

Why do some get ahead and others don't? (13:4)

THE TEXT (NASB)

The soul of the sluggard craves and gets nothing but the soul of the diligent is made fat.

The soul of the sluggard desireth, and hath nothing, but the soul of the diligent shall be made fat. Classic KJV - Proverbs 13:4

INTRODUCTION



Some work, enjoy working... and some don't.

This proverb compares two lives: The sluggard and the diligent. The sluggard certainly wants to have, but gets nothing. He craves things, but is unwilling to work for them.

Why do some get ahead, and some don't? It's plain and simple: Action versus inaction.



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COMMENTARY



Natural skills, intelligence, education, resources, or any other sorts of advantage are not even mentioned in the text. The sluggard and the diligent are opposites, and obtain opposite results.

Passion without action brings nothing—recognizing that it's the soul (the life) that's made fat here, not the body. Fatness of soul is an expression of satisfaction, of contentment. Excessive fat on the body is obesity, not health! Cravings are natural, but they're never satisfied without diligence. Both the sluggard and the diligent want to prosper, but the sluggard can't stomach the effort needed. God doesn't usually give people what they want, without making them exert at least some effort.

The Israelites were not given the Promised Land on a silver platter. They had to fight for it and crush its original inhabitants. And more, though it was a land "flowing with milk and honey," the honey had to be gathered by somebody, and—Ouch, those bees still had stingers. The land and its flowers were beautiful, but its treasures were not for the lazy.

Self-Delusion



Lazy people certainly have cravings, but their cravings themselves become an obstacle to their satisfaction. Sluggards live in a world of wishful thinking. They talk great accomplishments, but take no steps to make them a reality. An old neighbour of mine had grandiose plans for his property, with glass-covered walkways and an arching atrium between his house and his imaginary garage. Slowly I realized that he was unwilling ("unwilling," not "unable") to keep his existing property clean and tidy. He'd only rarely cut his grass. His marvelous imagination was merely an exercise in self-delusion. And as a friend once said, "Too many people itch for what they want, but won't scratch for it."



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Translation: *Sluggard*

The Hebrew word for “sluggard,” עצל (ʾā·ṣēl, pronounced “ah-tsel”), is used fourteen times in the Bible, always in Proverbs. It stems from the verb “to be sluggish,” which is used only once (Judges 18:9), where it translates as “remain still” or “just sit there.” ʾā·ṣēl has the connotation of delay and procrastination. Its first use describes the unnecessary delay of the Israelite tribe of Dan in establishing their own territory in the Promised Land. Procrastination is defined as the act or habit of delaying or putting off the task at hand—especially one needing immediate attention. The effort stands in the way.

Beware of Procrastination



Putting off a task is the same as not doing it at all, yet the people who don't procrastinate are relatively rare. They stand out. I've worked in offices for almost three decades; I've seen all sorts of secretaries and clerks, and one of the best was Marilyn. Why? Marilyn never procrastinated. When I needed help, she'd stop everything and gave me her full attention. Others told me they also got the same excellent care. She'd immediately halt one job and start another—given another person's need.

Jesus has a Parable of the Three Servants, entrusted with the same task, and the only actual word distinguishing the good servants from the bad servant is the adverb, “immediately.” The servant who received five talents began investing “immediately” (NASB) or “at once” (ESV). (A talent was a 75-lb. silver bar, so this was real money.) The servant getting two talents from his master did likewise (Matthew 25:16-17). On their master's return, they both received the same praise: “Well-done, good and faithful servant.” The servant getting one talent didn't start working with his new resources, but buried the talent, perhaps thinking to start later, but never starting at all. And he lost everything. Good workers don't procrastinate.

Good Work Fosters Good Luck



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It seems that lazy people are the ones who complain about others' good luck. But there's a well-known English maxim, answering this complaint: "The harder I work, the luckier I get." There was also an ironic saying in Canada of the 1900s: "If wishes were horses, beggars would ride!"

A person's work ethic may vary inversely with their purchasing of lottery tickets. Do hard workers buy most of the lottery tickets, or are they purchased mostly by those with great dreams but little effort? It's a question worth researching by some politically-incorrect sociologist.

Swindoll's Story



In his booklet, *Wisdom for the Way*, pastor Charles R. [Chuck] Swindoll tells this story:

A young fellow walks into a gas station to use the pay phone. The manager overhears his phone conversation as he asks: "Sir, could you use a hard-working, honest young man to work for you?" [pause] "Oh... you've already got a hardworking, honest young man? Well, thanks anyway!" And the boy hangs up the phone with a smile, and starts to walk away, obviously happy.

"How can you be so cheery?" asks the eavesdropping manager. "I thought the man you talked to already had someone and didn't want to hire you."

The young fellow replies, "I'm his hardworking young man. I was just checking up on my job!"

If we called our bosses, disguised our voices, and then asked about our current work responsibilities, how would they answer?



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OUR CREATOR, REDEEMER, AND FRIEND

One cannot accuse Jesus of not being diligent—He did all things well (Mark 7:37).

Jesus rose early in the morning to start his day (Mark 1:35). He refused to eat when there was important work to do, even though his followers urged him to eat (John 4:31-34). He continued to pray when others were weary and gave up (Luke 22:46). His soul was so “fat” that he overwhelmed the entire world (John 16:33).

Jesus was (and is!) no mere mortal.

APPLICATION

- Memorize the text in your favourite Bible translation and think about it often.
- Don't stop with desire; take action toward your goals.
- Maintain good physical conditioning. Inaction is often a by-product of poor health.
- Don't become arrogant whenever you are strong and healthy. Remember that God is giving you health and strength to work.

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



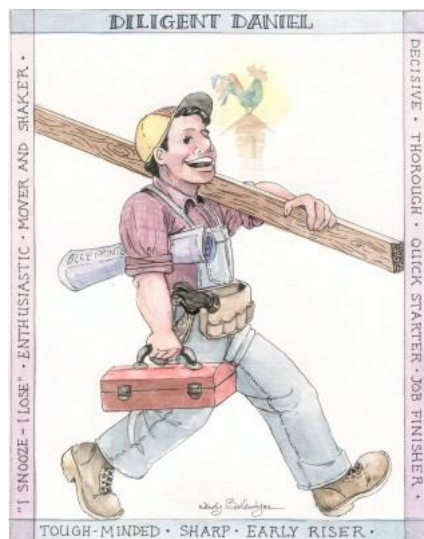
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KEY WORDS

cravings, diligence, imagination, initiative, laziness, lottery, more assets (quantity), nothing, 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).

