



SESSION 3

EARN MONEY PRODUCTIVELY

▶ **The Point**

Work isn't always easy, but it's necessary.

▶ **The Passage**

Proverbs 6:6-11

▶ **The Bible Meets Life**

Ever known anyone guilty of job title inflation? We now call the cafeteria lady an “Education Center Nourishment Consultant,” a lifeguard is a “Wet Leisure Attendant,” and a painter is a “Color Distribution Technician.”

American businesses especially like to use fancy job titles. Some people call themselves CEOs—Chief Executive Officers—even though the businesses they run may have only two employees. Even large corporations can have multiple layers of vice-presidents and more managers than workers. In fact, one large banking firm has 32,000 employees, with 12,000 of them carrying the title “vice president.”¹ Talk about a competitive work environment!

The Book of Proverbs says nothing about job titles, but it does tell us a lot about how we are to do our work. Our work is not always easy, but it is a noble, and Christ-honoring, thing to work and earn the money we need for daily living.

▶ **The Setting**

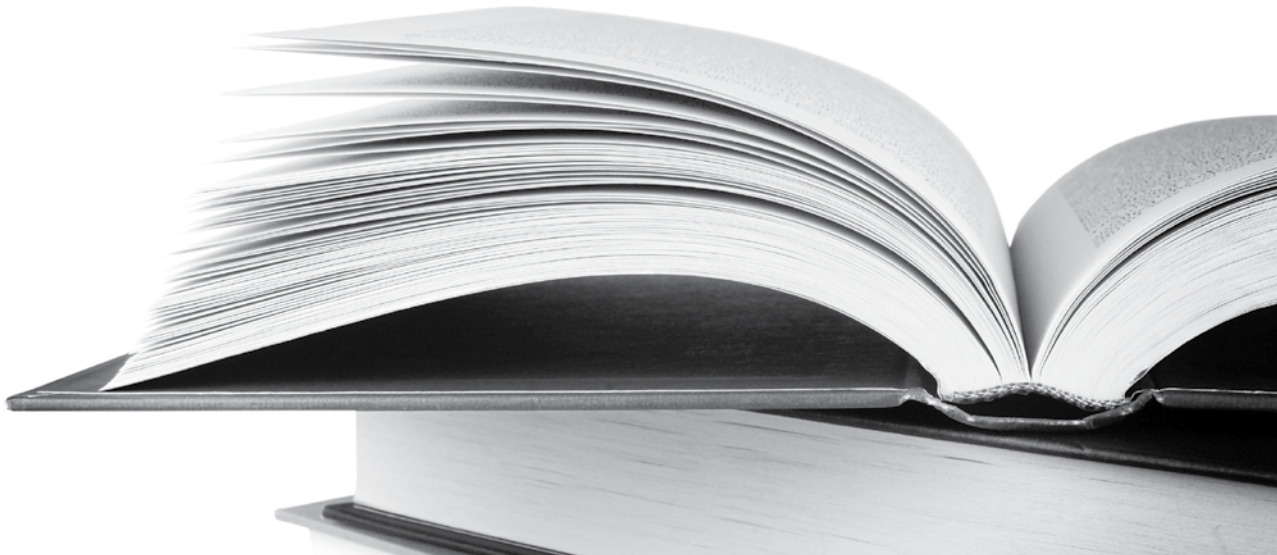
Proverbs 6:6-11 is part of a section dealing with three types of behavior one should avoid (see Prov. 6:1-19), which is itself part of the larger body of “The proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel” (see 1:1–24:34). In Proverbs 6, Solomon warns against becoming involved in legal entanglements and indebtedness (see 6:1-5), against being lazy (see vv. 6-11), and against becoming a person who loves causing conflict and dissension (see vv. 12-15).

What does the Bible say?

Slacker (v. 6)—A person who seeks to live life without having to work for food, clothing, shelter, and other essentials.

Proverbs 6:6-11

- 6 Go to the ant, you slacker! Observe its ways and become wise.
- 7 Without leader, administrator, or ruler,
- 8 it prepares its provisions in summer; it gathers its food during harvest.
- 9 How long will you stay in bed, you slacker? When will you get up from your sleep?
- 10 A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the arms to rest,
- 11 and your poverty will come like a robber, your need, like a bandit.



Proverbs 6:6-8

[Verse 6] As Solomon observed the work habits and attitudes in ancient Israel, he saw many people who exhibited unwise and unhealthy attitudes—those who were too busy with other things and those who were lazy. He addressed these attitudes with his typical direct and penetrating wisdom.

Solomon addressed his comments about laziness to the **slacker**. A slacker seeks to live life without having to work. In Proverbs 15:19, the “way” of the slacker is contrasted with “the path of the upright.” In Proverbs 21:25-26, “a slacker’s craving” is contrasted with “the righteous” who “give and don’t hold back.” Proverbs 20:4 describes how “the slacker does not plow during planting season,” which means he has nothing at the time for harvest. A parallel teaching on the disastrous ways of the slacker is found in Proverbs 24:30-34. The cause of the slacker’s condition is distinct from that of “the oppressed and the needy” (Prov. 31:9).

Many people end up in poverty through no fault of their own; the slacker’s poverty comes precisely because of his foolish ways. That is why Solomon challenged the slacker to **become wise**, to change his outlook and his habits to reflect godly wisdom.

While Solomon might have chosen larger and more noble animals, such as the lion or the eagle, he selected the tiny **ant** as an example of an industrious worker. Obviously, he chose the ant for the way it works—but perhaps also to stress how such a small and seemingly insignificant creature provided such a model for the highest of God’s creation. If such a lowly creature could act in this manner, surely a man could develop the right attitudes and habits in order to provide for himself and for his family.

[Verses 7-8] Solomon described the work of the ant in terms of the seasons of the year. During the **summer**, the time of **harvest**, the ant **prepares its provisions** and **gathers its food**. When winter comes, the ant has nothing to fear because its storehouse is full. Solomon added that the ant did all this work without a **leader** or an **administrator** to organize its forces, and without a **ruler** to push the ant colony’s members to do their assigned tasks. Each member works tirelessly on its own initiative and seems to know instinctively exactly what to do. They all go out to locate food, communicate their findings to the others in their colony, carry the food back to their home, and store their food in a safe place for later retrieval.

What a great example of selfless teamwork!

Proverbs 6:9-11

[Verses 9-10] After describing the industry of the ant, Solomon then pointed to the basic problem of the slacker's lifestyle: he was lazy. He would rather **stay in bed** and enjoy his **sleep** than go work in his field. Surely, he wanted food to eat, clothes to wear, and a place for shelter and rest. He simply did not want to do the work necessary to provide for himself. Instead, he expected others to provide for his needs.

This kind of attitude is a not unusual among human beings. Centuries after Solomon shared his wisdom we find Paul addressing this same problem in his writings.

In his second letter to the Thessalonians, Paul commanded the Thessalonian church, "If anyone isn't willing to work, he should not eat" (2 Thess. 3:10). Notice that he didn't say, "If anyone isn't working," but "If anyone isn't willing to work." Today, our state and national governments regularly provide updates on how many people are jobless. Some of the people reflected in these numbers are jobless because they are not willing to work. However, most of us know individuals who are very willing to work but have lost jobs through no fault of their own and cannot find new jobs. For those who are willing to work but are unable to find jobs, we should support them in every way possible. For those who are unwilling to work, we should follow Paul's guidance and "keep away from" them and not support their wrong choices (see v. 6). In doing so, our goal is not to push them away but to encourage them to change their ungodly attitudes.

In his letter to the Colossian believers, Paul instructed them on how to honor Christ in their various roles. He summed up his exhortation by urging every believer to view his or her role and work not simply as a job for people, but "as something done for the Lord" (Col. 3:23). Yes, as Jesus' disciples, we want our employers and our bosses to view us as good workers who are both capable and committed to doing our tasks well. However, when we realize that in everything we do we can serve our Lord, we should need no other motivation for doing our best. Then we can fulfill Jesus' command to let our lights shine so others will give glory to God (see Matt. 5:16).



STUDY THE BIBLE

Notes

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Proverbs 6:9-11 (continued)

⁹ How long will you stay in bed, you slacker? When will you get up from your sleep? ¹⁰ A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the arms to rest, ¹¹ and your poverty will come like a robber, your need, like a bandit.

DO: Direct group members to complete the activity "Slacking Off" on page 89 of the PSG. If time permits, encourage volunteers to share which routines and principles have helped them avoid laziness in the past.



Which of the following images represents what most tempts you to behave like a slacker? Choose one and explain.



What routines or principles have helped you avoid these temptations in recent months?

DISCUSS: Question #5 on page 88 of the PSG: "What tips would you suggest for balancing work and leisure?"

Note: Some group members may be hesitant to "toot their own horn" by talking about their own disciplines and routines. Encourage them to share in order to benefit the group.

GUIDE: Refer back to "The Point" of this session: "Work isn't always easy, but it's necessary." As time permits, encourage volunteers to share any final thoughts and questions.

Proverbs 6:9-11 (continued)

[Verse 11] If a person chooses to be lazy and refuses to work when he is able, what will be the result? Solomon said the result will be **poverty**. He used two similes to describe how this condition will come. The terms appear to be parallel—**robber** and **bandit**. These images convey the sense that the result of being lazy (which is poverty) will come quickly and unexpectedly.

Solomon and the other wise teachers in the Book of Proverbs often spoke about poverty. They warned against foolish attitudes and actions that can result in poverty; for example, not giving freely to help the poor (see 11:24), ignoring wise counsel (see 13:18), too much talking and not working enough (see 14:23), and being “reckless” instead of being “diligent” (see 21:5). From the Book of Proverbs and the Bible as a whole we should be able to see that work is both necessary and noble. Even more importantly, working with the right attitude honors Jesus.

However, the wise teachers also taught that those who are wise will give to help those in poverty and will treat them with respect. Proverbs 19:17 is an example: “Kindness to the poor is a loan to the LORD.” As mentioned previously, the kind of help we give to those in poverty depends on how they got there. If they are believers who are unwilling to work but simply choose to be lazy and depend on others, then we should respond with the “tough love” Paul outlined in 2 Thessalonians 3. But if they are believers who are willing to work but simply can't find jobs, then we should respond with sacrificial love.

One other category of individuals is unbelievers. How should we as Jesus' disciples respond to those in this group? Paul wrote in Galatians 6:10 that “as we have opportunity, we must work for the good of all.” We know from the Book of Acts that the Holy Spirit empowered Paul to heal unbelievers (see Acts 14:8-10; 16:16-18; 19:11). What were the results of Paul's ministering to these individuals? Crowds were attracted to the message Paul was preaching, and as a result many put their faith in Jesus. As Jesus told His disciples, “You always have the poor with you” (Matt. 26:11). While we teach the Bible's message about the nobility of work, let's also make sure we show the Bible's message about love.

Previous Biblical Illustrator articles “Food Storage and Preservation in the Ancient Near East” (Spring 2014), “The Wise and the Foolish in Proverbs” (Spring 2013), “Debt in the Ancient Near East” (Summer 2008), and “Ancient Israel's Agrarian Culture” (Summer 1998) relate to this lesson and can be purchased, along with other articles for this quarter, at lifeway.com/biblicalillustrator. “The Wise and the Foolish in Proverbs” can also be found on the DVD in the Summer 2016 Leader Pack.



5 minutes

LIVE IT OUT

GUIDE: Direct group members to page 90 of the PSG. Encourage them to consider the following responses to the Bible’s teaching about work:



Notes

Dotted lines for taking notes.

- ▶ **Assess.** Look back at the description of the slacker, and compare that list to your own work habits. Does anything need to change?
- ▶ **Set goals.** Make a specific plan for how you want to approach and engage your work. Set goals that will help you find the right balance between overworking and laziness.
- ▶ **Encourage others.** Make a deliberate effort to encourage one or more of your coworkers this week. However you approach this step—write a card, send a text, initiate a conversation—be specific regarding what you appreciate about that person’s approach to their work.

Wrap It Up

TRANSITION: Read or restate the Conclusion from page 90 of the PSG:

As we continue to explore the topic of work, remember that we don’t work hard to gain God’s favor. Jesus Christ did the work on the cross to restore us into right standing with God. As followers of Christ, then, we work diligently as a response to His grace. Through our necessary work, we honor the One who graciously loves us.

PRAY: Conclude by affirming that work is a necessary part of life, both in your community and in God’s kingdom. Ask again for God to help you be more productive as you join with others to work for Him.

1. <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/are-you-the-chief-me-officer>.