

Overcoming the Sin of Laziness

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I'm going to do something this morning that is just a little bit different in the way that I frame things than what I would normally do. This is a message today for our young people and those of you who are adults are welcome to listen in, everything that I say applies to you equally as well. Today I want to particularly speak to the young people, children, teenagers, young adults, particularly aiming this message and thinking about you as I stand here today. This is exactly for you guys, for you young ones. I have something that I want to say to you that I think is very important today, I have several things that I think are very important. First of all, I want to make something really really clear. Do you know why we don't have separate age designated ministry at Truth Community Church? Do you know why we don't do that? There are a lot of reasons but part of the reason that we don't do that is because we love you and we want you to be with us. We think that you have something to contribute when you're with us; that we benefit from your presence as much as we hope that you benefit from ours and so you're important to us. We care about you. We pray about you. We want you to...we pray for you, I should say. We want you to be with us. We love you. We care about you and so it's only fitting and right that I would take an opportunity once in a great while to direct something particularly to you. So that's why we have you here with us, it's because we want you with us. I don't understand thinking any other way, to be honest with you.

I want to talk to you about your life. I want to talk to you about the way that you structure your life and this is not just for young people but it's just particularly urgent for you. You know, there are books that are written and there are messages that are preached geared toward young people, teenagers, early 20s, that kind of thing, that call you and say, "You need to do great things. You need to do hard things." And they set really high, lofty goals trying to get you to embrace a great purpose in life. That's fine as far as it goes. Do you know what? It sets your mind, I think, in an entirely wrong direction to shape life that way. I don't think that that should be, it certainly shouldn't be the only way that you think about life because Jesus Christ said, "He who is faithful in a little thing, will be faithful in much." And what you need to cultivate in your mind and in your thinking and your approach to life is, "My responsibility, my duty is to be faithful in little things." And sometimes bigger things flow out of that. If you are faithful in the little things, God will give you more. What I don't like are lofty, flowery messages that are designed to flatter you in your pride about thinking that you're going to be the next person that changes the world while bypassing the elements that actually go up to make day to day character. You

need to be aware that God focuses on and looks to and calls you to be faithful in little things. That's really important for you to take into account.

Now, as we talk to young people, as I talk to you here today, there is an overarching thing that I would want you to hear and always be mindful of in your life; we talk about it so often it is central for you to be right with Christ. Jesus said, "If anyone wants to come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow after me." Young person, your central problem is that you're a sinner who has fallen short of the glory of God. You've broken God's laws with the way that you lie and disobey and dishonor your parents, those kinds of things. You're not right before God. You need a Savior. You need to be born again and I know that many of you have been born again and I'm grateful for that, grateful for the work of God in your life. So that's always central to what we want to say here and I would be wrong if I didn't preface the rest of the message with that.

The other thing that I would say just by way of reminder, things that we've talked about, things that are directed particularly to you young people out of God's word, is that you are to honor your father and mother; that there should be an element of respect and reverence for your parents' position in your life that would cause you to give them respect, to do what they tell you to do, to show your affection and love to them. That's part of honoring your father and mother. That's what God calls you to do. That's specific instruction to young people, honor your father and mother in the context of taking up your cross and following Christ. You need to do that. That's the demand of God, the command of God on your life, young person.

You know, we have addressed those kinds of things often in recent weeks as we finished up Ephesians, today's topic is going to kind of take all of that and narrow it down and focus it on one particular thing that's going to be, I trust, very helpful to you, and you know, look, I pray for you guys. I care for you so much. I'm concerned that your life would go well and that the one life that God has given you, you would use it greatly to his glory. There is a threat to that. There is a threat that is in your character that would hinder that and let me just tell you a little personal story. I know I spoke about not telling stories last week. I get that, but this isn't the whole message. It's just something to frame it to let you know that I'm on your side. That's what I want you to know here. When I was a young boy, I was a pretty lazy kid and I look back on that with a lot of disdain and regret for the way that I was as a kid and I didn't honor my father and mother at all like I should have, and there was one little incident that kind of crystallizes it, that sets the stage for you to be able to take what I've got to say to you today. I don't remember exactly how old I was, I was maybe 8, 9, 10, something like that, and I liked to read the newspaper, I liked to read the sports section in particular. I was always following sports when I was a young person and one day the newspaper...maybe I should back up a little bit. A newspaper is this large multiple sheet of paper that has news stories and sports stories and comics printed on it. It would physically arrive at your house. There wasn't any way to go on the internet in those days. That's what a newspaper was in case you didn't know. The physical dimension of that is important to the story.

So we had the newspaper delivered to our house every day and I would go out and get it. Well, one day, it was really really windy and the newspaper delivery had not tied up the newspaper appropriately so the wind caught the newspaper and scattered it all over our yard. I don't know how big the lot was, a half acre lot, and it was just spread everywhere, and my dear mom who is still living, went out and it was a mess. I mean, it was just separated everywhere, scrambled up, and my dear mom went out and gathered up that newspaper and brought it in kind of in heaps and put it down. Now, and I'm sitting there waiting on her, and she brings this in, she brings the first bit in and her hair is all blown over and it's probably pretty cold out and she says, "Well, here's the first part of the paper that I've got." And I looked at her and in kind of an angry voice said, "I want the sports section," and she went back out and started gathering it.

Now, there are two things about that story that should appall you about what your pastor used to be like. First of all, why was I not out there helping her gather up that newspaper? What made me think that I was too good for that task, I don't know. And secondly, just the utter laziness of that. I was just sitting on the couch perfectly content to let my mother go out and gather up this newspaper while I waited and then sat with an incredibly wicked selfish sense of entitlement and expectation, "You should be finding the sports section for me, woman." I didn't say it that way but that was certainly the attitude of my heart. Isn't that despicable? You don't have to agree so quickly back there, Kevin. It was despicable. I'm ashamed of that. I was a lazy selfish boy. Shame on me. And it's a trait, unfortunately, that is common to youth. It's a trait that's easy to fall into, especially when you live in a house where a lot of things are provided for you.

Well, I want to help you today. I want to challenge you today out of a specific passage of God's word and I want you to turn to the book of Proverbs 6. That's our text for this morning. Proverbs 6. Proverbs was largely written by King Solomon, written to his son, trying to communicate that to his son that would help him live a proper, wise life and to use his life well to the glory of God, and early on in the book, Solomon addresses his son with these words from Proverbs 6, beginning in verse 6. He says in chapter 6, verse 6, he says,

6 Go to the ant, O sluggard, Observe her ways and be wise, 7 Which, having no chief, Officer or ruler, 8 Prepares her food in the summer And gathers her provision in the harvest. 9 How long will you lie down, O sluggard? When will you arise from your sleep? 10 "A little sleep, a little slumber, A little folding of the hands to rest"-- 11 Your poverty will come in like a vagabond And your need like an armed man.

Now, young people, I really want you to listen to me and I want you to mark what I'm about to say right now: our world is really messed up. There is no question about that and we don't need to go into all of the reasons for that or all that we're referring to when we say that, but as I have told you in the past, I tell you again now, the fact that the world is messed up is your opportunity. You have an opportunity as a young person if you cultivate your life toward Christ, following Christ, receiving and submitting to Christ and then dedicating your life to live out in accordance with the instruction of God's word, you

have an opportunity to excel greatly beyond your peers because God will honor that life in a way that will be distinct from what you see going on in the world around you, but it's going to require a certain kind of character for you to do that and this is a central part of it here, what we're talking about today. I've entitled this message "Overcoming the Sin of Laziness." Overcoming the sin of laziness and the text opens up saying, "Go to the ant, O sluggard."

Well, let's talk about that for just a minute. Our English word "sluggard" refers to a habitually lazy person. A habitually lazy person. And Scripture talks about this more often than you would think and you need to think through what you are going to be like, young person. You need to think through, "What kind of person am I going to become? What kind of young man, what kind of young woman am I going to develop into?" And if you will deal with this central issue, many other things will fall into place. If you disregard the instruction that I'm giving you here today out of God's word and you go the path of the sluggard, I can't do anything to help you. So there is a critical response that is called for from your heart in response to the things that you hear today. You need to lean forward and pay attention because I am setting forth that which would bring the greatest blessing of your life to bear if you would only listen and pay heed, and I want you to do that. Why? Because I want to be your boss? No, it's not that at all. It's because I'm your pastor and I care about you and I want life to go well for you, and I want your life to be used greatly to the glory of God, but that's only going to happen if you apply your character to the kinds of things that we're talking about here today. Alright? We're on the same page, right? You would want your life to go well, wouldn't you? Wouldn't you want that? You want your life to go well. Well, what I'm giving you is designed to help you reach that greater goal and so I expect you to listen here today and to pay heed.

Charles Spurgeon, the great Baptist preacher from the 19th century said this, he said and I quote, "Proverbs deals very hard blows against sluggards and Christian ministers do well frequently to denounce the great sin of idleness which is the mother of a huge family of sins." What he's saying is that if a lazy person has multiplied other sins in their lives, laziness brings you to the point where you pursue other sins because you're not mindful of conforming your life to the call of God in Scripture. So if you will deal with the heart of a lazy attitude, you can overcome many other sins as well. The self-discipline of overcoming laziness will condition your life to apply self-discipline to other ways so that you advance in life and that you become the person that you should be.

So what are we going to do? We're going to look at four things here today from this text. First of all, I want you to consider the word of God. Consider the word of God. That's our first point: consider the word of God. There is something really essential for you to understand. I realize that perhaps with other friends and with your peers and sometimes even in your own heart, the concept of work seems like a dirty word; that to avoid work is the idea and to procrastinate and to let things go because you just don't want to do it right at that moment and, "I want to do something else," we've got to address that right at its heart. You need to understand something about your God. You need to understand something about the God of the Bible. God designed work into the cosmic order. God created man in part to work. Even before the fall of man into sin, Genesis 2:15 says, "The

LORD God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it." When God made Adam, before Adam ever fell into sin in the perfect environment of the garden of Eden, God had work for Adam to do. Work is a good thing. Laziness is a bad thing and God designed for people to work. You are a person, right? I don't want to assume too much here but, hey, we're all together on this. You're a young man, a young woman, you're a child growing up to become somebody special, well look, part of that, part of God's appointment for your life, part of God's design for your life, part of God's intended blessing for your life is for you to work; to do constructive things with your hand and mind that produce results rather than just lounging around doing nothing. God embedded work in the 10 Commandments. In Exodus 20:9, "Six days you shall labor and do all your work." You're supposed to work. By the way, just to step back, satellite view here, this applies to all of us as adults too, right? Okay, just as long as you guys are staying with me also. You see, I'm talking to your parents too, not just picking on you today.

You know, the priority of work is also present in the New Testament. Turn in your Bibles, young people, to 2 Thessalonians 3, and if you don't have a Bible, there is a black one in the seat slot in front of you; you can reach forward and get one and follow along. This is part of your work for the day, to follow me in the Bible. The priority of work is also present in the New Testament. As you're turning to 2 Thessalonians, we've said that work was present in the garden of Eden; God commanded it; it's part of the 10 Commandments, "You shall work and do your labor." And now you see it also in the New Testament. 2 Thessalonians 3:10 through 13. Look at that with me. 2 Thessalonians 3, beginning in verse 10. The Apostle Paul is writing to the Christians in the church. They struggled with some laziness and he needed to correct and rebuke them and he said in this passage, he said, look at it there with me at the text, beginning in verse 10, "even when we were with you, we used to give you this order: if anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either. For we hear that some among you are leading an undisciplined life, doing no work at all, but acting like busybodies. Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to work in quiet fashion and eat their own bread. But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary of doing good." Now, those of you, I know that a lot of our young people claim to know the Lord Jesus Christ and, you know, praise God for that. As a side note, I would ask you if you make that claim, have you been baptized in accordance with the Lord's command to follow him in baptism? That follows that confession. But notice for today's purposes, what it says there in verse 12. The idea of disciplined work is a command from the Lord Jesus Christ. This is what Christ commands you. You cannot be a lazy person and be an obedient disciple of Jesus Christ. Work is what you were made to do, assuming you have the physical capability to do it. So all I want you to see from this first point very briefly, consider the word of God, is that before man fell into sin, after man fell into sin, in the Old Testament, in the New Testament, is this principle: you are to work and be productive with your life.

Young people, let me say something to you that I hope you'll come back to. I can only trust the Spirit of God to brand this deep into your heart so that you understand. As you move into your age where you're able to work and you've got the physical capacity and maturity to work, you need to understand something: you are responsible to provide for

yourself. It is not your parents' duty to feed and provide and house you indefinitely into your adult life. It is not the duty of the government to do that. An able bodied person is responsible to provide for himself. That is what he is to do and Paul says that within the context of the church there in verse 10, if someone is not willing to do that, they are not to eat. That's how Scripture sees this. That's how high God places this priority that you would be a responsible person, seeking to use the talents and abilities and health that the Lord has given you in order to be a constructive member of society and to provide for your own needs and not expect someone else to do that for you. Okay? Consider the word of God. You can't resist that. You can't argue against that. You can't be against that without opposing God himself.

Here's the summary of the first point: work is right and laziness is a sin. The question then becomes: if you are like I once was, how do you start to overcome the sin of laziness? How can I help you overcome the sin of laziness? Well, this is what we need to do, we need to go back to Proverbs 6, our text for this morning, and just kind of walk through what Scripture says about this and let God's word teach us and help us. And one of the things about work and one of the things about Scripture is that it's very humbling really. It's humbling to think that we're not the king of the universe; that we're not the Lord of the world, but that we're under authority of God. That's humbling. And it's humbling to realize that we have things to do and sometimes what's in front of us is to do menial labor and to do things which perhaps the world despises but at least we're working and being productive and providing for things. Or if you're younger and you're not old enough for paid employment – watch this, young people – your responsibility and the way that you live out your obedience to this aspect of the command is you doing the part of the household chores that your parents give to you to do, even if it's just the simplest thing as a young person, 7 or 8 years old, you do that. You know, you can do your part even at that age, even if your part is just small.

Now, another think that's humbling about these things is what the Bible uses to teach us and here at our second point, let me just get the second point stated out. We said consider the word of God, secondly, you need to consider the world of nature. Consider the world of nature. And I know that some of you, especially you younger children, like bugs and all that kind of stuff, well, here's a perfect text for you. What the Bible tells us to do is to look at lesser creatures that do not have our strength and skill and to let them become the pattern for your own life. This is incredible.

Look at what Proverbs 6:6 says, it says, "Go to the ant, O sluggard, Observe her ways and be wise, Which, having no chief, Officer or ruler, Prepares her food in the summer And gathers her provision in the harvest." Now, let's stop here for just a moment because I want to make an important point and reinforce my introduction. This whole idea, do great things, do hard things and, you know, you can be whatever you want to be kind of stuff sounds really great, especially when you've got fog lights on the stage and a loud band to back up what you're saying, but how does that fit with the simple clarity of what Scripture says? Scripture calls you to do something far more humble, something far more menial, something that literally would put you down at ground level with a bug and says,

"That bug can teach you something," as Solomon tells him to look at the ant, consider the ant.

Now, a little bit of background information for you here. The ant that he refers to is likely what's known as the harvester ant which is found in the land of Israel. It's dependent for its existence on a diet of seeds, and what these ants do is they maintain underground colonies and they have a division of labor even though by human observation there is nothing directing the conduct of their work in order to make these things happen. The amount of grain that these ants store is massive even though they're such small little creatures. And here's what they do, as they collect and store their seeds in their nest, they are providing for themselves going forward in the future when there are not seeds to be found to eat. You say, "Okay, okay, where are you going with this? Where is Solomon going with this?" Let me help you with this: how hard do those ants work? One writer says this, listen to this quote, he says, "So great is the industry of ants that when there is moonlight, they work by night as well as by day. When they reach the cornfield, older ants climb the stocks and throw down the grains to others on the ground. They then carry away the food to their underground homes. They march in columns of 25 yards, 75 feet, and they have been known to transport grains over a distance of 1,000 yards to their nest," two thirds of a mile basically, these little ants are carrying seeds on their back, taking them back to their colonies. Solomon says, "Young person, you look at that and gain instruction for your own life." Now, not all ants everywhere do this but in Israel this particular type of ant has been observed for centuries in everyday life so this was a common observance in the land of Israel that Solomon was drawing upon; the simple aspect of nature saying, "Look at that ant. Look at it go. Look at it carry its body weight for 1,000 yards and store up what it needs in order to eat."

Now, what are you supposed to see from that as you consider the world of nature? Are you writing notes down, young people? I want you to be marking these things down because now we're going to get into what this means for your life and the way that you should be thinking about the way that you should live, and what kind of habits you're going to cultivate as a young person. Step back and just say something as a piece of advice to you: do something sometime, go to any older person in our congregation, and I know for some of you 30 sounds really old, but maybe go to some of the guys that are losing their hair or turning gray or something like that, and ask them a question, ask them, "How hard is it to change your habits at your age?" Do you know what they'll say if they're honest? They'll say, "It's a lot harder than it used to be. "You know, once habits get ingrained either for good or for bad, it's hard to change those. Well, as a young person, what you are doing with your day to day and hour to hour and moment by moment decisions, you are cultivating a pattern of life that is shaping the trajectory of who you will become, and you should consider these ants in order to make good decisions about what you're going to be like.

What can we say about these ants based on the little bit that I just told you? First of all, these ants – oh, watch this one, write this one down, ask your mom and dad to remind you of this point in the future – ants are self-motivated. Ants are self-motivated. From all natural appearances, these ants have no leader commanding them and telling them what

to do. They just work together and each ant goes and does its part without being told what to do. Each ant is working diligently, carrying his responsibility for the greater good of the colony. They are self-motivated that way. They don't have to be told, they just do it. And some of you, I know for certain, some of you have to be told again and again and again simply to do the simplest aspects of your household responsibilities by your parents. That's not right. That's not good. You see, the ant is self-motivated. He doesn't have to be told. He says, "This is what I do. I'm going to go do it." Well, that's what you're supposed to be like. If an ant, if the lowest part of creation can be like that, what's the matter with you and me that we're so lazy that we won't do things on our own initiative? Something's out of order there, isn't it? Well, what's out of order is not the ant, it's you that's out of order, to not just pick up and do what you're supposed to do without being told.

Secondly. These ants are self-motivated. These ants also plan for the future. They plan for the future and oh, young people, do me a favor and if this just seems to be a little bit beyond your realm, mark this message with a bookmark on your webpage and come back to it and listen to it again and again in the future. This is essential for you to understand. Honestly, I beg you, I beg you to hear what I'm about to say and to listen closely. What that ant is doing with what I described, that ant is taking advantage of present opportunity. Acting on God-given instinct, that ant is providing for its future – watch this – it's providing for its future by working now. This call to observe nature is supposed to change your life. You are supposed to think about the future. That's what the ant is doing. Somehow it knows that winter is coming and there is not going to be daily food available to retrieve day by day so they gather things up and they store things so that they have provision going forward when there's not anything to eat. Their work now provides for their needs in the future.

Well, what should you be taking away, young person, especially as you're starting to transition and thinking about college and training and work opportunities, things like that, what are you going to do? Young people, you should be self-motivated and you should plan for the future in the way that you plan your life, and not simply meander along thinking, "I'm just going to do whatever I want to do and I like to be at the beach," not that there's a lot of beaches around here, but you get the idea. You know what I'm saying. When you are able-bodied and healthy, to not be doing something to produce, to act, to make a constructive contribution is sinful. That's the only thing we can say about it. Your responsibility, especially in the dawn of your youth, is to do that which is necessary to provide for yourself and your family long-term whether you have a family yet or not. So your thinking should be in light of what we said, here's how you should think: you should be thinking, "I need to be self-motivated. I need to do things without being told to do them," and secondly, "I need to have an eye toward the future in the way that I approach life." That's what you should do. That's what an ant teaches you to do and if the life of an ant is a rebuke to your soul, humble yourself and receive it and thank God for it because this is straight from God's word that we are talking.

Now, third point: consider the warning against laziness. Consider the warning against laziness. You moms and dads are listening too, right? You guys are tracking with me?

Good, because this is for everybody. And young people, let me just remind you here in the middle at the hinge of my message, the first and second points are done, the third and fourth points to come, young people, please remember that I am on your side as I say these things to you. I don't know anything about what you're like inside your homes except for my own kids and I'll deal with them later. I have no idea. I have no agenda here. It's not like your parent came and told me, "Could you say something because, man, my kid..." No, it's not like that at all. I am on your side. I want your life to go well. You know, some of you are 40 years younger than I am, I'm not going to be here when you're entering into adulthood and I need to be able to tell you these things now so that you would act upon them and carry them with you and experience the blessing of the word of God in your life. That's what I want for you. I'm on your side. You get that, right? I'm for you. That's why you're in here. We want you here.

Now, third point: consider the warning against laziness. Young people, there is a lethal self-deception that is inherent in your laziness. There is something that is an enemy to your soul in your laziness that I know that you don't recognize right now, and God's word is here to help us recognize that so that we can separate ourselves from it, and here's what you need to understand: usually there are no immediate adverse consequences to your laziness. Nothing bad happens to you immediately because you're lazy one day and lazy the next and lazy the next and procrastinating, "I'll do that another time," that kind of thing. Nothing immediately bad happens to you. Your arm doesn't fall off. Your head doesn't swivel around weirdly. Life just goes on and the next day is kind of like the last day was, even though you were lazy in the midst of it. Now, here's the thing, and we're all like this, adults, we're all like this: because there are no immediate consequences to our laziness, we tend to think that there are no adverse consequences at all. You say, "Well, nothing bad happened yesterday when I didn't do anything. I won't do anything again today. And nothing bad happened and so I just keep doing that." And so you start to think, "Well, this doesn't matter. I can be lazy and everything can still be okay." Do you know what that is? That's not true. That's an utter falsehood.

Look at verses 9 and 10, Proverbs 6, "How long will you lie down, O sluggard? When will you arise from your sleep?" Then he quotes, as it were, the thinking of a sluggard. He says, "A little sleep, a little slumber, A little folding of the hands to rest." I'm just going to sleep a little longer. I'm just going to rest right now. Verse 11, "Your poverty will come in like a vagabond And your need like an armed man." I'll give you an easy test. Do you want to know if you're lazy or not? I'll tell you. I'll tell you if you're lazy or not, older people as well. Do you know how to recognize a lazy person? A lazy person is not the man who says, "I will never work," because very few people really speak that way, certainly not in any kind of biblically informed Christian circles. No, the lazy person – oh, this is going to sting like a bee, it's going to sting like a bee but let it sting – the lazy person is the one who says, "Not right now." There is a job that needs to be done, "Not right now, mom. A little bit later." One writer said this about that, he says this lazy person, "He does not commit himself to a refusal but he deceives himself by the smallness of his surrenders, so by inches and minutes, his opportunity slips away." You see, it's not the deception, the danger in your soul is not just that stated, outward, complete, verbal rebellion that says, "I'm never going to work," that's not it. Very few

people are like that and are that flagrant about it. What you find is the person that says, "Not right now. Maybe tomorrow. Maybe later," when there's no good reason not to do it now.

Now, here's the thing, my young friends: each little incident of that kind of laziness, "Not right now. Not right now," may not produce a bad result and maybe tomorrow you do get to it and do it. Maybe. But here's the thing and here is the core of everything that you need to be thinking about in the way that you approach your moment to moment life. This is at the core of what kind of person you're going to become in this context of what we're talking about. You know what the problem is with those acts of laziness? One act of laziness makes it easier for you to be lazy the next time, and the next time, and the next time. And do you know what individual acts of laziness produce? A lazy character. A lazy character and so they start to add up. There is this cumulative impact of your moment by moment choices that you make, "Not right now. Not right now," and you just without even being aware of it, you become a lazy person and a very bad trajectory has been set for your life simply because of the way that you approached things as a youth.

Let me give you a little illustration. Any time I talk anything automotive, you know that I'm stepping outside of my realm of understanding but I'm going to say something here that I think is pretty true. We have people in the church that could verify this for me later or correct me. Assume that you have a well-maintained car and you keep that car up but you go on a long trip or things come up and you miss a single oil change and then you get back to maintaining the car according to schedule. You know, the truth of the matter, that one missed oil change isn't going to ruin that engine. It will go on and you won't even notice the difference once you catch up with the routine. But do you know what? You start missing many oil changes and you go and instead of going 3,000 you go 10, 15, 20, 30,000 miles without an oil change, that will kill your engine little bit by little bit by a little bit and suddenly your car is not working even though everything seemed to be going along just fine. There is this cumulative impact. For those of you that watch your weight, you can eat a french fry and not have it do you any harm. It's not going to balloon your weight by 20 pounds by having one single french fry, crispy, golden brown. Yeah, let's not go there. But if you just start eating handfuls of french fries day after day after day, don't come to any of us and say, "Why aren't my clothes fitting?" There is a cumulative impact to it. Now, here's the thing, beloved, in the context of what we're talking about: one single individual act of laziness, yeah, I get it, it doesn't really affect anything, but that one leads to another one and makes it easier and you start to just combine these things and all of a sudden before you know it, a month has gone by and six months have gone by, and all that you really have to show for your life is some tussled bedsheets and nothing, and you haven't produced anything in the interim time. You see, these questions in verse 9, are designed to rouse you out of your laziness and prompt you to act.

Look at verse 9 with me again, "How long will you lie down? How much sleep do you really need?" And then there is this warning that says, verse 11, when you approach life like that, "Just a little bit more sleep. Just another half hour or so," and that's the way that you run your life, verse 11 says, "Your poverty will come in like a vagabond, your need like an armed man." Here's what he's saying and you have the opportunity to avoid this

disastrous result if you heed God's word now. What he's doing here is he is personifying poverty. He's acting like poverty, the condition of poverty is a person in order to make a point, and he says, "If you don't deal with this, what's going to happen is that poverty is going to suddenly burst on your life and you're not going to be in a position to defend it. It's like an armed robber bursts into your house and you don't have any way of defending yourself and the poverty just takes over and you're not in a position to do anything." Why? Because you have conditioned yourself to be lazy and by conditioning yourself in that manner, you're now unable to defend yourself and get yourself out of your bad situation.

Poverty is an ever-present threat and the lazy man – listen to me, track with me here – the lazy man is like the man who does not lock his door to keep the robber out. You know from God's word that the robbers are out there, you know that poverty and not having enough is out there but your laziness is like throwing the door open and saying, "Come in and dominate my life." Why would you do that? You see, young people, here's the thing: sooner or later, your laziness and your inaction is going to catch up with you and when it catches up with you, it's going to be too late to do anything about it. A similar thing has happened in our society with all of the wickedness that has taken over; just incrementally, step by step by step it expanded and expanded and it was never stopped and for all of the reasons that we could attribute to that, now it has got us in its clutches and there is really not any human reason to think that it's going to get any better. Why? Because of all of the incremental surrenders that were made over a course of many many years, now it has struck and we're in the grasp of it and there are reasons to think it's going to get worse, not better. But you see, here's the thing, old people, what else am I going to call you? Young people, what's the opposite of young, old? I don't know. Old people, what has happened in our society as a result of all of these incremental things and then suddenly it bursts on the scene, this didn't just happen. There was a whole process that led up to this inability to change things. Young people, sometimes poverty bursts on someone's life and when you trace it back, you see, "Do you know what? They never held a job. They never tried. They were drunk. They were on drugs. They were doing other things. They preferred to party rather than to work and apply themselves." Well, Scripture says, "Yeah, that's what happens. Yeah, you're drinking the fruit of your own labor now." Now, let me just say this: not all poverty is caused by laziness. That's all I'm going to say about that. I get that. Some people are in poverty through no fault of their own but, young people, we're not talking about that with you today. What we're saying is Scripture tells you laziness leads to poverty and when it hits, you lack the power to overcome it.

So what do you do then knowing that this principle is embedded in God's moral universe, how do you avoid that awful result in the future? In large part, you avoid it by being productive and active today. Moment by moment, hour by hour, making use of your time in productive ways, doing what your boss tells you to do, doing what your parents tell you to do with a happy attitude and responsive and saying, "Yes, ma'am. Yes, sir." And going and doing it and not resisting it just because you want to sit for another 10 minutes. Don't do that. And if you're like that, you need to repent and reorient the whole direction of your heart in response to God's word, and having said that, recognizing that God tells us this in order to bring about blessing in our lives and in your life.

Okay, now I'm going to help you. Final point, point 4: consider the way ahead. Consider the way ahead. We said to consider the word of God, consider the world of nature and consider the warning against laziness. Here are some practical suggestions to overcome laziness, not necessarily directly out of Scripture but consistent with everything that we've talked about here today. Here are some practical suggestions for you to overcome laziness. I'm going to give you five, okay? These are easy. This isn't difficult.

Point 1 in avoiding, overcoming laziness, point 1, it's pretty complicated so I just need to prepare you for that. There is a lot of technical Greek in what I'm about to say here, technical Hebrew since we're in the Old Testament. Point 1, are you ready? Get up. Yeah, that's it. Get up. There is a place for you to sleep. Ecclesiastes 5:12 says the sleep of the working man is pleasant. But young people, when your sleep is over and you've gotten the sleep that you need, get up. Get out of bed. You can't work if you don't get up. Am I making this too complicated? I hope not. Get up, that's the first thing. Here's how you overcome laziness, start by getting out of bed and not laying in bed all day.

Secondly, take out the garbage. Yeah. Yeah, it's really this simple. Take out the garbage. Go into your room and look and see if there is order or disorder in your room. Is there dirty laundry piled up? Have you got garbage, trash piled up all around? All kinds of disorder? Well, if you're serious about overcoming laziness, start there. Start in that little realm in which you live and say, "At least I'll put this into order." So take out the garbage. Clean the place up. Even better yet, taking out the garbage, I know you're taking that literally because that's the way I presented it, but to take out the garbage also has the sense of get away from the things that are making unproductive use of your time. Get the garbage of bad habits out of your life and say, "This does nothing to do anything productive. I'm getting rid of it. I'll stop doing that and I'll do something else instead." Take out the garbage of wasted time and replace it with something productive.

Thirdly, are you with me? Get up and take out the garbage. I can't make it any more practical than that, I don't think. Thirdly, and here's something that's really helpful. This has made a big big difference in my own life: finish what you've started. Finish what you've started. Look at your life, old people, you do the same thing. Look at your life and look at the useful things that you started but left unfinished. You walked away from a good project for whatever reason. You started a book but you didn't finish it. Well, to overcome laziness, go back to that point of departure where you had something good going and you left it for whatever reason, go back to that point where you departed and finish it. Take what good impulse started but for some reason commitment did not complete.

So get up. Take out the garbage. Finish what you started. Fourthly, start something new. Are there useful things that you know could be done but you shied away from them because it seems like it's too big? It'll take too long? Here's the thing: part of overcoming laziness and, remember, it's not about the project per se, we're talking about a bigger character issue. The bigger character issue is what we're after and we're just finding ways to cultivate that character. So if there is something really worth while but it's a big project

and this will take a long time, start it and apply yourself day by day by day. Don't look for, "I'm going to do six hours of really great work," just be faithful in the moment by moment opportunity that you have. Little by little being faithful on those big projects will cultivate the character that you need to be diligent and to act accordingly.

Point 5: repeat. Do it again. You see, it's all about consistency and perseverance in doing it. So once you walk out or maybe today, tomorrow you get up, you take out the garbage, as it were, you finish what you started, you start something new, the next day, do the same thing again. The next day, do the same thing again. Remember what Jesus said, "He who is faithful in a little will be faithful in much." And if you love the Lord Jesus Christ and you want to be in a position of fruitful service to him somewhere down your road, friends, understand that that doesn't just drop into somebody's life. It is the overflow, it is the outworking of a step by step quiet faithfulness when no one is watching. It comes to a character of one who says, "I don't care if the world is watching and I don't care if I ever do great things. It would be nice if I did but I don't care if I ever do great things, hard things." The hard thing for you, the really hard thing for a person to do, what's really noble in hard things is to say, "I'm going to submit myself to the Spirit of God and exercise a spirit of self-discipline in my life day by day by day and let the Lord lead that where he would take it to go." The fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

So, young people, we've talked in broad principles here, hopefully enough to get you going in the right direction. Ask your loving mom or dad, "What do you see that I could do better?" Humble yourself under this because the instruction of God's word will lead you to good things if you follow it day by day.

Let's pray together.

Our Father, as we started the message we emphasized that everything starts with taking up your cross, denying yourself, taking up your cross and following after Christ. We don't want to lose sight of that. Father, some of these young people need to be saved. Father, I pray that your Spirit would bring the Lord Jesus Christ so clearly to their mind and that perhaps something convicting that was said today would cause them to recognize their sin and turn from it and receive Christ for salvation. We would love that to take place.

Father, for those who are young believers in Christ just starting out on life and the horizons are all ahead, God, be gracious to them and work this spirit of industry and self-discipline into their lives so that they wouldn't squander it with all of the distractions that come from inside their own hearts and that are continually offered to them by the world. Be gracious to them, Father. And Father, it's not that we don't want great things to happen in their lives, we just don't want to bypass simple faithfulness for the sake of someone flattering us about great things. That doesn't mean anything if we're not faithful in the little things. Jesus commended those who gave a cup of water to his disciples who went to visit someone that was sick or in prison and said, "When you did that, you did it

for me," even when there were no lights shining, no cameras rolling, no one knew about it. Father, help us to be those kinds of faithful Christians today and going forward.

And having said that, Father, we pray that for some, some of the young men that are in the room even now, on the front end of life, Father, that the pursuit of self-discipline would lead them into a service to Christ, a service to his word, to become a great man of God. But Father, that doesn't happen in their lives unless they seek to be faithful in the little things first. So help them to start there and to embrace it as something good and honorable and noble from Christ and bless them Father. Bless these young people, these boys and girls, these young men and young women, full of aspirations, full of hope, full of the excitement of life being ahead in the things that they want to pursue. Bless every desire of their heart, Father, as they live for Christ. Sanctify them in the truth. Help them to live a life that is worthy of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Keep them strong in the Lord. Protect them from sin, temptation and Satan. And Father, order their steps so that without fail each one under the sound of this word would enter safely into your heavenly kingdom one day. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

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