

# How can you be busy yet still end up poor? (12:11)

He who tills his land will have plenty of bread but he who pursues worthless things lacks sense.

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## THE TEXT (NASB)

He who tills his land will have plenty of bread but he who pursues worthless things lacks sense.

*He that tilleth his land shall be satisfied with bread, but he that followeth vain persons is void of understanding. Classic KJV - Proverbs 12:11*

## INTRODUCTION



We can be busy—very, very busy—doing the wrong things. We need to stop confusing nervous activity with real productivity, aimless bustling about with real purpose and progress.

This proverb describes two busy people. Neither looks lazy. Both are energetic. One endures the dull monotony of repeated tasks, while the other embarks enthusiastically on promises of new profits, but ends up a loser.

Why do some to stay on task, while others get sidetracked?



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## COMMENTARY

### Fight to Focus



Why do some of us stay on task, while the rest of us get sidetracked? It all depends on where we're looking. If we don't stay focussed on the goal of our present work, intentionally, we soon get distracted by the peripheral vision of greener pastures elsewhere.

Concentration is vital for profit. But how can we keep our minds from wandering, when the job is boring? Tedious tasks can be like torture, and every job has its drudgery!

The key to getting through the inevitable, tedious task is intentionally remembering the greater good and seeing the bigger picture. Refer to Proverbs 18:9: Lack of Vision.

### Alluring but Worthless

Worthless things must have beauty, the appearance of worth, otherwise they'd never attract our attention. One of our hardest, daily decisions is to identify the best in today's pile of "good things."

The first half of this text is not simply true. Merely tilling the land does not always guarantee a good crop. During prolonged droughts, like the Dust Bowl of the 1930s, tilling the land was not enough. So a correct understanding of the text requires the second phrase: He who pursues worthless things lacks sense!

### Concentrate



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The main message of the text is to keep your mind on the job at hand. A well-packaged “financial opportunity” can distract us from core responsibilities. When we waste our energy chasing worthless things, we didn’t believe at first that they were worthless. There is a path that can seem right to us, but it leads to death. This powerful truth of human behaviour is repeated constantly, Proverbs 14:12 and Proverbs 16:25.

Biblically, it is true that, “The road to hell is paved with good intentions.” Our own hearts will deceive us. So, among other things, it is important to get good advice in business. Think on track to stay on track, and thinking on track always requires good counsellors, with different perspectives.

## Personal Experience

This text has personal significance for me. On January 24, 2003 we walked away from the purchase of a 20-acre lot northeast of Calgary. The location was beautiful, and the house, spacious and elegant—though needing some work. We were planning the serious, second walk-through, when I read this very proverb. Hmm. I was prompted to phone a friend, who’d grown up in the area. Surprise! This local farmer had watched this mansion being built. It was flimsy, a nightmare to heat, had sprung many leaks over its thirty years, and it had been a nightmare for its many owners. So we didn’t waste the time on a second walk-through. I’d been lacking sense, and my farmer-friend provided me the sense that I needed—sense that I didn’t know that I needed, until I read this proverb.

## Translation: *lacks sense*

The Hebrew phrase חסר־לב (ḥā•sēr lēḇ, pronounced “kha-sar lev”) has been translated in various ways:

- “lacks sense” – New American Standard (1995), English Standard Version (2001), *God’s Word* (1995);



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- “void of understanding” – *King James Version* (1850), *Jewish Publication Society* (1917);
- “lacking heart” – *Young's Literal Translation* (1898).

The literal translation for the word *lēb* is indeed “heart.” See Proverbs 17:16 for more on this word, worthy of contemplation. It can also be translated, “determination” or “willpower.” Success needs “heart,” persistence. As famous inventor Thomas Edison once famously said, “Genius is one percent inspiration and ninety-nine percent perspiration.”

## Drudgery's Best Antidote

Continuous, repetitive tasks are not easy, especially when they seem trivial. But a humble, unknown monk of 17th-century France wrote a great literary antidote to just this pain of drudgery. Brother Lawrence's *Practicing the Presence of God* is a collection of letters (Joseph de Beaufort, ed.), where Lawrence describes how he cultivated a habit of constant conversation with the always-present God. And trivial tasks done in an extraordinary way produced amazing results. He documents different techniques for developing and maintaining constant awareness of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords—even while working as a lowly cook in a monastery kitchen. The monastery is long gone, but Lawrence's secrets in overcoming boredom have been translated, republished, and distributed world-wide.

Clare De Graff's *The 10-Second Rule* (Howard Books, 2013) is a more recent book on the same theme, but with a specific emphasis on constant obedience to the constantly present Jesus.

## More than Enough

Plenty of bread does not necessarily mean plenty of wealth, but it does mean having more than enough bread. So if we still feel unsatisfied or frustrated, that may come simply from our own greed and grasping. Note the account of the diviner Balaam (Numbers 22:2-36). Balaam was not poor, since he had a donkey and at least two servants (Numbers 22:22). Yet he was still driven to scramble for more money—even though the LORD had told Balaam not to work as a prophet for hire. Balaam's love of luxuries (2 Peter 2:15, Jude 1:11) eventually cost him his life (Numbers 31:8). So this proverb suggests a strong warning against abandoning our core responsibilities, by pursuing pretty but empty distractions. If we ignore this message, we can be busy, even entrepreneurial, and still end up poor.



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## OUR CREATOR, REDEEMER, AND FRIEND

Jesus called Himself the “bread of life,” John 6:35. He said that, unless we “eat Him” [receiving His Holy Spirit and allowing His life to nourish our hearts and minds], we will “have no life” in ourselves, regardless of how much physical food we eat or how healthy we feel (John 6:53).

What an amazing claim about Himself, and what a disturbing commentary about us.

Who did Jesus think he was—God Almighty?

## APPLICATION

- Memorize the text in your favourite Bible translation and think about it often.
- If you are busy, are you correctly focused? Make sure that your energies are directed to an endeavour that will produce genuine profit.
- Don't skip the boring parts of a job. Every job has some. Read the book: *Life is Tremendous*, by Charlie Jones. Focus on Chapter 2 and the first law of leadership: “Learning to get excited about your work... not someone else's job, not some future job, but the miserable job you have right now.”
- Be very leery of promises for instant success. If it appears to be too good to be true, it probably is.

Which of these steps, if any, does Jesus want you to take now? Ask Him.



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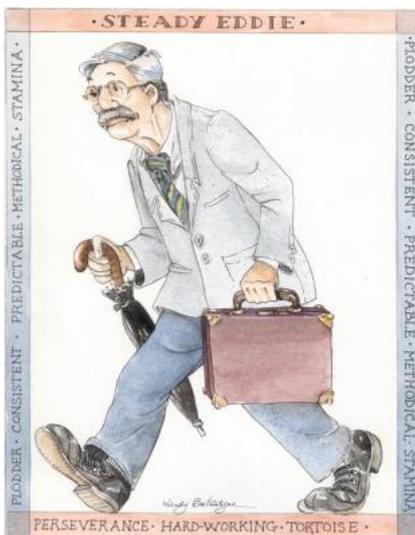
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## KEY WORDS

assets, bread, business, dedication, focus, land, more assets (quantity), patience, productivity, sense, work, bf serving others

## ILLUSTRATION

### Who is Steady Eddie?



Steady Eddie is a rather boring person. In Aesop’s fable of the tortoise and the hare, Eddie is the tortoise. He’s a plodder; he’s consistent; he’s predictable; he’s methodical. One of the greatest inventors of all time, Thomas Edison, defined genius as “One percent inspiration and 99 percent perspiration.” Steady Eddie doesn’t have the full one percent of inspiration but he generates perspiration and produces good results.

Charles Walter, a highly-experienced financial planner and insurance agent, said that after decades in the business he has observed the following: It’s not the educated and talented who usually win, but the plodder with stamina and perseverance.

Steady Eddie often shows up in financial planning literature to some degree. For example we catch a glimpse of him in that best seller, “The Wealthy Barber.” Barber Roy, the main character in the book, “hadn’t missed an entire day of work in thirty-seven years for any reason. He even opened on the morning of his daughter’s wedding.” Wow! I’ve known people who haven’t had a sick day in ten years, but thirty-seven—now that’s impressive! (It’s also fictional!)



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It boils down to this: In order to make many financial strategies work, we ourselves need to keep working and generating cash flow. Without the steady cash inflow we will continually change our strategies to meet unexpected bumps and potholes in the road. Without the discipline of work we often lose our own health and sharpness.

Steady Eddie won't quit his day job to become a singer. He's not glamorous. He's not intellectual. You might say that he is rather boring—and you're probably right, but I'll tell you another thing about him: Eddie's not broke!

