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 HCC Sermon: Wisdom for Life  
 Learn from the Sluggard

## INTRODUCTION

1. Image: Have you heard the myth about Sisyphus?
2. Need: The futility of work tempts us to give up before we begin.
3. Subject: What should we do when work feels like an exercise in futility?
4. Text: Proverbs 24:30-34
5. Preview: How do we deal with the futility of work? What are two things that happen when we deal with the futility of work?

## BODY

- I. Work with God's purpose (Prov 24:30-31)
  - A. Solomon observes an unfruitful vineyard resulting from a sluggard's lack of motivation to work [Needs to be more colloquial] (Prov 24:30-34).
    1. The word: sluggard means slow.
    2. Solomon parallels the word: sluggard with the phrase: "a man lacking sense."
    3. The vineyard becomes unproductive
    4. The sluggard lacked motivation to work because he only saw futility in work.
  - B. Solomon instructed his readers to work (24:27)
  - C. God tasks humanity to work (Gen 2:15; Exodus 20:9; Eph 6:5-8)
    1. God tasked Adam to work the garden of Eden (Gen 2:15)
    2. God tasked Israel to work six days to imitate him (Exodus 20:9)
    3. God tasked Jesus to a work to redeem humanity (Mark 10:45)
    4. God tasks Christians to work for Christ and (Eph 6:5-8)
  - D. Work with God's purpose
    1. Work to glorify God.
      - a. God gave you interests
      - b. God gave you gifts
    2. Work to love your neighbors.
      - a. Waste Management
      - b. HEB stocker.
      - c. Internet installation
- II. Work with God's purpose to avoid procrastination (Prov 24:32-33).
  - A. Solomon observed that the sluggard avoided work by procrastinating (24:32-33)
    1. Solomon couldn't get the picture of Nabal's vineyard out of his mind.
    2. Solomon eventually connected the dots.
    3. Nabal slept to escape responsibility
    4. Don't we do the same thing
      - a. Child plays switch to avoid work
      - b. We watch YouTube to avoid work.
  - B. We feel the temptation to procrastinate because we think me first

1. We procrastinate because we believe that time is ours to control (James 5:14).
    - a. Jo and I ran low on liquid hand soap.
    - b. We put off a task and receive one more.
  2. We procrastinate because we believe that our comfort trumps others.
    - a. We don't wash dishes
    - b. We don't finish our part of the group assignment.
    - c. We don't email our teammate.
  - C. Resist the temptation to procrastinate by thinking gospel first
    1. Think about Jesus's daily faithfulness.
    2. [Think about Jesus who thought of others first.](#)
    3. Receive each day as a gift.
    4. See work as service.
- III. Work with God's purpose to avoid procrastination and losing it all (Prov 24:34).
- A. Solomon observed that the sluggard would lose everything if he continued to avoid work (Prov 24:34)
    1. Poverty refers to a person who becomes impoverished because of lack of work.
    2. The word: robber can be translated vagrant.
    3. Solomon describes want as an armed man.
  - B. Avoiding work catches up with you.
    1. You may lose your job.
    2. You may fail your class.
    3. You may lose your possessions.
  - C. Loss ambushes those who avoid work
    1. Your check may bounce.
    2. Your credit card is declined.
    3. Your credit score is low.
    4. Your landlord serves you an eviction notice.
  - D. Work with God's Purpose
    1. Losses teach us.
    2. There is forgiveness and second chances in Christ.

## CONCLUSION

1. Summary: Work with God's purpose to avoid procrastination and losing it all.
2. Closing Image: Liz Ryan wrote in an article in Forbes magazine challenging companies to help employees connect with a greater mission rather than having "happy employees".

MANUSCRIPT

**Have you heard of the Greek myth about Sisyphus?** Sisyphus was the king of Corinth that had tricked the Greek gods one too many times. To punish Sisyphus, Zeus ordained for him to push a large stone up a steep hill every day. But there was a catch. Whenever Sisyphus pushed the large stone near the top, it would return again to the bottom of the hill for him to push up again. He would have to do this for all eternity. The myth of Sisyphus highlights the futility of work. Once you finish a task, you have to start all over again.

**The futility of work tempts us to give up before we begin.** Why should we wash our dishes, when there will always be more dirty dishes to clean? Why should we dust our homes because once we dust, the next day dust returns? Why do we go to work to write reports, when few people read them and are archived? Why do we treat patients? After we treat their sickness, they get sick again. Why should we do our homework, when we'll be assigned another assignment the next day? Why do we write and debug computer code, when there's more code to write? Once you finish a task, there's another one waiting. It makes you feel like you're stuck in a hamster wheel. The thought of work's futility makes us want to hit the snooze button to our alarms and pull the sheets over our head to escape.

**What should we do when work seems like an exercise in futility?** How do we overcome these feelings of frustration toward work? What do we do when work seems like a vain effort?

God would encourage us to learn from the sluggard found in the pages of Proverbs within the Bible. Solomon reveals his run in with a sluggard in Proverbs, chapter 24. Please turn there with me if you're not there already. Proverbs, chapter 24. Solomon places the sluggard's story from verse 30 thru 34.

From the sluggard we learn this: **How do we deal with the futility of work? What are two things that happen when we deal with the futility of work?**

How do we deal with the futility of work? **Work with God's purpose.** Work as God intended. Work with true purpose. Conduct your work as God designed it. **Work with God's purpose.**

**Solomon observed an unfruitful vineyard resulting from a sluggard's lack of motivation to work.** Look with me at verse 30: *"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."*

Solomon may spent a day to see the state of the kingdom of Israel. As he walked on the path, he saw the grain fields of Malachi, the fig orchards of Amos, and the cattle of Aaron. But then he comes to the vineyard of Nabal. Nabal had recently inherited the vineyard from his father Noah.

His father Noah had tried to teach Nabal the trade of caring for the vineyard. But anyone lesson about pruning vines, pulling weeds, cultivating the soil, harvesting grapes, or crushing grapes went in one ear and out the other. Nabal didn't see the need to learn. Solomon and others knew Nabal as the sluggard.

**The word: sluggard means sloooow.** The sluggard is slow not because he's trying to be careful in his work such as carefully inspecting the vines for pests. He's slow to get up in the morning. He's slow to get dressed. He's slow to head to the field because he doesn't have any will to work.

**This is why Solomon parallels the word sluggard with the phrase: “a man lacking sense”.** The phrase lacking sense literally means lacking heart. The word: heart can have a variety of meanings such as the organ or conscience. But the heart is also associated with will power. The sluggard lacks willpower because he thinks to himself: “Work is such a futile effort, why should I work? Why should I exert myself to work when work will never cease nor lessen? Why weed the field? The weeds just come back. Why protect the vineyard? The vermin seem to find new ways to steal my grapes.”

What happens when the sluggard fails to work? **The vineyard becomes unproductive.** As it says in verse 31, the vineyard becomes overgrown with thorny weeds. Nettles, another type of weed, covers the ground. Whenever the words: thorns and nettles occur, they demonstrate God’s judgment (Isa 34:13; Zeph 2:9). The wall that once protected the vineyard from human and animal thieves has crumbled. The vines that once produced grapes now yield nothing. This is the vineyard owned by a sluggard.

**The sluggard lacked the motivation to work because he only saw futility.** Solomon uses the sluggard to teach his readers what not to do. The sluggard is not an example to follow. He is not worthy of imitation.

**Solomon instructed his readers to work.** He highlights the importance of hard work in verse 27: *“Prepare your work outside; get everything ready for yourself in the field, and after that build your house.”* Solomon exhorted people like Nabal to remove the thorns and repair the walls. Cultivate your vineyard so that it bears fruit. Harvest grapes. Make raisin. Produce wine.

Why does Solomon instruct his readers to work even though work never ends? **God tasked humanity to work.**

**God tasked Adam to work the garden of Eden.** God created man in his image. Being made in God's image means that we imitate him. For just as God brought order into chaos by uttering the words: "Let there be light", God placed Adam in the garden of Eden to bring order to creation (Gen 2:15). One of his first jobs was to be zoologist by naming all the different animals (Gen 2:19).

**God tasked Israel to work six days to imitate him** (Exodus 20:9). Just as God had created creation in six days, Israel worked for six days to gather manna and rested on the seventh. By imitating God, Israel imaged him.

**God tasked Jesus to a work to redeem humanity** (Mark 10:45). God sent Jesus to die on a cross and rise three days later to save humanity from the curse of sin. And Jesus awaits the day when his father will send him again to complete the task of vanquishing the effects of sin from all creation.

**God tasks Christians to work for Christ** (Eph 6:5-8). Believers are to conduct their work as unto the Lord. We feel God's pleasure when we work. We desire to please him through our work. When we work, we realize this is what we're created for.

Knowing that God had tasked humanity to work means that we should **work with God's purpose. We work to glorify God.** When we exercise our God-given gifts and ability, we give glory to God. For if God didn't give us our training in medicine, engineering, dentistry, law, real estate, or teaching, then we wouldn't be able to do this work. Although work continues day in

and day out, we do this work because it's a faithful stewardship of what God has given us. God is pleased when his people work. [Could use further elaboration if preached again]

**Work to love your neighbor.** Know that your work leads to human flourishing. Imagine if Waste Management in Houston no longer existed. The garbage in your home would pile up. The stench would cause you to gag. You'll begin to see uninvited critters and vermin. Imagine if there were no more grocery store workers. You would be unable to go to the local HEB to pick up your favorite cereal. You won't be able to find your favorite ice cream. Toilet paper would be hard to find. Imagine if there was no one to install the internet. No more Amazon Prime. No Disney plus. No Netflix. No Hulu. No Instagram. No Tic Toc. If no one worked, chaos and disorder would ensue. Know that your work by God's design benefits others. [Should I mention that there is certain work that is evil? Drug dealing for instance?]

What is an effect that happens when you work with God's purpose?

**You avoid procrastination. Work with God's purpose to avoid procrastination.** You avoid putting off your work. You don't delay. You don't defer action. **Work with God's purpose to avoid procrastination.**

**Solomon observed that the sluggard avoided work by procrastinating.** Look with me at verse 32: *"Thne I saw and considered it; I looked and received instruction. A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest."*

When Solomon returned to the palace later that day, he couldn't get the picture of Nabal's vineyard out of his mind. He thought about it at dinner. He thought about it when his officials came in to report the daily happenings of the kingdom. This is what it means that he

considered it. He set his heart or will to determine what did Nabal do that led to the shadow of a vineyard.

Eventually, Solomon received instruction. He may have woken up in the middle of the night and wrote down the first half of his insight: “A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of hands to rest.” Notice that “little” is repeated three times in verse 33. And note the progression of the words from sleep to slumber to folding of hands. The sleep intensifies.

Nabal slept in to escape from the responsibility of work. He deferred his duties. He failed to wake up to tend to the vine. When Nabal felt tired, he'd give into the desire of taking a slight nap than finish weeding the vineyard.

Don't we do the same thing. It may not be sleep. But it could be a child playing the switch whose time is up saying: “Mom, please just five more minutes. Please let me finish this level. Let me beat this boss. Let me get to this save point” just to avoid returning to their schoolwork.

It could be us at home taking a break from work by watching a YouTube video. After you finish a video, another interesting video pops up. You think to yourself: “What could it hurt to watch another video?” Before you know it, you've wasted 15 minutes that you could have used to get that project done. Maybe it's not YouTube. It might be one more swipe of my Facebook newsfeed. One more Instagram photo. One more news article. Anything to delay return to my work.

Why do we have tendency to procrastinate? **We feel the temptation to procrastinate because we think me first.**



What do I mean by me-first? Let me share with you what I believe to be a me-first mentality. I'll provide two examples of a me-first mentality.

First, **we procrastinate because we believe time is ours to control.** We believe that we can put off tasks and assignments because there will be time later. And we believe that we can create time in the future to do things we delay. It betrays the thinking: "Time is mine to control and do with as I please."

Months ago, **Josephine and I were running low on liquid hand soap.** I thought to myself: I'll have time to pick it up later. Every time I went to Costco, I forgot to buy liquid hand soap. Then the coronavirus pandemic hit. Now I can't find any liquid hand soap anywhere. Before people start sending me liquid hand soap, I want to reassure everyone that I have been washing my hands. Josephine and I have been using the soap bars of which we have a large reserve.

But we fail to recognize as pastor Jason mentioned before in a message about plans that time is not in our control. There is only one time lord and that's not you or me. That person is God. Only God can efficiently get what he plans to get done each day on time without mistake.

**We put off one task and we receive one more the next day.** We think we can put off answering an email for tomorrow. But we forget that we'll get fifty more emails tomorrow as well. We think we'll have time to finish a project later. The next day, your manger comes by and puts another project on your desk. You think that you can put off your homework assignment for tomorrow. But your teacher will assign another assignment the next day. James wisely writes: "yet you do not know what tomorrow will be bring" (James 4:13).

Let me give you a second example of a me-first mentality. **We procrastinate because we believe our comfort trumps others.** We do what is best in our interest rather than what is in the interests of others. We don't consider what other people need. That's why we put off certain tasks.

Why did you put off washing the dishes? I can do it later. I'm in the middle of this new show on Netflix. I need to finish this section of this game. You don't realize that someone might need to use the dish that needs to be washed.

Why did you put off your section of the group assignment? They don't need it that urgently. What I really need to do is finish reading this reddit article? My phone is getting a little slower, so I need to research what new phone I'm going to buy. You don't realize that your other team members are waiting for your part to put it all together for submission.

Why did you put answering that email from your teammate? When I really needed him to help me on something last month, he didn't come through. I'm going to give me a little bit of his own medicine. So I'm going to put off answering him until the last moment.

What should we do? **Resist the temptation to procrastinate by thinking gospel first rather than me first.** Think about the gospel. **Think about Jesus's daily faithfulness.** He had so many responsibilities each day. There was always another person to be healed. There was always another sermon to preach. There was always another demon to exorcise. Yet Jesus accomplished each task that God set before him each day. For just as we have 24-hours in a day so did Jesus.

**Think about Jesus who thought of others first.** Can you imagine what would have happened if Jesus said at the night of Gethsemane: "Dying on the cross is just too tough. These

people don't deserve my help. I'd rather give it pass." It would have been doom for all of us. Jesus resisted the temptation to avoid the work of the cross (Mark 14:36). He asked God if there was another way. There wasn't and Jesus went to the cross willingly to die for us and to redeem us.

**Receive each day as a gift from God.** Like master wu gui says: "Yesterday is history. Tomorrow is a mystery. But today is a gift. That's why it is called the present." Do what you can with the time that God has given you. Sandwiches are eaten one bite at a time. Thousands of emails are answered one email at a time. Dozens of projects are completed one project at a time. Essays are written one sentence and paragraph at a time. Be faithful with the time you are given for today will never come again.

**See work as service.** Do your chores at home. Washing the dishes allows someone to grab a fresh mug to make a cup of tea or pour a bowl of cereal. Finishing your part in a group assignment lessens the anxiety of your group members. Answering the email of a colleague who is normally unhelpful demonstrates to them that you care about them as a person not their utility. You leave that for God to judge.

What is the second of effect of when you work with God's purpose?

**You avoid losing it all. Work with God's purpose to avoid procrastination and losing it all.** It shields you from loss. It protects you from deprivation. **Work with God's purpose to avoid procrastination and losing it all.**

**Solomon observed that the sluggard would lose everything if he continued to avoid work.** Look with me at verse 34: "*and poverty will come upon you like a robber, and want like an armed man.*"

By poverty, Solomon doesn't mean loss of possessions due to a natural disaster like flooding. It doesn't mean refer to powerful people oppressing individuals within society, so that they become poor. Instead it refers to a person who becomes impoverished because of lack of work.

The word: robber can actually be translated as vagrant. Solomon compares poverty to a drifter. It is someone who can come upon you quickly and suddenly. There is no record of where the resources went.

Solomon describes want as an armed man. He wants to draw a picture in our mind of want assaulting the sluggard. Hunger will assault the sluggard at unwanted times. Cold will eat at his skin when he loses his clothing. The lack of shelter drowns him in water when it rains. At these moments, he will want food, clothing, and shelter. But none of these things are available to him.

**Avoiding work catches up to you.** Avoiding work has consequences. These consequences will catch to you.

If you procrastinate and fail to do your work, then you may be called into your manager's office for a reprimand. If you continue to fail to do your work, your manager terminates you. You may lose your job.

If you spend time on your time catching up with the newest post or finishing the newest video game, then you may forget to turn in an assignment. When it becomes a habit, you forget multiple assignments. You receive a report card. You see a big fat F.

**Loss ambushes those who avoid work.** You forget how much is in your checking account because you neglect to balance your checkbook. You issue a check to pay for the

electricity. When you flip on the light switch the next month, the power fails to come on suddenly. The hot water stops running. You discover that your check had bounced because you had insufficient funds in your checking account to pay the electric bill.

You put forget to pay your credit card bills because you keep putting it off. The next time you go to grocery store, the cashier asks you to swipe your credit card. You swipe. The display reads: "Denied." You swipe again. "Denied" You apologize, and you get out another card. Same thing. The denied credit card surprises you.

You're assigned to read the first act of Macbeth for English class. But you decide to put it off because your friends invited you to watch a movie online. After the movie, it's too late in the evening to read so you put it off. When you log into class the next morning, your English teacher announces: "Pop quiz" on your Macbeth reading. Since you didn't read the first act, you stare blankly at the quiz wishing that you had done that reading last night instead of putting it off.

How do you avoid losing it all? Work with God's purpose. Remember that you are working in the Lord. In God's economy, we recognize that these losses serve as lessons to us. For we recognize that as his children, God disciplines those he loves. This means that God teaches through moments of loss so that we might repent of our avoidance of work. We ask for his forgiveness and reconcile with others to make amends.

Why are Christians able to do this? When Jesus Christ came to the earth, he gave up heaven to dwell among men. If that's not enough, then he went to the cross do die and lose his life so that we might receive life eternal. When we experience loss, we realize that we are not a

people without hope. For Christ's work on the cross paid not only for sins past, but also present and future. There is forgiveness and second chances in Christ.

What do we do when work seems like an exercise in futility? **Work with God's purpose to avoid procrastination and losing it all.**

**Liz Ryan wrote in an article in Forbes magazine challenging companies to help employees connect with a greater mission rather than having "happy employees"**. She writes this:

Let's imagine a person completely immersed in his or her work. We'll use the greatest violin maker in the world as our example. I don't know who makes the greatest violins in the world, but we'll imagine that it's an Italian violin maker named Franco and Franco has a studio where 15 or 20 apprentices and journeyman violin makers work alongside Franco making the most exquisite violins in the world.

Is Franco happy? He is alternately ecstatic, frustrated, transported, confused, exhausted and lost in the zone. He and his work are inextricable from one another. No one would say about Franco or his employees "They're happy." Instead, people in Franco's town would say, "Those guys live and breathe violins, and people around the world rejoice."

Can it be said of us that when people observe our work, they may say: "Those guys live and breathe to care for their patients. Those guys live and breathe to excel in their studies. Those guys live and breathe to provide the best customer service. Those guys live and breathe to teach. They live and breathe their work because they believe God designed them for it. They worked with God's purpose. And people around the world rejoice"?