

PROVERBS: THE WAY OF WISDOM

SLOTH & DILIGENCE

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. — Proverbs 24:30-34

Read: Proverbs 6:6-11; 13:4

Lust, Wrath, Greed, Envy, Pride, Sloth—one of these things is not like the others. Or, so it seems. At first glance, sloth feels out of place next to the other Seven Deadly Sins. Sure, binging Netflix for a few hours might make you feel a bit groggy, but can we seriously say that's as deadly as pride or lust? The Bible seems to think so. The book of Proverbs talks about the slothful, or the "sluggard," throughout. It warns us about this vice in dramatic terms, "the desire of the sluggard kills him" (Prov. 21:25). Paul says that, "if anyone is not willing to work, let them not eat." Sloth is a serious matter. The Church has viewed sloth as the opposite of diligence. Diligence comes from the Latin root for "love." Sloth is a lack of love. It is comfortable apathy—indifference to and neglect of the duties that love requires. Sloth is about so much more than how much entertainment you consume or how many pints of ice cream. Love implies responsibilities, and sloth shirks these. Rebecca DeYoung writes, "sloth has more to do with being lazy about love than being lazy about work."

But in our culture, it seems like everyone is busy all the time. Is that the same thing as being diligent? It would be too easy to say, "I don't have to worry about sloth, I'm so busy!" But, remember the Latin root for diligence? The virtue of diligence is rooted in rightly ordered love. It's not just about working harder. It is about the object of our work, the reason for which we "work heartily..." (Col. 3:23). It is entirely possible to be a busybody, who goes to bed exhausted at night, and yet still be lazy in love. We can grow to love the sinful satisfaction that comes from "being so busy." We can use our busyness to get what we want without having to change or sacrifice. The sloth loves his comfort more than God or neighbor; either the comfort of laziness or the comfort of workaholism. The solution to either ditch of sloth is to submit ourselves to the transforming power of God's love. God's love is the reason that he created, sustains, provides for us, and is ultimately the reason he sent Jesus to save us (John 3:16). We fight sloth by living with an awareness that God holds our lives, has called us to a particular place and people, and that all of his plans for us are formed out of love. When we remember that God holds us and calls us, we can avoid laziness as we "work quietly and earn [our] own living" (2 Thess. 3:12) and avoid idolatrous busyness as we "work heartily as unto the Lord, knowing that from the Lord you receive the inheritance as your reward" (Col. 3:23).

Discussion/Reflection

We want to apply God's wisdom to transform how we think, feel, and act. The following questions are meant to stimulate conversation, correction, and change.

1. **How is God's wisdom on rest and Sabbath different from the world's wisdom? How is Sabbath different than "self care?"**
2. **Does your relationship with work tend to lean toward avoidance or addiction? How does either ditch reveal your own disordered love?**
3. **What steps can you take to start living diligently? Are there responsibilities you've been avoiding or busyness you need to lay down?**