposed to use this. So the man with five talents, he goes and invests his talents.

The man with two talents goes and invests his talents. The man with one talent buries his talent in the ground. Now, if you know the story, you know the master eventually comes back and he speaks to the five-talent man and the two-talent man, and they've doubled it.

[22 : 48] So the five-talent man now has ten talents. The two-talent man now has four talents. The one-talent man, however, has produced nothing. He receives Jesus' condemnation or the master's condemnation, who's meant to represent Jesus or God here.

But the two servants who've invested their talents receive a commendation, a praise. He tells them this, In other words, there is a reward.

Jesus offers a reward for those who use the talents that he's given them wisely, who invest it. And there's two beautiful things that Jesus gives us in that story.

One, their work is for the master. Everything they're doing is for this master who's left them behind. Everything that we do is to serve and honor God and bring glory to him.

1 Corinthians 10, verse 41 tells us, Whatever we do, do it to the glory of God. So we're working for our Father God, no matter what we're doing in this world. The second thing that that story tells us from Jesus that's beautiful and freeing is it doesn't matter how much talent we have.

[24 : 06] One person has five, one person has two. Both of them are faithful and diligent. Both of them receive the exact same words from Jesus. It's the diligence, it's the faithfulness that Jesus comes back and praises them for.

Some of us are five talent people, diligent in our work for the sake of Jesus. Some of us are two talent people, diligent in our work for the sake of Jesus.

Some of us are one talent people, it's probably most of us, diligent in our work for the sake of Jesus. And he promises a reward and a commendation.

Jesus promises something for those who work diligently for him in this world. He gives a positive motivation in addition to the negative motivation of Proverbs.

Colossians chapter 3 tells us this, Whatever you do, work heartily as the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.

[25 : 09] In other words, Paul in Colossians is confirming the same thing. God promises a reward to his people, and he tells them that they're working for him. No matter what we're doing, we're working for our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

And so it's not just another set of math problems or homework. We are preparing to do work in the future that will help other people in this world flourish.

We're stewarding God's creation. We're preparing to do that when we do our schoolwork well now. It's not just another swept floor or mowed lawn.

We are working to create a home that's a place of welcome and hospitality, a place where people feel the safety and security of the gospel, that they would know Jesus' love in those things.

It is not just another engineering problem. We are helping people to live well in God's world. It is not just another dental exam.

[26 : 12] We are helping people take care and steward the bodies that God has given them because God's creation matters. It is not just teaching another lesson.

We're bringing honor and glory to God as we're developing young minds that God has given. It is not just another taking of inventory in a military installation.

We are taking care of the resources that God has given us so that we can do the work of protecting the innocent and keeping them far away from the wicked. Whatever we do is we are working like the ant.

We are working for our Lord Jesus Christ in his work in this world, knowing that he's coming back, promising a reward for his people. John F. Kennedy, when he was casting vision for the space program, that we were going to put a man on the moon, was praised for his ability to clearly present what it was that we were trying to accomplish.

And he did such a good job of that, that everyone knew no matter what their task was, that was what they were helping to accomplish. That was the mission that they were pushing forward.

[27 : 27] That was the goal that everyone was working for. In fact, he did this so well that there's a famous quote from a janitor who had a place within that effort.

And he said this, I am not mopping floors. Brothers and sisters, we are not just learning from the ant.

We are not just working hard. We are working for our King and Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, working and praying that his kingdom would be here on earth just as it is in heaven.

And so we can take this promise that Jesus, when he returns, will say this, well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little.

I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master. Please pray with me. Our Father in heaven, we thank you again that you give us instruction on lofty things, on things that are hard for us to understand.

[28 : 41] And you give us instruction in simple things. You give us instruction in working faithfully and diligently day by day. We ask that you would help us, that we would work hard not for man, but for you.

And we would do it because of our faith and our hope in you. We ask these things, grateful that we don't have to earn them, but that we can ask them in Jesus' name.

Amen.