



# The Scrolls

Helping **CENTRAL BIBLE CHURCH** Families Belong, Become and Go Beyond V21 N41 October 20, 2019

## TOXIC

“The Fatal Failure of Sloth”

Proverbs 6:6-11

### THIS WEEK'S CORE COMPETENCY

#### Life Purpose

I believe I am a steward of God's resources and have been redeemed to participate in His Kingdom purposes for His glory.

*“However, I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me – the task of testifying to the good news of God's grace.”*  
**Acts 20:24**



What is the sluggard's problem?

Have you ever seen a lazy ant? I've seen ants carrying loads larger than themselves. I've seen ants working together to move burdens too great for any one of them to bear. But no. I've never seen an ant on the margins of his hill just lollygagging around. Ants can walk on water in my book. Literally, they can. Have you ever wondered why they don't drown in the rain? They're so light that they don't break the surface tension of the water. They just walk on top of it!

Ants are mentioned twice in the book of Proverbs. In chapter 6 the ant is cited as an example of discipline and diligence, which are good things (vv. 6-8). Sluggards are to take notice. One commentator writes: “The ant is held up as a model of self-discipline and systematic industry . . . In erecting this insect into a paradigm of discipline and prudence, a blind eye is necessarily turned to its destructive effects” (William McKane, *Proverbs*, OTL, 323). On the one hand, you could say that ants are virtuous; but on the other hand, you could also say, as one writer does, that ants are the “greatest robbers in the land” of Israel (W. M. Thomson, *The Land and the Book*, 509). Leaving a bushel of grain in the vicinity of one of their subterranean cities is like leaving the keys in your car in a bad neighborhood. Both wheat and wheels will be gone in short order.

In chapter 30, Agur cites four things that belie their size, and ants are one of them. On the one hand, they are small; but on the other, they are extremely wise. They don't procrastinate. “Ants are creatures of little strength, yet they store up their food in the summer” (v. 25), that is, during the harvest season (cf., 6:8). Consequently, they

serve as examples of foresight. Readers are to take notice. As one writer suggests, size isn't everything. He writes: “The text describes four animals as small, weak, lacking in authority structure, or easily caught in order to emphasize their frailty relative to humans. Despite their weaknesses, however, they survive and provide four distinct lessons in survival. The lesson of the ant is to provide for bad times during good times . . .” (Duane A. Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, NAC, 242). Another adds: “Their exceptional achievement, which is out of proportion to their seemingly inadequate size and power, provides a model for God's people to exercise prudent foresight, discipline, and industry in a timely manner” (Bruce K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 15-31*, 496-97).

Ants and the people like them don't make excuses – unlike sluggards and the people like them. According to Proverbs 20:4, “Sluggards do not plow in season; so at harvest time they look but find nothing.” Plowing is done in the winter, when the sluggard thinks it too cold to plow (cf., KJV). “Since no sowing could have been done without plowing, the farmer waited for the first autumn rains to soften the ground. The sluggard, however, lacks the industry to plow from winter on, the only time that matters” (Waltke, 130). His other excuses are more ludicrous, ridiculous even: “There's a lion outside; I'll be killed in the public square,” and its companion, “There's a lion in the road, a fierce lion roaming the streets!” (26:13). The sluggard is guilty of sloth, one of the seven deadly sins that goes beyond mere laziness to spiritual apathy and inactivity.

**Proverbs 6:6-11**

6 Go to the ant, you sluggard;  
consider its ways and be wise!

7 It has no commander,  
no overseer or ruler,

8 yet it stores its provisions in summer  
and gathers its food at harvest.

9 How long will you lie there, you sluggard?  
When will you get up from your sleep?

10 A little sleep, a little slumber,  
a little folding of the hands to rest –

11 and poverty will come on you like a thief  
and scarcity like an armed man.

**READ in other translations**

6 Lazy people should learn a lesson from the way ants live. 7 They have no leader, chief, or ruler, 8 but they store up their food during the summer, getting ready for winter. 9 How long is the lazy man going to lie around? When is he ever going to get up? 10 "I'll just take a short nap," he says; "I'll fold my hands and rest a while." 11 But while he sleeps, poverty will attack him like an armed robber. (GNT)

6-11 You lazy fool, look at an ant.

Watch it closely; let it teach you a thing or two.

Nobody has to tell it what to do.

All summer it stores up food;  
at harvest it stockpiles provisions.

So how long are you going to laze around doing nothing?

How long before you get out of bed?

A nap here, a nap there, a day off here, a day off there,  
sit back, take it easy – do you know what comes next?

Just this: You can look forward to a dirt-poor life,  
poverty your permanent houseguest! (MSG)

After reading the text, practice your Observation skills by noting the following:

- Circle "ant" in v. 6.
- Circle "sluggard" in v. 6.
- Box "yet" indicating *contrast* in v. 8.
- Highlight v. 10.
- Box "like" indicating *comparison* in v. 11.
- Underline "thief" and "armed man" in v. 11.

What one word would you use to describe the TONE of this passage? (i.e., stern, joyful, cautious, etc.)

What word or idea stands out to you in this passage?

What is one thing you do not understand in this passage?

Try to summarize the THEME of this passage in one word. If you were going to describe these verses, you might say, "This text is about \_\_\_\_\_."



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Answer the questions to help you apply the passage and prepare for discussion

1. *Paraphrase* the first line of verse 6.
2. The sluggard is mentioned 12 times outside of chapter 6. Read 26:13-16 and write a short description of him.
3. Explain the *contrast* introduced by “yet” (v. 8).
4. Sluggards cannot do in summer what ants can do (v. 8). *What’s* that?
5. Sluggards cannot do in summer what ants can do because sluggards refuse to plow in winter. *Why’s* that? (See 20:4 KJV.)
6. What’s the point of the two *rhetorical* questions in verse 9?
7. Some translations put quotation marks around verse 10. Does that change the meaning? Explain.
8. Explain the *comparison* in verse 11 if translated “like a *thief* . . . like an *armed man*.”
9. Explain the *comparison* in verse 11 if translated “like a *vagabond* . . . like a *beggar*.”
10. **Discussion:** What would you say lies at the heart of the sluggard’s problem? Talk about it

### Commentary On The Text

Once when serving as an academic advisor, I met weekly with a freshman student who had been placed on academic probation. His GPA following his first semester at university was less than 1.0. Students who do that poorly in their first semester are at high risk of dropping out unless they turn things around second semester – anyone can recover from one bad semester, but from two or three not so much. Fortunately, he did recover. In fact, each semester going forward his GPA improved. Just before he graduated three years later with better than a 3.0 average, he came to my office to reflect on his poor start and brag a little on his strong finish. I asked him what made the difference? To what did he attribute his academic turnaround? He answered, “It was easy once I learned you have to do what you have to do when you have to do it.” Ants would wholeheartedly agree! They “store their provisions in summer and gather their food at harvest” (Pr 6:8). Failing to turn in assignments is nuts. Studying for an exam *after* the fact is nonsense.

Proverbs 6:6-11 is about the *sluggard*. On these verses one commentator writes: “The poem consists of two equal parts (6:6-8, 9-11), both introduced by the vocative ‘you sluggard’ (vv. 6 and 9). The first admonishes him to go and consider the wisdom and diligence of the ant (cf. 1 K. 4:33 [5:13]), and the second condemns him for his folly and indolence. The sluggard is useless, a good-for-nothing, who stands far below the animal, which does not need such a reproach. This good-for-nothingness can be seen as a connection point for the following proverb unit, in which the marks of a good-for-nothing are named in the form of an enumeration. Nevertheless, Solomon, though satirizing the sluggard, does not leave him hopeless but offers constructive criticism to make him wise, assuming he has the ability to reform himself. His admonition offers the sluggard hope of salvation before it is too late. The sluggard is the explicit audience, but the implicit audiences are the son and the gullible who are addressed in the book (see 1:4-5). They are being warned against laziness through the sluggard’s chastisement (see 19:25)” (Bruce K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 1-15*, NICOT, 335-36).

The first part (vv. 6-8) revolves around the *contrast* introduced by “yet” in verse 8. After his

opening charge to the sluggard, “*You lazy fool, look at an ant. Watch it closely; let it teach you a thing or two*” (MSG), Solomon explains what makes the “ant” so “wise.” It has no “commander,” that is, no one to tell it what to do, to settle disputes among the ants regarding “the timing, distribution, and order of labor.” It has no “overseer,” that is, no one to keep track of all individual ants – namely, to delegate and supervise their work. It has no “ruler,” that is, no one to direct it and govern its work (see the discussion in Waltke, 337). The meanings of the terms “commander,” “overseer,” and “ruler” clearly overlap. And yet, the ant *does what it has to do when it has to do it*; the sluggard does not. Harvest time is in the late spring and early summer in Israel, which means that plowing time is in the winter – when it’s too cold in the sluggard’s opinion to plow. When others are braving the elements, he is either standing idly by watching them work or is inside snuggled up by a warm fire. And because he refuses to plow in winter, he’s unable to plant and so goes without at harvest time (20:4). Choices in life matter.

The second part (vv. 9-11) revolves around the sluggard’s answer to Solomon’s questions reflected in the following translation, which puts quotation marks around verse 10: “How long is the lazy man going to lie around? When is he ever going to get up? “I’ll just take a short nap,” he says; “I’ll fold my hands and rest a while” (GNT). One commentator observes: “Drowsiness is the natural ally of sloth, and the lazy man is without the alertness and foresight by which he might anticipate difficulties ahead and make provision against them. Because he is so sleepy-headed he has no defenses against the onset of poverty and privation; he eats and sleeps from day to day, and when he is not unconscious he lives in a no-man’s land between sleep and waking life, his intelligence drugged by somnolence” (William McKane, *Proverbs*, OTL, 324). No wonder, the sluggard is destined for “poverty” and “scarcity,” for little by little (v. 10) “he deceives himself by the smallness of his surrenders. So, by inches and minutes, his opportunity slips away” (Kidner, 43).

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## Word Studies/Notes

v. 6 *ant* “The ant is the harvester ant, common in Palestine; Agur draws attention to it in 30:25; and a fourteenth-century king of Shechem quotes a proverb on its pugnacity” (Derek Kidner, *Proverbs*, TOTC, 72)—there is a Canaanite saying that speaks of the ant biting the hand of anyone who smites it. The harvester ant stores grain in its nest and it therefore used as an illustration of industry.

v. 6 *sluggard* “The sluggard in Proverbs is a figure of tragi-comedy, with his sheer animal laziness (he is more than anchored to his bed: he is *hinged* to it, 26:14), his preposterous excuses (‘there is a lion outside!’ 26:13; 22:13) and his final helplessness. 1. *He will not begin things* . . . 2. *He will not finish things* . . . 3. *He will not face things* . . . 4. Consequently he is *restless* (13:4; 21:25, 26) with unsatisfied desire; *helpless* in face of the tangle of his affairs, which are like a ‘hedge of thorns’ (15:19); and *useless*—expensively (18:9) and exasperatingly (10:26)—to any who employ him” (Kidner, 42-43).

v. 8 *yet* This word indicates *contrast*. “Rather than having external leaders who both organize the work with regard to its nature and its timing and see it through to completion, the ant possesses a God-given wisdom to work and, just as significantly, to order it wisely. By admonishing the sluggard to learn from this example, the author hopes that he will internalize its wisdom” (Bruce K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 1-15*, NICOT, 337).

v. 10 *A little sleep* . . . Repeated in 24:33-34. Some translations place quotation marks around verse 10 (cf., GNT; Roland E. Murphy, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 22, *Proverbs*, 35). “The quotation marks in the above translation of v 10 suggest that it might be mimicking the words of the sluggard who, in reply to the taunt on v 9, asks for just a little more sleep (cf. 26:14). V 10 could also be merely the continuation of v 9, as the speaker ridicules the laziness. The ‘folding of the arms’ is a preparation for sleep; cf. Eccl 4:8. In any case, the lazybones cannot escape the formidable threat of poverty (even if the metaphors in v 11 are not certain; see Notes 11.a and 11.b)” (Murphy, 38).

v. 11 *thief, armed man* Cf., “robber, bandit” (HCSB); “vagabond, armed man” (NASB); “vagrant, armed man” (Waltke, 326-27); “robber, armed man” (NET). The point of the *comparison* is debated. “Instead of poverty coming ‘like a bandit’

and an ‘armed man,’ it is better to translate v. 11 to say that poverty will come like a ‘vagabond’ and a ‘beggar.’ The point is not that it will attack suddenly, like armed robbers in ambush. Rather, poverty and indebtedness cling to the slothful like incorrigible beggars who always linger about the house and always want more. Laziness will siphon off resources until the indolent have nothing left” (Duane A. Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, NAC, 96-97). “The simile like a vagrant (or ‘a tramp,’ ‘a vagabond’) personifies poverty as a shiftless, disreputable wanderer who goes about with no visible means of support but, like a parasite, ‘panhandles’ whatever he can. Also, it connotes unpredictable visits and the danger of theft, giving the sluggard’s poverty sinister connotations that condemn his lifestyle . . . The personification of poverty now escalates to like an armed man. He, too, comes unexpectedly to take a person’s substance, but by force, not merely by stealth. To the notions of poverty as disreputable, homeless, and feeding off others, the new simile connotes a surprise attack against which one cannot defend oneself. Moreover, the image connotes that the plunderer defends the life and substance he carried off by theft and force so that the victim can never retrieve it. The easiest victim for a vagabond or a bandit is the sleeping sluggard, who lacks both the vigilance and the diligence to retain his wealth” (Waltke, 340-41).

### Other Texts to Consider

#### Proverbs 24:30-31

“I went past the field of a sluggard,  
past the vineyard of someone who has no sense;  
thorns had come up everywhere,  
the ground was covered with weeds,  
and the stone wall was in ruins.”

#### Proverbs 26:14-16

“As a door turns on its hinges,  
so a sluggard turns on his bed.  
A sluggard buries his hand in the dish;  
he is too lazy to bring it back to his mouth.  
A sluggard is wiser in his own eyes  
than seven people who answer discreetly.”

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## APPLY THE TEXT

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### CENTRAL MESSAGE OF THE TEXT

Follow the ant's example of industry and foresight – *doing what you have to do when you have to do it* – otherwise poverty and scarcity will dog your steps .

### CENTRAL MESSAGE FOR YOUR LIFE

(Rewrite the Central Message above to personally apply to your own life)



### 3 LIVING QUESTIONS

The “Living Questions” are simple questions we may ask of any text in order to apply the Bible to our life. Answer the questions below as personally as you can.

1. What does this passage teach me about God?

2. What does this passage teach me about myself?

3. What does this passage lead me to do?



## FAMILY TALK

Let's be real. Kids are by nature lazy. That being said, nothing gets me more fired up than my kids being lazy. How many of you have ever experienced that feeling of being the only one doing everything around the house? I went through a period a few years ago when the kids would come home from school and head straight to their room, toys, or TV and I would run around like a chicken with my head cut off preparing dinner and getting all the chores done. Inevitably, one of the little darlings would ask why dinner was taking so long. My slow simmer would become a rolling boil as I threw out in perfect passive-aggressive nature, "Well, if *someone* would help around here..." One day I woke up and assigned each child 15 minutes of chores. Why didn't I do this earlier? Perhaps it was laziness on my part. Sometimes it's easier to do things yourself than spend time training the kids. I can dust the house in 5 minutes or spend 45 minutes training the 6-year-old. As we approach a lesson in laziness this week I realize that not only is it a horrible personality trait, but laziness is a sin. I don't often think of laziness being a sin and am personally convicted that not only have I done a disservice to my kids, I have dishonored God in their training. Join me in praying this week to honor God in every aspect of our parenting.

### What Does The Bible Say?

Read Pr 6:6-11; Mt 25:14-30.

1. What do you learn about the ant's work ethic?
2. What do you learn about a lazy person's work ethic?
3. According to v. 11, what happens to lazy people?

### What Do You Think?

Is laziness just about physically working hard? Can we be spiritually lazy?

### What Do You Do?

Rather than waiting for mom and dad to tell you to do your chores or clean up after yourself this week, take the initiative to do so without being told.

### CORE COMPETENCY: Life Purpose

I believe God wants me to glorify Him in all I say and do.

### MEMORY VERSE: Colossians 3:23

*Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord not for men.*

## KidPIXCOUPON

Earn 1 KidPIX Token by completing the CENTRALKids Bible Study on this page and another token by memorizing and reciting the memory verse for this week.

Questions: [kids@wearecentral.org](mailto:kids@wearecentral.org)

- \_\_\_\_\_ I completed my Bible Study
- \_\_\_\_\_ I memorized this week's verse
- \_\_\_\_\_ I brought my Bible to church
- \_\_\_\_\_ I brought a friend



CHILD'S NAME \_\_\_\_\_

GRADE \_\_\_\_\_

PARENT SIGNATURE \_\_\_\_\_

# OUR CORE COMPETENCIES

## CENTRAL BELIEFS

**Authority of the Bible** (2 Timothy 3:16-17)  
*I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.*

**Church** (Ephesians 4:15-16)

*I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.*

**Eternity** (John 14:1-4)

*I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.*

**The Holy Spirit** (Romans 8:9)

*I believe the Holy Spirit convicts, calls, converts and changes me as a child of God.*

**Humanity** (John 3:16)

*I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.*

**Identity in Christ** (John 1:12)

*I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.*

**Jesus Christ** (Hebrews 1:1-4)

*I believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God who became man, died for sinners and rose from the dead.*

**Life Purpose** (Acts 20:24)

*I believe I am a steward of God's resources and have been redeemed to participate in His Kingdom purposes for His glory.*

**Personal God** (Psalm 121:1-2)

*I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.*

**Salvation by Grace** (Ephesians 2:8-9)

*I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.*



## CENTRAL VIRTUES

**Love** (1 John 4:10-12)

*I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.*

**Joy** (John 15:11)

*I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.*

**Peace** (Philippians 4:6-7)

*I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself and others.*

**Patience** (Proverbs 14:29)

*I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.*

**Kindness/Goodness** (1 Thessalonians 5:15)

*I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others*

**Faithfulness** (Proverbs 3:3-4)

*I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.*

**Gentleness** (Philippians 4:5)

*I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.*

**Self-Control** (Titus 2:11-13)

*I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.*

**Grace** (Colossians 3:13)

*I demonstrate forgiveness, mercy and generosity to others, even when they have offended me.*

**Hope** (1 Peter 1:3-5)

*I have a growing anticipation of God's promises and my secure eternity with Him.*

**Humility** (Philippians 2:3-4)

*I choose to esteem others above myself.*



## CENTRAL PRACTICES

**Bible Study** (Hebrews 4:12)

*I study the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.*

**Biblical Community** (Acts 2:44-47)

*I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.*

**Compassion** (Psalm 82:3-4)

*I seek to serve the last, the least and the lost in my community.*

**Disciple-Making** (2 Timothy 2:2)

*I multiply godly beliefs, virtues and practices in others to encourage their spiritual growth in Christ.*

**Evangelism** (Acts 1:8)

*I share Jesus with others through personal proclamation and demonstration of the gospel.*

**Generosity** (2 Corinthians 9:6-11)

*I gladly give my resources to fulfill God's purposes.*

**Prayer** (Psalm 66:16-20)

*I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.*

**Single-Mindedness** (Matthew 6:33)

*I focus on God and His priorities for my life.*

**Spiritual Gifts** (Romans 12:4-6)

*I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.*

**Worship** (Psalm 95:1-7)

*I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.*

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