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Proverbs: Money (Part 2)



Proverbs - Steve Gregg

In this discussion, Steve Gregg explores the subject of money through the lens of Proverbs. He emphasizes that while desiring material wealth is not inherently wrong, it is important to prioritize maintaining peace, love, integrity and a clear conscience. Gregg stresses the importance of hard work and warns against the pitfalls of laziness, as it can lead to poverty and negative consequences for society as a whole. Overall, he reinforces the idea that one's behavior with money is ultimately answerable to the Lord, regardless of whether one is rich or poor.

Transcript

Last time in our study in Proverbs, we were looking at the subject of money. Actually, the larger category we're looking at is the world's traps, and the issue we're looking at now is that of the lust of the eyes, which is that naturally acquisitiveness, not inquisitiveness, but acquisitiveness, the desire to acquire things. Things that are not necessarily, they don't necessarily make their appeal to our flesh, in the sense that they don't have a, there's no appetite of our body that is satisfied by them, but they just attract our eyes.

They have status attached to them. They have visible attractiveness to them. Having an attractive home or car or objects, furniture or whatever, many times, of course, it's not much more comfortable than something that could be less attractive, but our eyes are made, our nature is made to appreciate things.

We have an aesthetic sense, and because of that, we are attracted to things. The problem is, of course, as with the lust of the flesh, where we have natural and legitimate attractions or cravings, there is that need to govern them by the higher principles of God and of God's word, so that we don't just let the desires govern us. The same is true with the desires of the eyes.

Sometimes we'll just acquire as much as we can and desire more, because we'll see somebody else has more than we have, and something they have might be something we would like to have. And so, this desire to just have more stuff, just to know that we have it, is something that needs to be watched. We can be trapped in this cycle of

always wanting to have more and more and more, and we think that if we just had a little more, we'd be secure then.

If we had a little more, we'd be satisfied then. So we get that much more, and we find out, well, there's still a little more that someone else has that would be nice for us to have, we'd still like to have more of that. And it really becomes an endless cycle of dissatisfaction.

Now, the attitude toward money that we looked at last time were that people tend to place their security in money, if they have money. Solomon said that a man's wealth is his strong tower. That is his defense.

It's his buffer against disaster, in his own esteem. And that is, of course, how almost all of us would naturally think. And yet, we have read a number of Proverbs that point out how unpredictable money is and how little it really serves as a real security.

Because there are changes and reversals in the economy and in our own circumstances that are unexpected, unpredictable, and therefore, money is an unreliable source of security for us. And then we saw that Solomon identified a lot of things that he says are more important than money, more to be desired than money. Peace in the home, love in relationships, a clear conscience, keeping your integrity.

These things are more important than money. Those are the things we looked at last time. Now, I'd like to now look at the Proverbs that talk about the general subject of obtaining money.

And there are two aspects of money management. One is obtaining money. The other is disbursing money.

And Solomon has something to say about both. But we want to talk about the general subject of obtaining money, of getting money. In chapter 11 and verse 4, I want to just start with this foundational understanding.

There's a few verses that kind of lay a basic principle down that we need to have always operating behind the scenes as we consider the subject of making money. In chapter 11, verse 4, it says, Riches do not profit in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivers from death. So, again, the idea is that money has its limits to what it can do for you.

And if you think that it's going to be a security, especially against God's wrath, against judgment, obviously there's no way that could be so. Only righteousness will deliver you from God's wrath. A nation is not made more secure vis-à-vis God's blessing or God's cursing by having more money.

It's made more secure by having more righteousness. And in chapter 11, also in verse 28, it says, He who trusts in riches will fall, but the righteous will flourish like foliage.

Again, the contrast between riches and righteousness.

When it comes to gaining money, it must be the priority that we do not compromise righteousness in gaining money. There is something desirable by having money. Money is useful, money is necessary.

The things we need to survive and to help our children and our families survive require money. And therefore, people should have an interest in money. But some people's interest in money is too great.

So much so that they will make compromises in the area of their integrity and their righteousness in order to get money. And so the idea is that if you're hoping to get money, make sure that you realize that righteousness is going to be more valuable to you than money. And that you don't compromise your righteousness.

Because that is often possible to do. You can often make more money if you're not too concerned about doing the right thing. If you're willing to make certain compromises, cheat a little bit, you can make more money more quickly.

And so that's the foundational understanding we have to have. It says this also in chapter 22, 2. Proverbs 22, verse 2. The rich and the poor have this in common. The Lord is the maker of them all.

Now, if the Lord is the maker, then He is the one to whom we all answer. We answer to the Lord for our behavior, whether we're rich or we're poor. So again, it's more important that when we answer to God, that we will be prepared to stand before Him in terms of righteousness.

Rather than that we've just chased profit and chased money. And try to feather our own nest and make ourselves more secure in the world. When in fact, God, who is the maker of us all, is going to be the judge of us all as well.

And only righteousness will deliver from wrath. Money will not do that. Now, Proverbs has quite a few verses in it that contrast hard work with easy money.

The general theme of Proverbs about money is that you have to earn it. You have to work for it. And that is true.

And a lot of people want easy money that comes without much work. We need to remember that work is something that God has ordained, especially hard work. It's something God has ordained as a result of the fall.

Not as a punishment so much as probably to keep men out of trouble. Adam and Eve had a lot of time on their hands when God made them. They had a lot to do, pleasant work to do, but it was apparently a fairly leisurely life.

Enough so that they could go meandering around having conversations with snakes and things like that. And they got into trouble. And they say the devil finds work for idle hands.

It is true, of course, that unless you discipline yourself to righteousness, you can find all kinds of ways to get into trouble if you're not working. And so working is something of a protection against bad behavior. Although working can be bad behavior itself.

Working can also involve you in compromises of various kinds. But the main thing is that ever since the fall, eating, consuming, is only able to be done at the expense of sweat and toil. That's what God said to Adam and Eve in chapter 3 of Genesis.

That in the sweat of your face, you will eat your food. And so people have had to go out for the most part throughout most of history and farm and grow their food. And they found that thorns and thistles were produced in the ground.

And they had difficulty. They were fighting against nature to eke out their subsistence. And therefore, through most of history, people had to work hard to eat.

Now, the ones who didn't have to work hard were the ones who figured out how to make other people work hard for them. They either owned slaves or they had enough capital to hire people to do their work for them. And they made a profit off other people's sweat.

But the fact remains that somebody had to sweat. Now, there's not as much sweat today because of our machinery and everything like that. And when it comes to farming, we've certainly found ways to make things easier.

But there's still a certain amount of labor, a certain amount of maybe work that someone would rather not do. That has to be done in order to produce that which we regularly want to consume. And now we consume many things besides food.

We consume products, a lot of products. And you go to the store and most of what you buy these days isn't food. It says in Isaiah 55, Why do you spend your money on what is not bread and your labor on that which does not satisfy? And Isaiah 55 too.

And yet that's probably what we do more than anything. We eat a lot, but we have, I would say, the majority of our budget is not toward food unless we're rather, if we're lower class. I mean, in terms of our finances, if we're in poverty, then it may be we spend a good portion of our income just on trying to stay alive.

Most Americans are not in that state, though. Most people in the world labor all day long. I mean, in poorer nations, and this is the way people all were centuries ago.

They labor all day long just to basically eat and feed their families. And that's just subsistence farming, subsistence living. And we hardly can even relate to that at all

because we eat with a very small portion of our income.

We can feed ourselves and the rest we have to consume on other things, gadgets and all kinds of things that we can buy that are luxuries. So we don't really have to work so much to eat, but we still want to consume. And the things we consume require work, too.

And I'm not saying it's wrong to have gadgets. I'm just saying that we there's a lot more things now that we consume besides food. We are consumers, and somebody has to work so that those things can be produced and the persons who work must be paid.

And so in order to buy those things, we should work for them. That is to say, whatever we receive that we should have put out something for. Because otherwise, we're letting somebody else do our share of the work for what we're consuming.

In a just society, people receive consumer goods in exchange for something of equal value that they give. That is to say, they don't receive consumer goods from somebody else without giving back something that's of equal value. If somebody else is getting rich, if somebody's getting rich off somebody else's labor, it's not quite so much a matter of, well, it's not equity.

Let's put it that way. It may be just in the sense that they're not depriving anyone of their rights, but it's not loving necessarily. When somebody is doing no work, and they've got a bunch of people working really hard and paying them less than what they're worth so that the owner of the plantation or whatever can become rich on the sweat of someone else.

It's not an unjust system in itself, since the laborers, if they're not slaves, may be working by an agreement. They agree to work for a certain wage, like that parable that Jesus told, the man who hired people to work for a denarius for a day. And then someone else worked for an hour and got the same pay.

And the ones who worked the longest thought they were cheated. But they had agreed to work for a denarius, and they got the denarius, so they weren't cheated. It's just that the other people who had worked shorter time got a better deal.

And sometimes we think that equity or equality is a necessary part of justice, and that's not necessarily the case. But it is unjust for somebody to exploit persons almost like slaves, persons who don't have much choice about whether they work or not. And yet the majority of what they labor for ends up belonging to somebody other than themselves.

That's something that I think Solomon sees even as a bad thing, although he was probably guilty of it as much as anybody, as the king. In Proverbs throughout, the idea is that getting rich is okay, as long as you've done it by hard work. If you're seeking a quick fortune, easy money, without working, it's almost always going to be at the cost of

compromise.

In chapter 13, verse 11, chapter 13, verse 11 says, Wealth gained by dishonesty will be diminished, but he who gathers by labor will increase. This is a basic thought that gets repeated a lot of different ways in Proverbs, a lot of different times. In chapter 14, verse 4, it says, Where no oxen are, the trough is clean, but much increase comes by the strength of an ox.

Now, what's that mean? Where no oxen are, the trough is clean. You don't have to muck out a stall if you don't have an ox. But then you can't pull a plow either, and you can't produce much.

The ox actually is a worthwhile tool of the farmer. He can produce way more than a man working alone can. An ox is probably as good as ten men as a farm implementer.

But if you have an ox, you have to feed it and clean it and take care of it and clean up after it. Now, you might wish you weren't mucking out the stall, but it's a worthy investment. The extra amount of work that comes with maintaining an ox produces more value.

So, in other words, sometimes you can put out a little more work and get a lot more production. Nowadays, of course, we don't use oxen, not in this society. But there's investments of farm machinery.

Or if it's not a farm, some other kind of company, you know, tooling up for manufacture or whatever it takes. Whatever it takes to set up a restaurant or some kind of a business, it's a headache. There are headaches associated with running a business.

But a lot of times if you choose your headaches wisely, you can really gain considerably more by accepting extra headaches. Mucking a stall is an extra headache for a farmer. If a man doesn't have an ox, he doesn't ever have to do that.

But it's very worthwhile to do that extra work in order to have the value of the extra work that the ox can do. And so what it's basically saying is that wise management may allow you to take on a few extra responsibilities, a few extra headaches, but with a much better payoff than what you're putting out, laying out in the extra work. You can have a clean stall if there's no ox, but you're not going to have the much produce that comes from the ox that way.

In chapter four and verse 23, in all labor, there is profit, but idle chatter leads only to poverty. I guess this probably calls to mind images of government workers at the roadside who are supposed to be repairing the roads or digging ditches or something like that. A lot of idle chatter appears to go on.

Five guys working, one guy's got the shovel, the others are sitting around drawing

sometimes. I don't know if that's true as much as it used to be. That used to be a fairly common sight.

I think it became so proverbial that maybe they corrected it. I don't know if I've seen that as much lately. But it's often the case that somebody wants to get rich, but they don't want to work.

And they end up talking about it all the time. But they don't get any richer by chattering and talking about it. You just get down to work, stop talking and start doing.

And there'll be some profit in it. Now, it doesn't necessarily say that if you labor, you'll get rich, although some proverbs do say that. This one just says there's some profit in all labor.

It's better to do some labor of any kind than none at all and just sit around and talk. Because a little bit of labor, by definition, is getting something done. And that's an improvement over what was before you did before you got something done.

Unless you're laboring on a project that isn't worth doing. In chapter 15 and verse 27, it says, he who is greedy for gain troubles his own house, but he who hates bribes will live. Now, no doubt this is directed primarily to people like himself who are in government positions.

And I'm sure that a lot of Solomon's associates were. I mean, he had he was in the government. He was a king and all the magistrates and all the princes and all the people that were in any kind of government role answered to him.

And I'm sure that he spent most of his time with people like that. And so this advice is probably to his son, who's also going to be a king. It may be at least he's in government and saying that a lot of people want to get rich.

They're greedy for gain. And one of the best ways or not one of the best is one of the fastest ways to get money if you're in the government is to take bribes. To be bribed, to let corporations pay you all kinds of things to get their agendas passed for them, whether they're good agendas or not.

And so government work has so often included this, that the people who work as legislators and judges and so forth, they get a little extra money besides their salary. Maybe a lot extra from people who will give them money under the table to cover some issue that they'd like to see put forward. And a government official who's greedy for gain is almost certainly going to take bribes.

But he'll be troubling his own house. Now, I've never been in a position to have anyone offer me bribes, so I don't really know what kind of trouble comes with taking them. It may be just that God's disapproval is on your house.

Or it may be that actually you bring complications, legal complications that trouble your whole house. But the point is, it's not just yourself that gets into trouble. You're going to bring trouble on your whole family if you're dishonest and speaking to be greedy for gain in a dishonest way.

It could be true even if you're not dishonest. If you're just greedy for gain and you're so devoted to your work to get rich, maybe beyond the point that is necessary, that you neglect your house and your family. And the quality of life in the home diminishes while the standard of living is increasing.

It's possible to get rich and to have your relationships dissolve. Because the time it takes for you to get rich in the way you want to is taking time away from people that really want that time from you. And so you can trouble your house that way too, just by even honest, honest pursuit of money if it becomes obsessive.

However, it looks like in this case he's talking about dishonest attempts to get rich. Because he talks about the contrast between the one who's greedy on the one hand and the other who hates bribes. That is someone who won't take bribes on the other hand.

In chapter 21 of Proverbs in verse 5, it says, The plans of the diligent lead surely to plenty, but those of everyone who is hasty surely to poverty. Now, the plans of the diligent. A diligent person is a hard worker.

A person who doesn't waste a lot of his energy and a lot of his time on things that are unproductive. A diligent person is someone who sets his mind to his work and gets it done. Makes it a priority to do what has to be done and does it well.

And sees work as a worthy way to spend his time. A diligent person is the one who just puts his nose to the grindstone and does it without complaining and gets it done and does it well. He's a hard worker, a diligent person.

Now, the plans of the diligent tend to plenty. Lots of people make plans. Remember James said, Go to now you that say today or tomorrow we should go into such a city and continue there a year and buy and sell and gain.

He talked about people who are making their plans to make money. Well, if you more than plan, if you also are diligent, then your plans will come to fruition and produce something. Planning doesn't make anything grow.

Planning doesn't bring money in. But diligence added to your plans does. A good plan worked well and diligently tends to prosper.

But those who are hasty, that tends toward poverty. Now, hasty is the opposite of diligent here. A diligent person is apparently one who's working methodically and takes the time to do things right the first time.

The hasty person does a shoddy job. He just wants to get, you know, fulfill his obligations with the least amount of effort and the least amount of time expended. He just wants to get it done.

But in the process, of course, he's more concerned about how little time he needs to spend than he is concerned about the quality of the work he does. A diligent person is looking to the quality of the work they do. A hasty person is just looking to get the thing done as quickly as possible and usually will end up cutting corners and doing shoddy work.

And that person who's hasty is going to tend toward poverty. I mean, there are manufacturers of products that get a good name because they make really good products and they plan carefully. And their R&D department is always laboring to remove weaknesses in their product.

And they get a good reputation and they make a lot of money because everyone knows they do a good product. And there's someone else making a similar product. They just want to put out a lot of product and sell it cheap and they don't make the great effort to put out a good product.

And, of course, they tend toward poverty because their products don't have a good reputation. If you do work well rather than hastily, your customers, your clientele will respect you, will recommend you, and you'll tend toward plenty and toward prosperity. But the idea here is that everybody who has a plan doesn't become wealthy.

A plan that is worked by a diligent person is going to tend toward plenty. A person who's planning to get rich, if they're hasty about it and they're not working methodically and intelligently about it, well, they're going to tend toward poverty, obviously. It may not be obvious.

It seems obvious. It's obvious to Solomon. Chapter 21 and verse 17.

He who loves pleasure will be a poor man. He who loves wine and oil will not be rich. We've seen this problem when we're talking about food and wine, but here it's talking about the financial or the economic upshot of loving pleasure.

If you love pleasure rather than loving to, I don't know, to be responsible and to fulfill your obligations and to get things done, to be productive. If you love to be productive, then you won't tend toward poverty. But if a person just loves to eat and drink and seek pleasure in life, that's not the way to become wealthy.

Not that becoming wealthy is necessarily the Christian's goal, but at the same time, poverty is not the Christian's goal. It's important to note that because sometimes people say, well, Jesus talks about the danger of being rich and it's hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom and all of that. True, it is.

And if the person is not able to keep their attitude toward their wealth godly, then maybe they're better off if God doesn't prosper them. Because prosperity may ruin them. Like Agur in Proverbs 30, who said, don't make me too rich or too poor, because if I'm too rich, I might forget God.

If I'm too poor, I might steal. Well, it should be possible for a Christian to be either rich or poor and neither steal nor forget God. But it is difficult for some, and therefore riches are not good for everybody.

But the ideal would be that the Christian can and would be productive, would produce a lot, so that they'll have to give to others. Not so that they can just live an opulent lifestyle, necessarily, but that they will have more to give to others. In Ephesians 4, verse 28, Paul said, let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give to him who has need.

So a person should be laboring with their hands, being productive. Why? So that they will be able to help others who have need. Now, I said that if you consume but you don't work, then somebody else is going to have to work more for the stuff that you consume.

You're going to have to get it at the cost of somebody else's sweat, because whatever you consume is going to cause someone to sweat. Someone's going to have to work. It doesn't just come out of the thin air.

Everything we eat, the fuel we burn in our vehicles, the electricity that we use, the gadgets that we buy, everything that we have was produced by somebody working. And that's okay. That's not a bad thing.

Work is good, and the things we get from it are good. The thing is, if we consume these things but we don't work, then somebody else is going to have to be doing the work that we're supposed to be doing. We're putting extra work on somebody else.

Now, that's not loving, and that's the point. Christians are supposed to love their neighbor as they love themselves. And if you're making somebody else work harder for you, that's not very loving.

But for you to work harder so someone else can have something, especially maybe somebody who isn't in the position to produce as much. Maybe somebody who would like as much comforts as you have, but they can't afford them, although they work just as hard. There are people in certain countries that work harder than any of us work just to stay alive, and they don't have any of the luxuries we have.

For us to produce more and be able to give to those who can't produce as much is a loving thing. That's love. So diligence, working hard, is love.

And Paul said that the person who used to steal, who was on the other end of that kind

of arrangement where they were taking stuff that other people worked for, should now work hard with his hands so that he can have stuff to give to others who have need. He needs to be transformed into a giver rather than a taker. And in chapter 4 of 1 Thessalonians, verses 9 and following, it says, But concerning brotherly love, you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught of God to love one another.

And indeed you do so toward all the brethren who are in Macedonia. But we urge you, brethren, that you increase more and more, that you also aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, to work with your own hands, as we commanded you, that you may walk properly toward those who are outside, and that you may lack nothing. So he says this is what brotherly love is.

He says, let brotherly love increase, for example, that you work with your own hands. Well, how is that brotherly love, that I work with my own hands? Well, it's loving to work with my own hands so someone else doesn't have to work with their hands to feed me. If I'm going to eat, I should work.

And we know that Paul said that in 2 Thessalonians 3, that whoever does not work, let him not eat. That's just over in 2 Thessalonians. Same concerns he had in 1 Thessalonians, people not working.

2 Thessalonians 3, 10. Even when we were with you, we commanded you this. If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat.

Because why? Well, because the food you're eating is for someone else to work for. And if you're not willing to work, then you're not. Why should someone else work for you? But for you to work extra in order to have to give to others is loving.

And not so much that others won't have to work. But lots of people work hard and don't produce much. And to help out other persons who are working poor or people who would be working but through no fault of their own have been left without employment, that is what Christians should do.

That is what love does. It seeks to help others. And so, to become rich is a desirable thing if it is something that is seen as a ministry.

A ministry to help the poor. It's true that the Bible says in the New Testament a lot of things about the dangers, the spiritual dangers of being rich. And even the Old Testament has its warnings about riches or at least the limitations of the desirability of being rich that Proverbs brings out.

But at the same time, the assumption is it's not bad to be rich. You can do a lot more if you're rich, if you will. A lot of people say, well, I want to be rich so I can reach the rich.

I don't think that that's really a good excuse. I don't think that rich people do reach the rich that much. You could actually ask most rich Christians how much of your riches are actually being used to reach rich people.

Or to reach any people, for that matter. In many cases, people who make that excuse to say I want to be rich to reach rich people are just saying someone has to reach the rich and I want to be in that crowd. I want to be, you know, the rich only listen to rich.

That's not really true. Jesus reached a few rich people and he wasn't rich. And Paul reached some rich people.

Not many. But that's because there weren't many rich who wanted to respond to the gospel on the terms that Jesus and Paul preached it. It wasn't because Jesus and Paul were not rich that they didn't reach more rich people.

It was because the message they were preaching was not as attractive to rich people. And therefore not as many rich people respond to it. While it may be a cop out for some people to say, well, someone has to reach the rich and therefore I have to be rich to do it.

Nonetheless, there is something to be said for a person who is willing to live a godly life and a modest life to make a lot of money. Because there's a lot of good that can be done with it. On this matter of hard work versus easy money in chapter 28 of Proverbs, verse 8. One who increases his possessions by usury and extortion gathers it for him who will pity the poor.

In other words, God's going to take the money from him eventually as a judgment upon him for the way he's made his money. He increases his possessions. That means he gets rich.

He does it by usury. Now, usury in our modern English usually means charging exorbitant interest. Taking advantage of somebody who's in need by lending them money and charging really high interest on them.

Things like what credit cards do. Credit cards are guilty. Credit card companies are guilty of usury.

Frankly, people who use credit cards to get themselves in debt are guilty of getting themselves into debt. But the credit card companies exploit this weakness of people and charge really oppressive interest rates. That would be considered usury.

In the Bible, though, the word usury is not any different than the word for interest. Generally, when you find the word usury in the King James or the New King James Version, it really just means interest, charging interest. Most loans were made to poor people.

The lending in the Bible is a very different thing than the lending of banks today. The banks will not lend to the poor. The banks will only lend to people who can show that they can afford to pay back the loans.

At least, usually, this recent mortgage thing was an exception. For some reason, the government required banks to give loans to people who couldn't pay it back, which precipitated the crisis that we've had in recent years. But for the most part, banks don't make their money by lending to the poor.

They make their money by lending to people who want to capitalize on new business or buy a new house or something. And they'll only lend if you can show that you've got the money. If you need the money, you can't get it, because the banks don't want to lend to someone who's not a good risk.

But in biblical times, people didn't borrow money to capitalize business ventures so much. It was almost always the case that the man who needed to borrow money was a poor man. He needed food that day for his family, and he was in trouble.

And so, if he asked to borrow money, if somebody charged him interest on it, that was just oppressing the poor. I mean, it'd be better to give him a gift, or if you lend it, that you lend it without any expectation that he's going to pay you any, that you're going to make any profit off the loan. You do it, in other words, out of love for the person.

In the law, it was forbidden to the Jews to lend with interest to their brothers. They could lend and charge interest to a non-Jewish person. But to their brother Jews, they were not allowed to charge interest on any loans that they gave out, because it's unloving.

And the person who increases his wealth by usury and extortion, these are some of the normal ways that people would exploit people financially and make themselves rich in the process, that person will experience a loss, a reversal. It says eventually God's going to turn that person's money over to someone else who will show pity to the poor. In the same chapter, chapter 28, verses 19 and 20, it says, He who tills his land will have plenty of bread, but he who follows frivolity will have poverty enough.

A faithful man will abound with blessings, but he who hastens to be rich will not go unpunished. The person who's eager to be rich or hastens to be rich, if he's too hasty, he's going to be cutting corners. And cutting corners usually means compromising integrity.

It's not that often that a fortune can be gotten very quickly. It is possible that you'll inherit a fortune, honestly, from parents, or it's possible that you'll be in a business that just really takes off, and you get suddenly rich through no compromises of your own. But in most cases, money and wealth are accumulated gradually.

In most cases, people earn a bit more than they need to live on, and if they save it up

and invest it well, honestly and so forth, and wisely, their wealth can increase, but usually gradually. I mean, once in a while you might invest in a company that just turns out to be, you take off like a rocket, and suddenly you got rich almost faster than you anticipated. But a person who is eager to get rich quick is generally speaking going to be cutting corners and doing things other than honest labor to get that money.

But the man who tills his land, he'll have plenty to eat. He's working, in other words. The man who puts up the labor will have plenty of bread.

But the man who follows frivolity, which means he's just kind of playing and entertaining himself when he should be working, is going to not have any bread when it comes time that he's going to need it. So, easy money is not a good thing, because it's not usually gotten honestly. Now, there's quite a few proverbs that contrast the sluggard from the diligent man.

Some of them are, I think, deliberately humorous pictures of the sluggard. Solomon has no respect for the sluggard. What is a sluggard? A lazy person.

What is a lazy person? I mean, we have a lot of leisure in our society that people didn't have 200 years ago and before. Just in the past, actually, to tell you the truth, just since World War II, the average American has had lots of leisure compared to any time previous. America's economy just took off after World War II, and wealth got easier and easier for the average person to acquire.

Before that, most people worked pretty hard, and they lived reasonably well in America. I mean, this is a land of opportunity, this is a land of plenty, and people who worked hard could live relatively comfortably, except at times when there were special disasters that made that impossible. There's always those things.

But we're talking about all other things being equal under normal circumstances. A person who works hard could live reasonably comfortably in this country, more so than a person who worked maybe twice as hard in India or in some other countries that were just poverty-stricken and didn't have very much resources. But since World War II, it just seems like even an ordinary middle-class person is rich.

Almost everybody who has a normal job can afford to get a boat or a vacation home or RVs or lots of things, fun things, not bad things, but just fun things to have that people couldn't afford before. We're just very rich by comparison to what most people have been throughout history. And because of that, we have a lot of leisure, which we are, of course, responsible for.

Just like we're responsible for extra money, we're responsible for extra time. Whatever time God gives us is His time, and it's to be used for His kingdom. Leisure can be a good thing, just like extra money can be a good thing.

If you have extra time or extra money, that's something that can be invested in the kingdom of God. People who don't have any extra money or extra time can't invest so much in it. So it's a good thing to have leisure.

But loving leisure or loving to avoid work is not a good attitude because, again, because of the fall, we have to be prepared to work hard in order to produce. And we want to produce so that we can help other people because there are people who really have a hard time surviving. It's hard for us to realize because survival comes fairly easy for us in this part of the world.

Not only survival, but relatively good health, clean water, good shelter, healthy food, abundance of variety. Even the poorest Americans who are on welfare live like kings compared to people in most of the other parts of the world. At least much of the rest of the world, the third world.

So it's easy for us to begin to think we deserve leisure. I mean, why should we have to work all the time? Why knock yourself out? Other people around us aren't. And so to love leisure and to decide to find as much leisure as we can and to work as little as we can is not necessarily virtuous.

And I personally think that if I were working at a normal job, I would look forward to retirement. But only so I could do more work for God. I'm very fortunate that my regular employment is working for God because that's what I'd want to do with all my free time if I wasn't doing it with all my working time.

And for me to retire from another kind of job so I could work for God would be what I'd look forward to if I had to work another job. But a lot of people who work other jobs just look forward to retiring so that they can do nothing. They just don't like work.

They don't like their job. And they're looking forward to the time when they just don't have to do anything. They can just sit and watch television.

They can just relax all the time. And that's, you know, in some ways kind of attractive. But it's attractive to the wrong kind of character.

The right kind of character is thinking, as long as I'm consuming, I should be producing. If I can't. Of course, the time may come when I get too old or I may get sick or something may happen.

I can't produce. All the better reason for me to produce a lot while I can. Like the ant who gathers in the summer because the winter is coming and they won't be able to gather.

We may all come to a time in our lives where we can't produce much anymore. So to gather much is good. But not to gather much so that we don't have to work.

But to gather much so that if the time ever comes that we can't work. That we don't have to become a burden on somebody else or on society or something like that. It is a loving thing to take your own burden of your support upon yourself.

Even your future support. If you anticipate that you're getting old enough that the time may come when your children or society or someone else may have to support you. And if you are in the position to do something for yourself, it seems to me a loving thing to make provision for your own support.

So that someone else doesn't have to support you. But the thing is, a lot of people want to be supported by society when they get older. They want to take time off work and do nothing.

And again, I can understand that if a person is laboring in a job that doesn't do anything but make money and doesn't have any benefit to the kingdom of God. I can see what someone is saying, I don't have to do this anymore. So that I can do the things that really matter in life.

I can really serve God. But for people who just don't want to work and look forward to just having as much lazy time as possible. That's the sluggard that Proverbs has a lot of things to say about.

To Solomon, a sluggard is about as bad as a person can be. He's even worse than the fool. In Proverbs, there's a lot of things said against the fool.

But actually, the sluggard is even compared negatively against a man who's merely a fool. A man who's a sluggard is a special kind of fool. And so, sluggards and diligent people are contrasted in a lot of verses.

In Proverbs 10.4, it says, He who deals with a slack hand becomes poor. That means he's not a diligent worker. But the hand of the diligent makes one rich.

So once again, working hard tends toward production. Production tends toward wealth, of course. And becoming rich.

But dealing with a slack hand, a person who works lazily, cuts corners, doesn't do excellent work, takes longer coffee breaks than they need to, just tries to avoid work as much as they can and shuffle off more work on other people. That person is tending toward poverty. Or they should.

They deserve to. In chapter 12, verse 11, He who tills his land will be satisfied with bread, but he who follows frivolity is devoid of understanding. This contrast between the person tilling their land and the person who follows frivolity has been mentioned earlier.

Once again, someone who follows frivolity is someone who's devoting their time to

something that's not productive. We are an entertainment-oriented culture. And while entertainment is... I actually enjoy entertainment more now that I'm older than I did when I was younger.

When I was younger, I didn't even want to go to movies. I just thought, why waste the time? There's so much to do. But now that I'm older, I'm tired.

I get tired more. And I don't mind sitting down and watching a movie. I think it's kind of a refreshing thing.

And I don't think it's a bad thing, necessarily. But at the same time, we have so many options for entertainment in our society that we could become almost addicted to it. Especially now that we have the video games and our computers, and we can be online all the time with things that are more entertaining than productive.

That's a danger that our society is producing now. Because, you know, people ask, well, what's the matter? If we can make enough to live on comfortably by working only, you know, 20 hours a week or 30 hours a week, and we spend 50 hours a week entertaining ourselves, who's to say that's wrong? We're earning enough. Well, we're earning enough to support ourselves, if that's all that we're responsible for.

But if God's given us a lot of leisure time, if he's put us in a position where we don't have to work very much to support ourselves, that means there's more opportunity to do work that will help other people. And following frivolity is something we need to be careful not to do too much. There may be times when kicking back and just relaxing and entertaining ourselves is a good thing, and a regenerative thing, even.

But it can easily be that we find entertainment so easy, work so unpleasant, and so unnecessary sometimes. Because we can, these days, make money without hard work, without quite as hard work as it used to be because of machinery and because of money-making businesses that don't require a lot of work, and there's multi-levels, and the people at the top levels are making more for less work than the people at the lower levels, and so forth. It is so easy in our society now to work a minimal amount to survive, and just kind of be lazy and seek entertainment the rest of the time.

It's not the best thing for Christians to do. Not a good thing at all, in fact. Chapter 13, verse 4 says, The soul of the sluggard, that's the slothful man, desires and has nothing, but the soul of the diligent shall be made rich.

Now, the man who doesn't work is not necessarily the man who lacks any desire for stuff. He desires stuff just as much as the other man does. He's just too late to go out and get it, as he's too late to go out and earn it.

Now, if a person doesn't really care for stuff, if a person really is happy with a low standard of living, then this is a little different. What Solomon is assuming is that the

sluggard would like to have the standard of living that a diligent man has, but he doesn't have it. He desires it, but he can't get it.

He doesn't seem to put it together that that is accessible to someone who works hard, but working hard is not a negotiable with him. He's not something he's willing to even consider. He's a sluggard.

He's lazy. He will not put out energy. And there's a lot of statements in Proverbs that indicate there are people like that, that just don't want to expend any energy, and sometimes there's some humorous ones about it.

In chapter 18, verse 9, it says, He who is slothful in his work is a brother to him who is a great destroyer. Now, this is a working man. This is not an unemployed man.

He's working. But he's slothful in his work, and so he's going to be cutting corners. He's going to be working slow.

He's going to be taking long breaks. He's going to get involved in conversations with the other people in the office, and just slow, just getting as little done as he can get away with. He's a brother to, and this expression, is a brother to, is found in some other Proverbs.

It means is closely related to, is almost the same thing as a destroyer. Now, a man who is working is no doubt doing something productive, but if he's doing it slothfully, he's not much removed from the person who isn't getting anything done positively, in fact, who's destroying things. You have to work to overcome the second law of thermodynamics.

Things do erode. Things need maintenance. Machines need maintenance.

Buildings need maintenance. Everything needs maintenance, because the second law of thermodynamics says everything's going to tend to wear out, tend to erode. It takes actual proactive work to prevent things to just destroy themselves.

The person who's slothful and doesn't work hard is not, he's not counteracting the second law of thermodynamics sufficiently. He might as well be contributing to the destruction. He's a brother to one who destroys.

He's not proactively destroying something. He's not deliberately destroying something, but he's not working hard enough to, to overcome the natural forces of destruction that are always at work. So, some result of his activity is things get worse rather than better.

He's not working hard enough to improve, to fight against the second law. I mean, you have to work hard to keep your lawn from going to weeds, and to keep your garden from being overrun with, you know, pests, and to have your house not just begin to fall apart, and your car engine to wear out sooner than it needs to. I mean, you have to maintain

things, or else they just destroy themselves.

That's how, that's how reality is. That's the laws of physics. And so you have to, you have to be diligent to overcome the forces that are naturally tending toward destruction.

The man who's slothful in his work is not really making gains against the destructive tendency of nature, and therefore he's not much different than a person who's actively destroying things. Not compared to what he should be, and at least he should be able to counteract the second law of thermodynamics if he'd work harder. In chapter 20, verse 4, it says, The sluggard will not plow because of winter.

Therefore, he will beg during the harvest and have nothing. Wintertime's not a pleasant time to go outdoors. The weather's not nice.

You don't want to go out and work in the rain, or the snow, or the cold. So the sluggard doesn't do so. He doesn't work at those times.

But when the food is needed, it isn't there for him, so he's out begging. He doesn't plan ahead well. In chapter 20, verse 13, it says, Do not love sleep, lest you come to poverty.

Open your eyes, in other words, wake up, and you will be satisfied with bread. To love sleep. Now, I'll tell you, sometimes we do love sleep in a way that's not so condemnable.

I mean, we just get so weary. We get so tired that there's hardly anything that's more refreshing than just hitting the sack and going right to sleep. We just love it.

But he's not talking about that. He's talking about someone who places a value on sleeping as much as they can, who just likes to just be lazy and stay in bed and never get out of bed. That person, of course, is the same as the sluggard who comes to poverty.

It's like the other lusts of the flesh. Desire for sleep. Desire for food, desire for drink, desire for sex, desire for sleep.

Those are things the body craves. The body needs sleep. The body needs rest.

And the body needs food and so forth. But to love those things in the sense that you place a value on them is going to perhaps lead you to indulge in those things more than prudence or righteousness would dictate that you should. Now, there's a little segment in chapter 26 of Proverbs verses 14 through 16.

Actually, 13 through 16. I don't know why I put 14 through 16 in the notes. It's 13 through 16.

Four Proverbs in a row about sluggards. And they're intended to be somewhat humorous, but they do make the point Verse 13, 26-13. The slothful man says there's a lion in the

streets.

A fierce lion is in the streets. In other words, I don't want to go out and work because there's danger out there. It's not a very realistic... I mean, he's making lame excuses not to work.

There are very seldom lions in the street. I mean, occasionally, if you live in the jungle or even if you live near the edge of the Jordan back in those days, there were lions. But they weren't usually walking down the street.

It's pretty unusual. Once in a while I hear on the news that there's a cougar, you know, seen in the parking lot at our mall or something in Capitola. Occasionally, you hear about coyotes or wolves.

There are not wolves here in this area where I lived before in Idaho. But, you know, a bear. Sometimes you'll see a bear or a moose in town.

A moose in Washington State came onto a campus and killed somebody. Mooses are dangerous animals to get near. But, I mean, there are wild animals that occasionally wander into where people live.

It's not very common. It's rare. The assumption here is this is not true.

There isn't a lion in the streets. To say that sluggery won't go out because there might be a lion out there. Well, there might be.

We might also have a meteorite hit our house while we're sleeping. And we don't want to be in bed. But if that happens, we better get out of bed because a meteorite might hit the bed right where we are.

You know, there's always a possibility that what we're doing is dangerous. But it's not very realistic. A slugger, in other words, makes all kinds of lame excuses.

Thinks of every reason he can imagine not to work. He won't go outside to do his work because there just might be a lion out there. Well, I guess the laws of averages would be against it, although the laws of nature wouldn't preclude it.

I mean, a lion might be in the streets. They do sometimes walk into town, but, you know, not one day in a million, probably. So it's just talking about how the sloth will find any kind of excuse not to not to go to work.

In verse 14, as a door turns on its hinges, so does the sloth will turn on his bed. How's that? A door moves on its hinges, but it doesn't change positions very much. You know, I mean, the slugger doesn't get very far from his bed.

He moves a little, he'll roll over in bed, but he's not going to get out of bed. The door is

still attached to the door frame. It's not going anywhere.

The hinge lets it move. It changes position a little bit, but not location. And so also the slugger in his bed is not going to change his location.

He may roll over. He may exert that much energy. He doesn't exert much energy, but he might roll over if he's getting tired of sleeping on one side.

But he's going to stay in the bed anyway. Verse 15, the slothful man buries his hand in the bowl. It worries him to bring it back to his mouth.

He's sitting at the table and he reaches out for his food and his hand goes into the bowl to get food, but he's too lazy to even bring it back to put it in his mouth. He's like going to starve to death because he doesn't have enough energy or enough diligence to even feed himself. That's what is being suggested there.

In verse 16, the sluggard is wiser in his own eyes than seven men who can answer sensibly. I can think of many people who are wiser in their own eyes than seven men who can answer sensibly. But this in particular is talking about a sluggard.

A sluggard is thinking of all kinds of great reasons why he shouldn't go to work today. All kinds of men can give him good reasons that he should, but he can't be persuaded. No matter how many men can give him good reasons, he just will not be persuaded to go to work.

Now you can see that Solomon has nothing but disgust for a sluggard. And that's because, of course, the sluggard does not quite get it. Does not understand that life is about work.

It's not all about making money, but it's all about work. There are reprieves from work. There are nights to sleep.

There are times when the work of the day is done. And a person can just enjoy their family or enjoy something else that's enjoyable, that's not itself work. But that's only so they can really recover enough to go back to work when it's time to do so.

Because work is what life is for. God made Adam and Eve, put them in the garden to till it, well not to till it, but to tend it. To tend the garden.

He gave them work to do. It wasn't stressful work, it wasn't sweating work, it was pleasant work. But it still had to be done.

Apparently God made the garden such that it would become a jungle if it wasn't tended. So he put some gardeners in it. So that although it was a beautiful environment and a pleasant one to live in and a pleasant one to work in, it was still one that required work.

And people are made to work. And if they don't work, and if they try to find ways to get out of work, they end up being a burden on society or a burden on other people. And therefore they're disgusting to Solomon.

And frankly, disgusting to everybody else who is a hard worker and sees that they get out of work every time they can. We're going to stop there because the limit's on our time. And therefore we're going to come back to this general topic in our next session on Proverbs as well.