

What activities invite poverty? (28:19)

He who tills his land will have plenty of food, but he who follows empty *pursuits* will have poverty in plenty

THE TEXT (NASB)

He who tills his land will have plenty of food, but he who follows empty *pursuits* will have poverty in plenty

He that tilleth his land shall have plenty of bread: but he that followeth after vain persons shall have poverty enough. KJV - Proverbs 28:19

INTRODUCTION



Even with great wealth at your fingertips, distractions can bring destruction.

Beware of well-packaged but unprofitable business “get rich quick” opportunities. We are most susceptible to exciting new ventures when going through the monotonous periods in our work routine. Tilling is perhaps the dullest part of farming. Planting, watering, and harvesting are all more directly related to the visible benefits of farming a good crop. Watch over your business and your business will watch over you.

Do you want to increase your business acumen?



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COMMENTARY

Repeated for Emphasis

This text is very similar to the question: [How can you be busy yet end up poor?](#) Both texts stress the importance of hard work. This text stresses the danger of distractions, and Proverbs 12:11 identifies the personal character flaw that gets us distracted. In contrast, the message of Proverbs 27:18 is to serve others patiently and faithfully. See [Why serve others patiently?](#)

Translation

The word **plenty** is repeated in the text. I like the ESV translation, “Whoever works his land will have plenty of bread, but he who follows worthless pursuits will have plenty of poverty.”

The word “persons” in the KJV does not appear in the Hebrew or in most other English translations. I believe the word “persons” is not helpful in the translation. Just as **land** is a tool to earn income in the same way **empty pursuits** are also tools, not persons. Thus the King James Version (KJV) translation is misleading in my opinion since emptiness can come from persons or things. Often our best opportunities lie right before our eyes but they might look rather UN-interesting.

It Starts with Tilling



Soil preparation is not as exciting as planting, and certainly not as satisfying as harvesting, but tilling and preparing the land essential to farming. When someone **tills land** there is no **food** in sight. It takes faith to till land. Hard soil or clay can be like rock; it must be tilled or ploughed to break it up before planting. This is the whole point of tilling: To create a seed bed where the crop will flourish and grow to produce a bountiful harvest. So tilling is vitally important to the crop production process. When the seed bed is deep and soft the roots can be easily established. The roots can grow deeply where there is plenty of moisture. When the crop is sown, a little earth is harrowed on top to cover the seeds from birds and other predators.

Handling Boredom



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Some set mini-goals such as, “I will do ten more repetitions before take a small rest or break.” Others say, “I will do this for another ten minutes before I do something else.” Still others dream of the prize for finishing the task or think of a loved one for whom they labour. Overcoming monotony is all in the mind. Techniques vary for each person. If financial resources permit, a person could hire workers to complete such tasks. Certainly there is more to successful farming than just tilling the land, but the text implies that all else being equal, tilling the land is necessary for a successful crop. The farmer cannot control the weather but he can, to a large degree, control the condition of the land.

No Land to Farm?

For a non-farmer “land” might be an auto repair shop, a bakery, or any asset. My university professor (L.S. Rosen, York University, Toronto) defined an asset as “something with the potential to generate income.”

Many, if not most of the world’s current population have no agricultural land of their own. In those cases this truth applies to any earning potential: A group of clients to assist, a supervisor to serve, a sales territory to manage, or, in general, customers to satisfy. We need to identify our core business and those assets which must be worked in order to generate income.

Lotteries and Ponzi Schemes



No one in their right mind deliberately **follows** or gives chase to something they know to be of no real value. For example, no one would buy a lottery ticket if they knew it was a losing number. Ponzi schemes work well because people are so blinded by fat and easy profits that they don’t really care how the profits are generated. They exercise no due diligence to inspect the economic engine behind the investment. The largest Ponzi scheme (so far) totalling over \$50 billion was orchestrated by Berni Madoff, arrested and imprisoned in 2009.



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Here's the problem: We are either deceived or deluded into seeing value where there is none. To be naïve is to invite **poverty**. Probing is absolutely vital. We need to exercise healthy skepticism. We need to get counsel before investing time or money in an attractive business opportunity. Some business opportunities have only marginal value.

Diversification or “Diworsification”



While working for Shell Canada, an oil and gas and petrochemical company, I recall a time of economic slowdown when Shell had to sell its non-core businesses which it had acquired during the boom times. These included Alphatext, a word-processing company, Woodex, a manufacturer of wood pellets for wood-burning stoves, and Enviroglass, a producer of fiberglass underground fuel tanks. All these ancillary businesses were not deemed profitable enough to warrant distraction from Shell's core business. Wandering from the “cash cow” in pursuit of a good idea is easy, but the good idea may cause enough distraction to bring poverty.

On the other hand, diversification is a wise investment strategy. To quote from investment legend, Sir John Templeton, "The only investors who shouldn't diversify are those who are right 100% of the time." This same investment principle is in the Bible, "Divide your portion to seven or even to eight, for you do not know what misfortune may occur on the earth" (NASB). (Ecclesiastes 11:2 ESV). In January of 2020, no investment advisor foresaw the global economic impact of the Covid 19 virus.

Dreams Fuelled by Money Makers



Sometimes something seemingly impossible and worthless just requires extra effort. I like the way the Wright brothers invented their flying machine. Their contemporaries held the position that it was impossible for human beings to fly in heavier-than-air machines. Meanwhile, Orville and Wilbur Wright used the proceeds from their bicycle shop (like a farmer who tills his land) to fund their “flyer” experimentation at Kitty Hawk. They did not



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receive any government grants or handouts. They did not forsake their primary source of income in a reckless pursuit of their vision.

We can learn from their example. If we truly believe our dream has potential, even while others scoff, then we should not abandon it. Neither should we abandon known sources of income generation. But take note that the brothers didn't do it alone; they had each other to vet ideas and encourage each other in times of failure. Thus having a colleague with us while we pursue our dreams is wise, lest we get caught in the common trap of self-delusion.

OUR CREATOR, REDEEMER, AND FRIEND

Jesus warned His disciples, "No one, after putting his hand to the plough and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God," (Luke 9:62).

The kingdom of God, like farming, demands full dedication. Discipleship to the Lord Jesus Christ is not a haphazard, easygoing, part-time affair. It is a battle and there are many enemies. If we believe there are distractions in the natural realm we can be more certain that there are decoys and diversions in the spiritual realm. The three classic enemies of the Christian, namely the world (fun, fame, and fortune), flesh (lusts, comfort, and laziness) and the devil (selfish ambition) all try to distract us from keeping our eyes on Jesus.

Energy directed toward worshipping Jesus Christ is always rewarded.

APPLICATION

- Memorize the text and Proverbs 12:11 in your favourite Bible translation and think about both texts often.
- Keep your mind on the job; don't daydream. MIND your own business. Do your part and ask God to do His.
- Thoroughly investigate new business opportunities before giving them personal time and energy.
- Obtain wise business council before embarking on a new opportunity, even if it seems like a sure winner.

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



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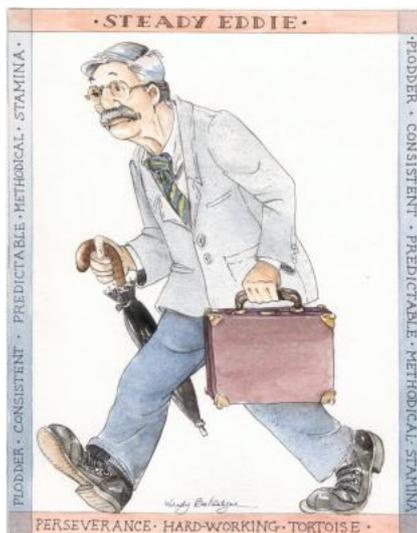
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KEY WORDS

bread, capital, business, dedication, determination, farming, focus, land, more assets (quantity), naive, poverty, 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!

