

When are we often tempted to quit working? (20:4)

The sluggard does not plough after the autumn, so he begs during the harvest and has nothing.

THE TEXT (NASB)

The sluggard does not plough after the autumn, so he begs during the harvest and has nothing.

The sluggard will not plow by reason of the cold; therefore shall he beg in harvest, and have nothing. KJV - Proverbs 20:4

INTRODUCTION



When the crops are in, the barns full, and it's cold outside, who wants to work? It takes great discipline to plough for the coming year.

Every business has its cycle—a time to harvest and a time to plant.

With successful harvest, there's usually a sense of accomplishment. So who wants to work then? Unfortunately, success is often followed by slacking off.



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COMMENTARY

When the sluggard has good reasons to skip work—cold weather and a stomach filled by fresh produce—it's easy to avoid ploughing. A lazy person will not work when he's satisfied and the conditions are harsh. The opposite is also true. A good worker will embrace the discomfort to prepare for the next big effort.

Translation



There's a minor difference between the New American Standard Bible (NASB) and King James Version (KJV). The NASB translates the time of inactivity as "after the autumn." The KJV translates it as "by reason of the cold." The message is simpler in the KJV: Cold weather follows the autumn and makes working outdoors uncomfortable. Ploughing after the autumn is hard work and produces no immediate benefits. Ploughing can be tedious and boring, but the need here is to be disciplined by the demands of the natural timetable.

Classic Comments

Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary (1706) amplifies this text:

See here the evil of slothfulness and the love of ease. 1. It keeps men from the most necessary business, from ploughing and sowing when the season is: The sluggard has ground to occupy, and has ability for it; he can plough, but he will not... He that will not submit to the labour of ploughing must submit to the shame of begging. They shall beg in harvest, and yet have nothing; no, not then when there is great plenty. Though it may be charity to relieve sluggards, yet a man may, in justice, not relieve them; they deserve to be left to starve. Those that would not provide oil in their vessels begged when the bridegroom came, and were denied.

So in his famous *An Exposition of Proverbs* (1829), Charles Bridges cuts to the bone, here: "Men's hearts are justly hardened against that man, who by his own sloth and sinfulness hath brought himself to want."

Why Some Beg

Is it cruel to ignore those who are begging, even if they beg during the harvest, when there's an



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abundance of food? An uninformed onlooker may say Yes, but think again. In the text, the other farmers watch their neighbour relax, while they plough in miserable weather for the winter wheat. Perhaps they remember this at the next harvest, when the lazy farmer begs. Sometimes giving food to beggars is foolish. Some may need to suffer the effects of their sloth.

If we will not work when the time is right, we should expect people to ignore us later. So the lazy prefer to beg from strangers, since those who saw them earlier may not support them.

Taxpayer's Burden



This proverb identifies the conditions when social assistance, like a guaranteed annual income, is a waste of taxpayer's money. Giving money to those who will not work at the proper time is foolish. It penalizes the diligent and subsidizes sluggards. A wise worker understands business cycles and the importance of timing (something governments cannot do). He avoids excessive consumption in the present to save "seed corn" for future planting. He rejoices in the harvest, but sees the opportunity to prepare for the next phase in the business cycle.

This is the basic message in the story of the Little Red Hen. [The Little Red Hen](#) is an old folk tale, most likely of Russian origin designed to teach children about the work ethic.

Preparation Versus Worry

"Don't worry about the future," does not mean don't prepare for it. Worry is like spinning your car's wheels while stuck in snow. It wastes energy. Prepare for the future but don't spin your emotional wheels.

Those who hate working in cold weather (that's most of us) need some planning. This may be as simple as buying warm clothes. If you don't work outside in the cold it could mean:

- Setting aside time each week (Friday afternoon?) for planning future work;
- Identifying and reducing unproductive "busy-work";
- Setting aside money to enhance future growth or to soften the downturns.

Pain and discomfort must be endured for ongoing success. No pain, no gain. No battle, no victory. No cross, no crown. Every flower must grow through dirt. So an undisciplined,



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unscheduled love of ease may not hurt immediately, but the hurt will come.

OUR CREATOR, REDEEMER, AND FRIEND

Jesus told a story about a successful farmer who had such a huge bumper crop, he decided to quit farming entirely and live a life of leisure.

He made no plans for expanding his operations, profit-sharing with workers, or giving to the poor.

The story does not have a happy ending (Luke 12:15-21).

APPLICATION

- Memorize the text in your favourite Bible translation and think about it often.
- Dress for cold weather when you need to, but don't stop working just because the conditions are unpleasant.
- Don't allow yourself to get soft and lazy or you will begin to suffer financially.
- Don't support beggars who beg because of their own laziness.

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



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KEY WORDS

consumption, diligence, harvest, industriousness, laziness, less assets (quantity), nothing, planning, social assistance, success, bf serving others

ILLUSTRATION

Who is Prudent Pauline?



Prudent Pauline is a planner. She looks before she leaps, she thinks before she speaks. Her favourite mottos are: "Haste makes waste," "brains over brawn," and "don't jump to conclusions."

When Pauline first heard that famous maxim: "The journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step," she said NO! It begins with a good map. The map must be studied and the best route plotted. Consider road conditions, terrain, rest stops, refuelling, hostile territory, expected weather, travelling companions, clothing, supplies, and many more factors, including (if necessary) a guide.

She has studied the wisdom of Solomon and even helped teach him a thing or two. Solomon wrote these words about 3,000 years ago in honour of Prudent Pauline. "Whatever your hand finds to do (no matter what you are doing) do it with all your might (give it your full ability and energy) for there is no activity or planning or wisdom after you die—it will be too late." Pauline says, "First comes wisdom, then comes planning (her favourite activity), and then comes activity."

Pauline makes the time to do tax planning. She does a work plan every day. She uses a day



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timer or planner to assign priorities to her activities. She and Diligent Daniel are an incredible pair. Pauline does all her homework before she starts an activity.

