

Why not skip the boring parts of a job? (12:27)

A lazy man does not roast his prey, but the precious possession of a man is diligence.

THE TEXT (NASB)

A lazy man does not roast his prey, but the precious possession of a man is diligence.

The slothful man roasteth not that which he took in hunting, but the substance of a diligent man is precious. KJV 12:27

INTRODUCTION



Every job has boring moments; no job is all entertainment. The lazy do only what they find fun; they avoid giving methodical attention to boring details.

A successful hunter slays his prey. Yet, though he enjoyed the thrill of the chase and success of the kill, there's no guarantee that he'll finish the job. He may not have the patience for the dreary, messy, time-consuming tasks: Gutting, skinning, butchering, and finally roasting the game.

The race should be exciting and enjoyable, but the prize comes at the end, not the start or middle. This is true of all our possessions: There are no plastic "Participation" trophies in life.



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COMMENTARY

How do we develop diligence? The old Hebrew maxim says: "A man who does not teach his son to work, teaches him to steal." Diligence is learned, and it should be learned early in childhood. So the proverb doesn't apply only to hunting, but to any task with an exciting start and tedious finish. The text ties in closely with a statement in Ecclesiastes 7:8: "The end of matter is better than its beginning." This is the "other half" of the maxim, "A job well begun is a job half done."

Translation Difficulties

The Hebrew of this proverb's last phrase is ambiguous in English, and therefore hard to translate. The *Darby* says, "...but man's precious substance is to the diligent." The *Revised Standard Version* tries, "...but the diligent man will get precious wealth." The NKJV renders it, "...but diligence is man's precious possession." The *Young's Literal Translation* of 1899 states, "the wealth of a diligent man is precious." The NIV says, "...but a diligent man prizes his possessions." The ESV and the sense of the *German Luther Bible* take it to say, "...but the diligent man will get precious wealth."

Three Alternatives

We find three alternatives to the English translation of the last part of the text:

- A person's most valuable asset is a good work ethic; or
- Diligent people get good riches; or
- The assets of diligent people are well maintained.

Although the original Hebrew contains all these meanings, the NIV translation (the third alternative) seems to grasp the whole of the proverb, because it develops the contrast with the first phrase: "A lazy man does not care for his take, but a diligent man finishes up with all that he gets." This is also the rendering of the classic KJV. The translation of the Hebrew matches Proverbs 1:13 where "precious possession" (Strong's Hebrew #1952) is translated as "precious goods". It refers to a physical asset, not an intangible, albeit admirable, character quality.

By implication, the text tells us not to store junk. If we can't fix it and use it we shouldn't be storing it. In my case I had to get rid of that old Raleigh three speed bike, an old furnace motor and an unsafe but operating table saw, all of which hadn't been used for over ten years. It's better to have fewer things in good working order than many things in need of repair.

I also like the way proverbs scholar Bruce K. Waltke summarizes the differing translation options. "Whether as a non-finisher (too lazy to process the catch) or as a non-starter (too lazy



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to go hunting) the indolent man throws away his chances." ¹ This truth ties into the message of Proverbs 17:24 which warns against daydreaming while ignoring the opportunity for gain, right where we are now.

Process the Prize



It is significant that God allows the lazy to succeed in capturing the prey. A successful hunt is a chance to prove whether or not the hunter will fully butcher his prize. Much legitimate criticism has been directed against hunting, because some hunt only for the sport, but waste the sustenance. Likewise, proper asset management is the key difference between a sluggard's land and the field of an industrious gardener (Proverbs 24:30-34).

Debt and Clutter

If we cannot maintain what we already have, then perhaps our stuff has already become clutter. An invasion of debt may signal that we are stretched beyond our capacity for asset management. If God has not provided us the assets through our own profitable production or His gracious blessing, then we may not be able to handle any extra assets, and we should not be borrowing to get them. We must be beware of debt. Debt may bring more "prey" than the "hunter" has the knives to butcher. I believe it was Hudson Taylor who said, "God's work, done God's way, does not lack God's supply."

High Standards

Conscientious, meticulous diligence. Most children have a hard time turning off lights to conserve energy when they leave a room. By nature, children are not given to diligence. In almost every situation, they exhibit some lack of conscientiousness in what they do. When studying an Algebra lesson, a child may complete a page of work on a problem, but because he forgot to put the decimal point in the right place or left out a parenthesis, he will arrive at the wrong answer. He should receive no credit for the work he did, for the same reason that an engineer who makes the same error in the design of a bridge receives no credit when the bridge collapses! Mathematics trains this special trait of conscientious diligence, and in the scientific disciplines there is no substitution for this vital character trait.

This verse encourages us to a careful use of the resources that God gives us. Naturally, we all face the deleterious effects of the law of entropy. Things grow old and dilapidated over time. But when we take due care of our belongings, carefully maintaining our homes, automobiles, and



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yards, they do not lose value as quickly as they would if we were careless with them.²

Too Comfortable

In his classic work on Proverbs, author Charles Bridges warns us not to get too comfortable resting on our attainments (achievements). He urges us to spend and be spent.³

OUR CREATOR, REDEEMER, AND FRIEND

Jesus' last words were, "It is finished." In the original Greek this is a one word expression, "teltesti," meaning "paid in full!"

Jesus finishes whatever He starts—whether it's His work in training and teaching His disciples, or in His agonizing work of redemption, accomplished through humiliation, torture, torment, and death on a cross (John 17:4).

"He does all things well," Mark 7:37: Jesus was—and is—a finisher.

APPLICATION

- Memorize the text in your favourite Bible translation and think about it often.
- Practice finishing jobs. Don't start new work while existing jobs are undone.
- Take good care of what you have. Keep your assets clean and in working order. Don't store junk - fix 'em, sell 'em or dump 'em.
- Don't get in the habit of jumping from one exciting task to another while never fully completing a job.

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



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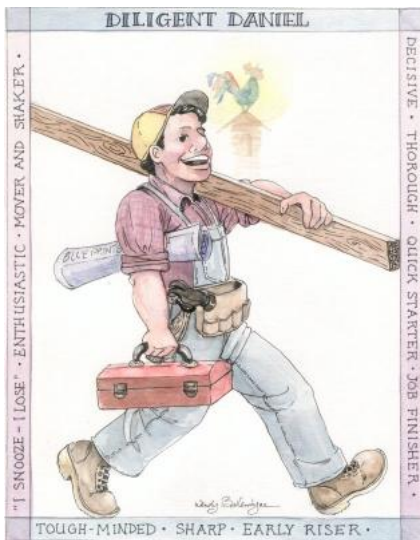
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KEY WORDS

assets, capacity, debt, diligence, endurance, laziness, less assets (quantity), leverage, maintenance, precious, productivity, bf serving others

ILLUSTRATION

Who is Diligent Daniel?



Diligent Daniel is a friend of Steady Eddie. Whereas Steady Eddie is known for his staying power, Diligent Daniel is known for his decisiveness and thoroughness. He is an early riser, a quick starter, and a job finisher. There's no room for procrastination here.

Daniel is tough-minded and sharp. He tells himself each day, "I snooze- I lose." He pushes himself and calls himself lazy. He is tough on himself—not rough.

He's the one Benjamin Franklin was thinking about two hundred years ago when he came up with the maxim, "Early to bed, early to rise makes a man healthy, WEALTHY, and wise." Daniel's also the one the author Oswald Chambers described with the words, "The heights by great men reached and kept, were not attained by sudden flight, but they while their companions slept, were toiling upward in the night."

Daniel is more of a thinker than Steady Eddie, but is known for his enthusiastic work capacity, not his brilliance. He's a mover and a shaker. He's not afraid to get his hands dirty and is in good physical condition. He's a builder. He starts the job right away and gets it DONE. He doesn't flip-flop in this thinking. He is not double-minded. He remains humble while exuding confidence.



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One of his favourite financial tools is the Registered Education Savings Plan (RESP).



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FOOTNOTES

1. The Book of Proverbs, Volume 1. Bruce K. Waltke, Eerdmans Publishing Co. 2004, page 543
2. Generations Family Devotional, January 14, 2022, Partial commentary on Proverbs 12:27
3. A Modern Study in the Book of Proverbs, Charles Bridges' Classic Revised for Today's Reader by George F. Santa , Mott Media 1978, pages 178,179.

