

What Nobody Tells You

Alright, good to see you guys. If you have your bibles, go ahead and turn with me to Proverbs 24. We're going to get there in a bit. The plan today is to wrap up this series we've been called *Adulting*. We've been looking at different aspects of being an adult in today's world and trying to understand how to think about them well through the lenses of the bible. We've talked about work, decision-making, and finances. Those tend to be some of the central overwhelming pieces of being an adult. And largely, we've been looking at those things through the opening pages of the book of Genesis.

Today, I want to switch it up a little and look at some selected passages from the book of Proverbs. And part of the reason for that is that **today, instead of looking at one particular part of adulting, I want us to look at one particular issue that infiltrates all of adulting.** And really something that is at work behind the scenes in our adult lives. And what we're discussing today is something that I think has the potential to make or break our entire adulting experience. How you think about this one thing, I would argue, impacts your ability to function as an adult in almost every arena of your life. The crazy thing is, I don't think I would've even had language to describe what it is until I heard someone talk about it fairly recently. So in a second we're gonna look at Proverbs 24, but first, a quick thought experiment. I want you to picture with me three types of people:

- First, imagine with me the 30-35 year old unmarried man who lives in his parents' basement. Now, he doesn't live there because he loves them or cares about them or wants to take care of them, or because he hit a rough patch in life—none of that. He lives there because rent is free there. And because turns out, when you don't have a job, and refuse to even try to get a job, free is about the most expensive price of rent you can afford. Free is your ceiling. So he lives in his parents' basement and spends the bulk of his time playing video games, and/or watching Netflix off of his parents' account, and/or watching superhero movies (probably pirated from the internet, because again—free is the ceiling), and maybe has a group of guys over periodically to shotgun some Natty Lights or something—because Natty Light is as close as you can get to free in beer world. Got the picture in your head? Okay, now let's shift to...
- Now we're talking about a married man in his late 30s, early 40s. He's got a few kids, a great wife, he works a good job downtown somewhere in one of the tall fancier-looking buildings. Wears a suit to work, works 40-50 hour weeks, and then comes home each day, throws his briefcase and keys on the table, and goes to sit in front of the TV while he eats dinner. He doesn't want to be bothered to give his kids a bath, or get them ready for bed, or help them with their homework—he just wants them to keep it down because he has a headache or needs to hear Sportscenter on TV. When his wife asks him to help with something or do something around the house, his default response is “do you mind if I get to it tomorrow? I'm just *so exhausted* from work honey.” Got that picture in your head? Okay one more.
- This time, we're talking about a girl in her mid-to-late 20s. She's recently graduated college, unmarried, no romantic relationships (or at least not serious ones), and she's getting ready to go on a two-ish year “travel the world” trip. She's gonna see all the places she's never seen before, live it up, probably bring along a copy of *Eat, Pray, Love*—you know, for research. She's just going to enjoy “not being tied down” in her words. She has no commitments, no obligations, no demands, no entanglements, and in her mind that is how everyone should be living their life anyway. Work and marriage and structure? That's what her 30s are for. For now, she's just gonna enjoy her “freedom.” Know anybody like that? I thought you might.

Okay, now those all seem like pretty different people on the surface, right? Those are three very different portraits of life embodied by three very different people. But here's what I want us to see before we're done today: **there is the same force at work behind all three of these people.** They all subscribe to the same life philosophy, just expressed in different ways. **And what I want to do today is describe what that philosophy is, and examine to see if it might be at work in a lot of us too.**

First off, let's talk about what that philosophy is. And this is gonna feel a bit random, but according to the bible, what's at play behind all of those people's decisions is what's called *sloth*. That's right, *sloth*. Now, I realize that's probably not a word you used over coffee this morning, but I think it's a word we should learn. Now, when I say "sloth," I need you to know that I'm *not* talking about *[this]*. Or *[this]*. **Sloth, in the bible, is a mindset, an attitude, an outlook on life.** And it's one that I think is very connected to what it means to be an adult.

For a definition of sloth let's go to a guy named RJ Snell. He wrote a book called *Acedia and its Discontents: Metaphysical Boredom in an Empire of Desire*. And it's actually a really good book despite how badly the title makes you never ever want to read it. But in it he gives a number of descriptions of sloth, and I wanted to steal one of them for our purposes today to use as a definition. Here's how he describes or defines sloth (I'll read it and then translate it into English a little):

Sloth rejects the burden of order, choosing instead the breezy lightness of freedom. Loving self more than relation, and autonomy more than the good, in sloth one rejects the weight and density of living in an ordered creation.

Okay, here's what I think he means by that: **Sloth is an aversion to anything or anyone that makes demands of us.** Sloth says "if something requires my time, attention, responsibility, or commitment—and it doesn't immediately benefit me—I'd rather not." "If it feels anything like an obligation or demand of me, my default response is 'no'." And, **even if we participate in things that are demanding, we despise every second of it.** Every time we have to wake up early for our job, we hate our job a little more. Every time we have to serve someone or somewhere that we don't want to, we get a little more grumpy and bothered about it. That's sloth: an aversion to anything or anyone that makes demands of me.

Now as a fair warning, when you start to grasp what sloth *is*, you may start to see it *all over* your life:

- So, sloth is when you come home after a long day at work or at school, and you think "you know, it'd be really good for me to check in with my spouse and ask them how their day was, see how they're doing. But it sure is easier to just watch this Netflix show."
- Sloth is when it's 4:35, and you get off work at 5:00, and you're thinking "you know, I really should finish that one report or respond to that one email, but man, it sure is easier to just scroll through Facebook for the next twenty minutes and enjoy judging all the people I went to high school with."
- Sloth is when someone in your LifeGroup texts everybody saying they could use some help with something this weekend and you think to yourself, "yeah, I'm just gonna pretend I didn't see that text and wait to see if other people respond so I don't have to..."
- It's why some of us refuse to make a budget and/or stick to a budget, because having a budget feels like an obligation, it feels like it's making demands of us.
- It's why many of us struggle to spend regular time in the Scriptures, because yielding that block of time every day feels like obligation to us.

- It's often why many people don't like committing to one church, belonging to any one community and contributing to that one group of people. Belonging to one place feels too much like obligation.
- Culturally, this is why some people don't like to commit to marriage or a relationship with any one person. That to us feels like an obligation, it feels like it's going to demand something of us.
- Culturally, it's one reason divorces are so common. Remaining married feels like an obligation.
- Culturally, it's often why people are waiting to have kids until later and later in life. Because kids feel like (and *are*) and obligation. They necessarily demand something of us.

Now hear me, I'm not saying any of those things are *only* caused by sloth. But I do think slothfulness is behind all these things *far more often* than we realize.

So I see sloth in myself often. Ana usually works late at the salon at least one night a week, which means I'm at home those nights with our two-year old, Whit. Now Whit's bedtime is generally around 7:00, sometimes a good bit later if we are out with friends or hanging out with our LifeGroup. We're generally not really strict about his 7:00 bedtime. But on the nights when Ana works late and I'm responsible for putting him down? You better believe I'm putting that dude down at 6:58 on the dot. And you know why I do that? Because once he's down, I've got a couple hours where I have *no demands on me*. I can relax, I can binge-watch Bloodline on Netflix, watch cat videos on YouTube—you know, all the normal things that a 31 year old man does. Now, hear me parents: I'm not saying it's wrong for you to look forward to your kid-free time at the end of a long day. Not at all. But I am saying that often, *for me*, it's not just that I'm tired and want to rest. It's more that having a kid feels like a burden and I just want to have no responsibility on my life for a bit. And that's sloth. **I'm motivated to put my kid down way early just so I can have no demands or obligations on me for a bit. Sloth I think affects more of day-to-day life than we realize.**

Okay, now that we've defined sloth, let me give you a few examples of how the book of Proverbs describes it. Here's Proverbs 24:30-31:

I passed by the field of a sluggard [just the word Proverbs uses to describe a person characterized by sloth], by the vineyard of a man lacking sense, and behold, it was all overgrown with thorns; the ground was covered with nettles, and its stone wall was broken down.

So the picture here is that **a slothful person's life is surrounded by chaos and disarray**. Everything they're involved in is overgrown, untended to. So maybe that's their physical circumstances—maybe their house or their yard looks like what Proverbs just described, or maybe it's more intangible things: their bank account is always overdrawn, their health is constantly in jeopardy because they refuse to eat or exercise well. Maybe it's in regards to their relationships: their friendships with others are a mess because there are conflicts left unresolved, arguments that never get settled or apologized for. Maybe their marriage has been infiltrated with resentment, bitterness is just growing like a weed in them or in their spouse because tensions aren't getting dealt with. In a variety of different ways, **the sluggard is often surrounded by chaos and disorder, because dealing with those things just seems like it requires too much effort**. Next, keep a finger there in Proverbs 24 and flip backwards just a handful of pages to Proverbs 10:26. This time, it's gonna describe the sluggard from the perspective of the person who *asks them to go do something*:

Like vinegar to the teeth and smoke to the eyes, so is the sluggard to those who send him.

It says that to the person who asks the sluggard to do something, interacting with the sluggard is like vinegar to the teeth or smoke to the eyes. Now, I can't say I've ever poured vinegar on my teeth (certainly *sounds* awful), but I've definitely experienced smoke in my eyes. Have you guys ever been sitting around a bonfire, and you're trying to talk to somebody, and it seems like the smoke goes wherever you go? And you can't even hardly focus on the conversation you're trying to have, because you're constantly having to stop and rub your eyes over and over again? The writer of Proverbs says that's how it feels if you ask a sluggard to complete a task. You usually have to ask them multiple times to do something, and then you have to follow up with them multiple times after that. You have to send them reminder after reminder after reminder just get them to do what they said they'd do, or what they need to do. It's feels a little like constantly having smoke in your eyes—you can hardly do anything you need to do, because you're having to constantly do *their work* for them. A sluggard is generally very unreliable. Next up, flip back to near where we were at first, Proverbs 26:15. This, to me, is by far the most comical description of a sluggard. Here's what it says:

The sluggard buries his hand in the dish; it wears him out to bring it back to his mouth.

So the picture here is that a sluggard *can* bring himself to reach towards a plate for food, but it feels like too much work to bring it back to his mouth and eat it. Now, verses like this one is why many people think slothfulness is just another word for laziness. And it's easy to think that. **But the emphasis here isn't so much on aversion to effort as it is on aversion to obligation.** The sluggard is fine putting forth effort—the reaches for his food—but he doesn't want to *commit* himself to anything that might make demands of him. He wants food enough to reach for it, but bringing it back to his mouth feels like *obligation*—"I'm gonna have to chew it, and swallow it—and that just seems like it might be too much for me to take on at the moment. I'm not sure I'm ready for that type of commitment."

And this gets us to why I think this is so connected to adulting. *The thing about adulting is that almost all of it demands something from you. Work demands things from you. Decision-making demands things of you. Finances demand things of you. Adulthood in many ways is one long list of things that demand things from you. So if you don't learn to deal with the sloth that fights against all of that, you're gonna make every part of adulthood harder than it has to be.* Because it turns adulthood into one long obstacle course. You're going to spend your effort and energy trying to dodge and avoid everything that requires something of you, and therefore make everything more difficult than it is. **What nobody tells you is that sloth makes adulting miserable.** I think this is what Proverbs 15 means when it says:

The way of a sluggard is like a hedge of thorns, but the path of the upright is a level highway.

It's saying that when you let sloth go undealt with in your life, you make life feel like a hedge of thorns. Your whole existence just becomes one continuous attempt to not get *stuck* by something, and there's virtually no way to pull that off an adult. It says **instead, if you deal with that tendency in you, life becomes like a level highway. It's just a wide open path you're traveling down. It still takes effort, it still requires responsibility, but it's a whole lot easier than a hedge of thorns.**

So I want us to talk today about a few ways to deal with any sloth that might be present in our lives. But before we do, we have to talk about one more thing. And it's something that RJ Snell's quote earlier alluded to. **One of the biggest problems for us here in America when it comes to *identifying* sloth**

in our own lives is that slothfulness now often goes by a different name. It's almost like, at some point, slothfulness went out and hired a fantastic P.R. manager and went through a rebrand. It rebranded itself as "freedom." And this might have been the best rebrand in the history of the world. Because it takes something that is actually a problem, a *liability* for us, and made it seem like an inherently *good* thing. I mean who's gonna be against *freedom*? But often, when we say "freedom," what we really mean is "sloth." And if you listen closely, you can hear it in the language people use:

- People will say the reason that they don't want to get married (or delay getting married) is because they want to enjoy their "*freedom*" now.
- People will say the reason they don't want to have kids (or want to delay having kids) is because they want to enjoy their "*freedom*."
- People will say they don't want to get a 9-to-5 job because they want one that provides more "freedom" than that.

Now, hear me, not wanting to get married is not sinful—not at all. And not wanting to have kids isn't necessarily sinful. But if your leading motivation for those things is just to avoid any type of *obligation* on your life, that's sloth and *that* is sinful. That make sense?

And all of that begs the question, what *is* freedom, actually? Is it just an absence of obligation and demands on you? The biblical author Paul certainly doesn't think so—look at Galatians 5:

You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."

So according to this passage, "freedom" is not an absence of obligation. No, quite the opposite, right? **Freedom, according to Paul, is something given to us *for the purpose of serving others, loving others as ourselves.*** That's true freedom. Anything else is simply sloth in disguise.

So, with that being said, I think there are at least **three things from the Scriptures we can do fight against sloth, to slowly rid it from our system.** And for the rest of our time I want us to talk about what they are:

1. Learn to carry your load.

So right after that passage in Galatians we just read, in Galatians 6, it distinguishes between things that are "burdens" and things that are "loads." It says that we as a community are to "bear one another's *burdens*." Meaning that when overwhelming life circumstances hit, sudden deaths in the family, hospitalization, being laid off unexpectedly—when those things happen, we step in and stand in the gap for one another. But it also says that "each will have to carry his own *load*." Meaning that there are other things in life that we all have to do, that aren't burdens—they're loads. These are things like getting to work on time in the morning, providing for ourselves and our families, spending time in the Scriptures, keeping an eye on our budget—the normal parts of life that we all have to learn how to do.

And **one of the most practical things you can do to fight against sloth in your life is to learn to carry your own load. By deciding to participate in the tiny little obligations of life day after day, week after week, we're actually yielding less and less power to sloth in our lives.** Take a look at RJ Snell again talking about this very idea:

*We do this in concrete ways. Finishing the report. Paying our bills. Wiping away childish tears. Washing the car. Caring for our tools. Doing the dishes. Staying in mundane, ordinary work, while perhaps unromantic, allow for virtue since **natural virtue requires repetition**. There is no virtue without repetition. And so, we stay put. We sink our roots deep. Parents can confirm this. Exhausting? Yes. But a new character forms with every nap, meal, diaper, wet bed, and smile. **We become the people we are by what we choose to do, again.***

Isn't that good? I especially like how in *that* quote, he chose to write with smaller words so I can understand it better. But look at that last line: *we become the people we are by what we choose to do again*. That is so true and I so often forget it. We've talked about this before, but **we become who we are so often via our habits**. Our habits—the things we do over and over again—actually form us into the type of people we are. **So not only should we not avoid responsibility as adults—we actually need responsibility to grow us into a fully-formed human being.**

So with that in mind, what responsibility can you allow to grow and mature you this week? So what if the next time you wanted to just go climb in bed at 9:00p and leave those dishes piled up in the sink, what if instead, you just knocked them out really quick? What if the next time you knew the grass needs mowing and wanted to put it off until tomorrow, you just decided to go ahead and do it now? What if tomorrow morning when your alarm goes off for you to get up and spend time in the bible, instead of hitting snooze approximately 17 times, you just went ahead and got up, made some extra strong coffee, and spent that time in the Scriptures? **None of those things are going to change your just life by doing them one time. But by choosing to do things like that, time and time again—even when you don't want to—you subtly pushing back against the power that sloth might over your life.** Learn to carry your load.

2. Learn to distinguish between rest and escape.

Take a look with me at Proverbs 19:15:

Slothfulness casts into a deep sleep, and an idle person will suffer hunger.

So this says that one of the effects of sloth is that it casts a person into a “deep sleep.” The picture here is not of resting in a healthy way, but rather rest that is actually *escape* from the realities of life. In other words, there is a way to rest that gets *reinvigorates* you, *replenishes* you. And then there is what the sluggard does. Which is trying to escape from doing what we're supposed to do. **And to fight against sloth, you need rest, not just escape.**

And here's how you can tell which one you're participating in: **rest gives you more energy after you do it**. Rest is recharging, in a Godward way, so that afterwards I am ready to get back to work. **But escape, just makes you more tired afterwards**. Escape doesn't make us want to get back to work. Escape makes us want to continue escaping. Some of us don't know why we're perpetually tired even after a day off or after a weekend. It could be because you're escaping instead of resting.

So listen, you're welcome to watch Netflix. Feel free to watch Netflix sometimes. But don't think that watching hours of Netflix is the same thing as *rest*. You're welcome to play video games. Go for it. But

don't think that playing video games for hours on end on your day off is the same thing as *rest*. Those things can be fine to do, but chances are they're not really making you excited to get back to everyday life after you do them. Chances are they're not motivating you to love and serve people, to embrace responsibility.

Let me try and give you a good place to start with rest. On your day off, or your night off, or your Sabbath—pick something to do that is strikingly different from what you do the rest of the week. So you may have heard someone say this before: if your job is all about manual labor (landscaping, building, construction, etc.), then you might want to do something for rest that *isn't* manual labor (reading, journaling, hanging out with friends, etc.). If your job isn't manual labor, you may want to pick something for rest that *is* manual labor (going to the gym, pick-up basketball game, yardwork). For me personally, my job is to read and think, which means as funny as it sounds, cutting the grass is really restful for me, because it's so different than what I do the rest of the week. So I don't know what it is for you exactly, but it's very worth figuring out. Do some trial and error. **What is it that after you've done it, you feel recharged and have a renewed desire to get back to life? Try participating in those things and don't just buy into cheap escapes that don't recharge you at all.** Learn to distinguish between rest and escape.

Alright, lastly—most importantly—to fight sloth in your life, you need to...

3. Learn to imitate Jesus.

In Proverbs 6:6-8, the the sluggard is actually *instructed* on what to do about his sloth. Take a look at what it says:

Go to the ant, O sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise. Without having any chief, officer, or ruler, she prepares her bread in summer and gathers her food in harvest.

The sluggard is told to go and consider what an ant does. And look at what the sluggard is told to notice specifically. It says that even though the ant has no chief or officer, she *embraces* responsibility on her life. Nobody has to tell the ant “hey, remember to go do this.” “Hey will you finish that thing I asked you to finish?” The ant doesn't need anyone watching over her to make sure she gets stuff done. She just does it. “Oh it's summer, cool. That means I should prepare my bread. It's harvest time? Cool, time to go gather my food.” And the sluggard is told to go and observe those qualities about the ant. **One of the best things for a sluggard to do is to see what a life *free from sloth* actually looks like. We need a living, breathing example of what it looks like to embrace the right demands of us and to embrace them well.**

I can think of no better example for us to observe than the life of Jesus. **Nobody ever had to get onto Jesus because he was shirking responsibility.** Think about this: Jesus spent the bulk of his life *working*. From a very young age, Jesus had a job. Depending on how you read it, he was either a carpenter or a stonemason. Either way, **Jesus spent far more years of his life doing physical, manual labor than he did doing public ministry.** Let that sink in. Do you think Jesus made bad tables? I bet he didn't. I bet people didn't have to put crumpled-up napkins under the tables Jesus made to keep them from wobbling. I bet nobody had to come wake Jesus up because he was oversleeping and refusing to go to work. I bet nobody had to remind Jesus to spend time in the Scriptures.

Jesus was not enslaved to his desires, he wasn't governed by a constant inclination to avoid demands made of him. Quite the opposite. Proverbs says "*A sluggard's appetite is never filled, but the desires of the diligent are fully satisfied.*" Jesus says, in the gospel of John "*My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work.*" Think about that. **Jesus is saying that his energy, his fuel, what drives him in life is not avoiding responsibility, but embracing it.** Jesus gets his sustenance not from laziness, not from escape, not from shirking responsibility or even resentfully submitting to it. He says "I get my energy, my sustenance from *gladly doing* the work I've been given to do. Gladly fulfilling the responsibilities and obligations I've been given." That's what a life *free from sloth* looks like—it means **being driven by, not repelled by, your responsibilities.**

And notice that Jesus says his food is to "do the will of him to sent me," *and*—don't miss the second part—"to *finish his work.*" What were the words that Jesus uttered on the cross—"It is.." what? "*Finished.*" The work Jesus was doing was finished in his death. There, **Jesus not only did what he was asked to do, but what all of us were asked to do.** We are all called to live lives free from sloth. Jesus lived that life, and all of us who follow him are given credit for it because of the cross. But when you've grasped that, it does not—it *can* not—make you more slothful. It gives you the desire to put sloth to death, so that you can reflect who Jesus is to the world.

And that's what we're called to as adults that follow Jesus. **We're called to live lives free from the grip of sloth—lives where we embrace responsibility, not avoid it. Lives where we are guided by passion and enthusiasm, not apathy and indifference. Lives where we use our freedom to serve others, not to serve ourselves.** So my prayer for us as a community of Jesus-followers, as a result of this morning and as a result of this entire series is that we would put on display a radically different approach to adulting than others often do. That we would lead the charge in showing that responsibility is a good thing, not a thing to run from. And that as we do that, we would point people to Jesus who makes it possible.

Let's pray.