

The title of this series is, “Put Off Laziness, and Put on Diligence.”

We’ve talked about putting off and putting on before, so I don’t want to spend much time on it, but it’s worth repeating b/c:

1. It’s such an important part of the Christian life
2. It’s essential for understanding this series.

The gist is that many people fail to repent, b/c:

- They put off w/o putting on.
- They stop something, w/o starting something else.

Eph 4 and **Col 3** are the two places teaching this. Briefly turn to **Eph 4**...

Let’s say some of us struggle w/ lying. Look at **verse 25** to see how to repent of this sin...

- **25 Therefore, putting away lying** – so here’s what you repent of:
 - Here’s what you stop...
 - Here’s what you put off...
- Then it says **Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor.** So here’s the fruit:
 - Here’s what you start...
 - Here’s what you put on...

So if you have a problem w/ lying, it’s not enough to simply stop lying: you have to make a conscious effort to start telling the truth. This probably means concentrating on your speech, and making sure what you say is accurate and correct.

Next, let’s say you struggle w/ stealing. Look at **verse 28**...

- **Let him who stole steal no longer** – so this is what you repent of. This is what you stop...put off...or sever.
- Then it says **but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need.** This is the fruit that’s produced:
 - This is what you start...
 - This is what you put on...

Let’s say you have a problem w/ the way you talk. Look at **verse 29**...

- **Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth** – this is what you repent of, or stop, put off, or sever.
- Then it says **but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.** This is the fruit that has to be produced. This is what’s started or put on. This is what replaces the corrupt speech. It’s not enough to simply stop saying unwholesome things. You have to consciously speak words that edify and build up.

Finally skip to **verse 31** where Paul sums it up:

- **Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice** – repent of all this:
 - Stop all this...

- Put off all this...
- Sever all this...
- **32 And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.** This is what we start, put on, and replace the sins of verse 31 with. If someone has genuinely repented of the sins in **verse 31**, then they'll produce the fruit of **verse 32**.

You probably noticed the verses are presented as opposites or opposing pairs:

- Whatever you repent of, you generally try to produce the opposite of that as fruit.
- If there's a sin in your life that's not covered by the verses we discussed, then think about the opposite of that sin. More than likely that's the fruit you need to produce if you want to genuinely repent of that sin.

Although the words "putting off" and "putting on" are not used in Proverbs, the book of Proverbs repeatedly demonstrates the principle through the corresponding pairs it presents:

- Wisdom versus foolishness
- Patience versus hastiness
- Pride versus humility
- Truth versus deceit
- Obedience versus disobedience
- Righteous versus unrighteous

One other contrast is laziness versus diligence, which is what I want to focus on for this series.

When we think of the "worst" sins, lying, adultery, and murder, come to mind, but people don't often think of laziness. Some people might not even think laziness is a sin. This is unfortunate because laziness is a sin the Bible discusses:

1. Discusses frequently
2. Describes having serious consequences

"Sluggard" and "slothful" are synonyms for lazy, and these words occur seventeen times in Proverbs with nothing good said about these people. Ronald Sailer and David Wyrzten wrote, "*Laziness could run a competitive race for the most underrated sin. Quietly it anesthetizes its victim into a lifeless stupor that ends in hunger, bondage, and death.*"ⁱ Laziness is a sin that has no place in the character of a Christian.

Laziness is like pride, dishonesty, unforgiveness, and anxiety, in that it's a sin all of us can identify with to some extent. It might be a more difficult struggle for some than others, but nobody can say that they're never tempted to be lazy.

One of the difficulties with laziness is that, like gluttony, it's a sin that can't be handled like others. For example, the Bible says gluttony is a sin, but nobody can deal with that sin by avoiding eating. Laziness is a sin, but nobody can deal w/ it by working all the time, since we need rest and the Bible commands it. There are times God wants us to relax, so we can be recharged and refreshed.

Rest requires balance and wisdom, which begs the question: how do we know when we've rested and relaxed so much that we've become lazy?

Typically we recognize when there's a responsibility we should be fulfilling. The Holy Spirit convicts us that we need to get up and get going. God knows how much we can bear, and He won't give us tasks that we can't handle.

We sin when we ignore that prompting and remain idle and indifferent to what the Lord would have us do. This is when we need the exhortations from the Word that remind us of the seriousness of laziness.

We can commit these verses to memory and use them as a sword against laziness. The next time we're tempted to remain on the couch when there's something better to do or sleep in later than we should, these verses can be a weapon against laziness. There are so many verses dealing with laziness it would take up too much room to cover all of them. We'll look at the three main passages in Proverbs, and I'll integrate many of the other verses.

Pro 6:6-11...

**Pro 6:6–7 Go to the ant, you sluggard!
Consider her ways and be wise,
7 Which, having no captain, Overseer or ruler,**

The book of Proverbs is written as a wise father speaking to his son (Proverbs 1:8). He tells his son he can learn a considerable amount from the ant's example. It's a humble creature that you never see sitting around. It works hard, even though it doesn't have anyone watching over it. If we learn from the ant's example we should work hard without having to have someone standing over our shoulder. If you're a parent, you know what a blessing it is when your children work without you having to constantly tell them what to do.

As negatively as Scripture speaks of laziness, it speaks equally positively of work. Jesus worked as a carpenter before He began His public ministry (Mark 6:3a). Paul worked as a tentmaker while conducting his ministry (Acts 18:1-3). The goodness of work is shown through its institution prior to the fall. After God created Adam, **Genesis 2:15** says, **“Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it.”**

God gave Adam work to do in the garden before sin was introduced. This is important to notice, because it demonstrates that work is not a part of the curse. **Genesis 1:31** says, **“Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed *it was very good*. So the evening and the morning were the sixth day.”** Work came about on the sixth day, which means it is also “very good.”

The Old and New Testaments both teach the importance of working hard:

- **Ecc 9:10 Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for *there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going.***

- **Col 3:23 And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ.**

Why do we work as though we're working for Christ? Because we are! Our work ethic is one of the greatest testimonies of our faith.

Just as rest requires balance, so too does work. We can rest too much, and work too much. When we overwork there can be negative consequences. We might suffer mentally, emotionally, or physically. Overworking takes a toll on relationships with friends and loved ones. For some people, working too much interferes with their church involvement. I've met some men who seem relieved to tell me their schedules don't allow them to be involved in church. I have to wonder how much effort they put forth to see their schedules changed, even if that effort is simply praying God would give them Sundays off?

**Pro 6:8 Provides her supplies in the summer,
And gathers her food in the harvest.**

Even though the ant has no obvious overseer continually driving it in its labors, it still prepares for the future. They busy themselves storing food during summer against the winter that lies ahead. **Proverbs 30:25 says "ants are a people not strong, yet they prepare their food in the summer."**

They're good examples of industry, diligence, and planning. They serve as a rebuke to lazy people who lack self-control, and think only about the moment. **Proverbs 20:4 says, "The lazy man will not plow because of winter; he will beg during harvest and have nothing." (Proverbs 20:4; see also Proverbs 19:15).**

See the contrast? Lazy people stand in contrast to ants:

- Ants prepare during summer for the harvest
- Lazy people don't work and have nothing for the harvest.

Lazy people won't work, but they want to survive, so how do they sustain their lives? The verse says "he will beg." This is part of why laziness is presented so negatively in Scripture. We tend to think laziness is a sin that affects only the sinner, but the sin affects others. When lazy people choose not to work, inevitably they're also choosing to consume what others produce...without producing anything themselves.

Pro 6:9 How long will you slumber, O sluggard? When will you rise from your sleep?

Asking **how long** implies this has been going on too long. These words are used in Scripture to imply that something bad is going to happen:

So Moses and Aaron came in to Pharaoh and said to him, “Thus says the LORD God of the Hebrews: ‘How long will you refuse to humble yourself before Me? Let My people go, that they may serve Me. (Exodus 10:3; see also Proverbs 1:22 and Psalm 74:10).

These rhetorical questions are aimed at both stirring the sluggard to get to work, and ridiculing his preference to stay in bed. Newton’s first law of motion states that an object in motion tends to remain in motion, and an object at rest tends to remain at rest. This law can apply to people too! Some people are more diligent, and they tend to stay in motion. Other people are lazier, and they tend to stay at rest.

Pro 6:10 A little sleep, a little slumber, A little folding of the hands to sleep—

The three-fold repetition shows the lazy person prefers just “a little” more sleep rather than work. He doesn’t refuse to work. He simply won’t get started. All he knows is his tempting drowsiness. The poet Robert Frost said, “The world is full of willing people, some willing to work, the rest willing to let them.”

Sleep is necessary for health but oversleeping is associated with laziness. One of the marks of sluggards is they love to sleep and have lost all interest in work. They dream of the things they want to enjoy, but they won’t work to earn them. Again the selfishness of lazy people is revealed. They are sleeping while others are working.

But the dreams of lazy people will become nightmares at some point. Look at **verse 11**...

**Pro 6:11 So shall your poverty come on you like a prowler,
And your need like an armed man.**

Poverty comes to lazy people. This is the first mention of a truth that is communicated throughout the book:

- **Proverbs 20:13a—Do not love sleep, lest you come to poverty**
- **Proverbs 24:34a—Poverty will come upon [the sluggard]**
- **Proverbs 28:19b—He who follows frivolity will have poverty enough**

Lazy people deceive themselves. Since they don’t expect the disaster that comes upon them, they aren’t prepared. Two illustrations picture the suddenness and unexpectedness:

1. First, a **prowler** is literally a traveler, which means he’s a vagabond or drifter who silently creeps in and steals. Poverty comes upon the lazy like thieves or robbers surprise people.
2. Second, the **armed man** is literally a bandit or a man with a shield. He forcibly imposes his need. The lazy person is overpowered and left in need.

Talk without labor also leads to poverty: **“In all labor there is profit, but idle chatter leads only to poverty” (Proverbs 14:23).** Lazy people like to talk, but without work they’re like the second son in Jesus’ parable:

Matthew 21:28 “But what do you think? A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, ‘Son, go, work today in my vineyard.’ **29** He answered and said, ‘I will not,’ but afterward he regretted it and went. **30** Then he came to the second and said likewise. And he answered and said, ‘I go, sir,’ but he did not go.

Talk is cheap. It doesn't matter what we say. It matters what we do. The second son was a lazy talker, but the first son was a convicted worker.

We're going to look at Pro 26 second, and Pro 24 third. I'll explain why later...

Pro 26:13-16

The following Proverbs are a description of lazy people, and they have a “can you top this” quality that provides comic relief. Lazy people are the object of jokes in Scripture. Although the verses are humorous at points, they are also very unflattering. Any reasonable people would want to ensure these verses don't apply to them.

Pro 26:13 The lazy man says, “There is a lion in the road!
A fierce lion *is* in the streets!”

When one of my children was young and we asked her to do simple things, such as pick up her clothes or clean up a mess, she would say, “I'm too shy.” This excuse has stuck around our house as a joke, in that Katie and I say this to the kids when we don't want to do something they ask us to do.

Billy Sunday said an excuse is, “the skin of a reason stuffed with a lie.” People who are good at making excuses are rarely good at much else, and lazy people are very good at making excuses. Proverbs 15:19 says, “The way of the lazy man is like a hedge of thorns, but the way of the upright is a highway.” Lazy people always find reasons not to work, but for the righteous the way to work is an open highway.

The weather is too cold so they “will not plow because of winter” (Proverbs 20:4a). Any flimsy reason is enough to prevent them from leaving the house to go to work. They'll make excuses, even if they're as absurd as the one above.

When we give in to the temptation to be lazy, maybe we can admit that the excuses we make are also weak.

Pro 26:14 As a door turns on its hinges,
So *does* the lazy man on his bed.

Once again Proverbs connects laziness with oversleeping. Lazy people are attached to their beds like doors are attached to hinges. Their only activity is turning in bed, as a door's only activity is turning on its hinges. Lazy people are no more likely to get out of bed and go to work than doors are to get off their hinges. Lots of motion, but no work is accomplished.

**Pro 26:15 The lazy *man* buries his hand in the bowl;
It wearies him to bring it back to his mouth.**

The lazy person's hand is worn out from feeding himself, because even that is too much work for him. He summons the strength to put his hand in the bowl, but he's too tired to bring it back to his mouth. Could anyone be lazier than this? I don't see how.

We say lazy people won't even lift a hand to help, but this proverb brings it to another level in that he won't even lift a hand to feed himself. He may not have to worry about reaching for food for long though, because the longer he lives so lazily, the less chance he'll have to find something to eat.

This is also recorded in **Proverbs 19:24**. Why repeat verses? God does not waste words in Scripture. When we see the same thing more than once, it is for a reason. He does not use highlighting, italics, underlining, or bold for emphasis, but He does repeat Himself to ensure we don't miss something. What are we supposed to avoid missing from this verse?

The greatest threat to lazy people, even greater than poverty, is starvation. God draws attention to this, and puts the responsibility squarely on their shoulders! The humor is making a legitimate point: lazy people starve and it's completely their fault.

Our nation is so opulent that even poor people rarely go without food; however, in the Old Testament, starvation was a legitimate threat. Like the lazy person of **Proverbs 19:24** and **26:15**, if people chose not to work, they were choosing not to feed themselves.

Start here for part II...

We give people handouts without them putting forth much more effort than standing in line or walking to a mailbox to collect a check. The welfare system in the Mosaic Law was considerably different than ours:

“When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not wholly reap the corners of your field when you reap, nor shall you gather any gleaning from your harvest. You shall leave them for the poor and for the stranger: I *am* the LORD your God.” (Leviticus 23:22; see also Leviticus 19:9 and Deuteronomy 24:19).

God's approach is better for two reasons:

1. First, it provided for the poor by encouraging generosity, versus the redistribution of wealth our nation promotes by taking from those with more to give to those with less.
2. Second, it involved the poor in the process. They could eat, but they had to work.

Ruth shows the beauty of this approach.

Ruth 2:2 records: **“And Ruth the Moabitess said to Naomi, ‘Let me go to the fields and pick up the leftover grain behind anyone in whose eyes I find favor.’”**

Ruth could have said, “I’m with my mother-in-law, and we’re both childless widows. We’re in a terrible situation, so everyone should feel sorry for us and give us handouts.” Instead, she went to the field, and according to **Ruth 2:17**, she gathered an ephah of barley (about 26 quarts). Ruth’s example is a strong rebuke to lazy people.

**Pro 26:16 The lazy man is wiser in his own eyes
Than seven men who can answer sensibly.**

Lazy people have a “know-it-all-attitude.” They’re smug and unteachable. They think they’re clever, probably because of the different ways they find to avoid work.

They live in fantasy worlds that prevent them from helping the real world. They’re deceived in two ways:

1. First, they consider themselves wiser than the perfect number of wise men. They’re hopeless, because as **Proverbs 26:12** says, “**There is more hope for a fool than for a man wise in his own eyes.**”
2. Second, they believe their own excuses. The lazy person is so deluded he considers himself wiser than them.

For our third passage on laziness let’s look at **Pro 24**...

Pro 24:30-34

**Pro 24:30 I went by the field of the lazy man,
And by the vineyard of the man devoid of understanding;
Proverbs 24:31 And there it was, all overgrown with thorns;
Its surface was covered with nettles;
Its stone wall was broken down.**

The father tells his son about a field owned by a lazy person who lacks sense (**devoid of understanding**). The property’s neglect is evident by the shambles and overgrown weeds. The property’s dilapidated state leaves him without gain. He’s responsible for the field’s ruin, which pictures the way lazy people ruin whatever they come into contact with: **Proverbs 18:9** says, “**He who is slothful in his work is a brother to him who is a great destroyer.**” What exactly do they waste (destroy) besides fields they own? They waste the talents God’s given them, and the time of the people who invest in them.

They do such a bad job when “working” that whatever they do will have to be thrown out or done over. **Proverbs 10:26** says, “**As vinegar to the teeth and smoke to the eyes, so is the lazy man to those who send him.**” Vinegar in our mouths and smoke in our eyes isn’t deadly, but it is annoying, as are lazy people who won’t get the job done. They’re more work than help.

**Proverbs 24:32 When I saw it, I considered it well;
I looked on it and received instruction:**

The words “saw...considered...looked” reveal the wise father studied the field like he earlier instructed his son to study the ant. Wise people learn by observation, and just as we can learn from good examples (**the ant**), we can also learn from bad examples (**the lazy man**).

**Proverbs 24:33 A little sleep, a little slumber,
A little folding of the hands to rest;
34 So shall your poverty come like a prowler,
And your need like an armed man.**

This is repeated from **Proverbs 6:10–11**. God wants to make sure we don’t miss the two main points of these verses:

1. There’s a strong associate between sleep and laziness
2. Sudden, unexpected disaster awaits the lazy

The field of verses 30 and 31 is also a picture of the lazy person’s life: **“The way of the lazy man is like a hedge of thorns” (Proverbs 15:19a)**. Thorns appear in a lazy person’s life as they appear in the field. In both cases he’s too lazy to remove them.

A field as a metaphor for a person’s life is a common in Scripture. Jesus told the Parable of the Sower with the different soils (fields) representing different people (**Matt 13:1-9, 18-23**). Regarding the ways God used Paul and Apollos in people’s lives, Paul said, “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. For we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field” (**1 Corinthians 3:9**). When God discussed the work His Word does in people’s lives, He said:

**“For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven,
And do not return there,
But water the earth,
And make it bring forth and bud,
That it may give seed to the sower
And bread to the eater,
11 So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth” (Isaiah 55:10–11a).**

The word is represented by the rain and snow, and the ground (field) that produces represents people’s lives. We’re going to look at a passage in Hebrews 6 for two reasons:

1. It reveals the laziness we might be most guilty of, which is spiritual instead of physical.
2. It ties together these verses from **Isaiah 55** and the fool’s field of **Proverbs 24:30–34**.

Hebrews 6:7 For the earth which drinks in the rain that often comes upon it, and bears herbs useful for those by whom it is cultivated, receives blessing from God. 8 but if it bears thorns and briers, it is rejected and near to being cursed, whose end is to be burned.

The rain of **Hebrews 6:7** that brings produce from the ground parallels the rain of **Isaiah 55:7** that brings produce from the ground. The field in **Hebrews 6:8** that produces thorns and briers and is rejected and burned parallels the fool’s field (and life) in **Proverbs 24:30–34**. Just as fields are revealed by what they produce, so are we revealed by what we produce.

God Wants Us to Work

We know the Gospel is salvation **“by grace through faith, and that not of [ourselves]; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast”** (Ephesians 2:8–9), but we’re wrong if we think God doesn’t want us working. We aren’t saved by works, but they’re one of the clearest evidences of being saved. Believers don’t bear the same amount of fruit. In the Parable of the Sower Jesus taught **“some [produce] a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty”** (Matthew 13:23). But every believer produces the same kind of fruit: **“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law”** (Galatians 5:22–23).

Right after the most well-known verses about salvation being by grace through faith apart from works, **Ephesians 2:10** says, **“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”** One reason laziness is such a serious sin is it hinders us from doing the **good works** God wants us to do.

The author of Hebrews spoke strongly to his readers about being **rejected and cursed**. Then he follows that up with an encouragement about their works...

Hebrews 6:9 But, beloved, we are confident of better things concerning you, yes, things that accompany salvation, though we speak in this manner. **10** For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister.

The author is more optimistic about them—he expects **better things** from them—than those **whose end is to be burned**. They have produced and the author expected them to continue producing. The fruit he mentioned is their **work and love for the saints**, and this serves as evidence of, or **[accompanies their] salvation**. The author reminded them that God would remember and reward their works, and this can be one of our greatest motivations for us to be faithful.

Even though the author of Hebrews expected them to continue working, he didn’t want them resting on their previous labor. He wanted them pressing on to the very end...

Heb 6:11 And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, that you do not become lazy, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

These verses reveal what we’re supposed to put off (**do not become lazy**) and put on (**diligence**). Since the author of Hebrews said to **imitate those [of] faith**, he’s not speaking physically. He’s speaking spiritually. He’s not warning about physical laziness. He’s warning against spiritual laziness. Many of these Hebrews probably worked very hard physically, but do they put forth that same amount of effort spiritually into their relationships with the Lord?

This is instructive for us, because we've been discussing laziness and perhaps we think only in physical terms. We might not sleep in all day or stand on street corners asking for money, but are there ways we're spiritually lazy?

ⁱ Ronald Sailer and David Wyrzten, *The Practice of Wisdom*, Chicago: Moody, 1992, p. 82.