

“WISDOM FOR WORKING HARD.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

September 6, 2026, 10:30 AM

Text for Sermon: Proverbs 6:6-8

Introduction.

We are talking about living wisely and well in a fallen and foolish world. Or to say it another way, we are talking about living wisely and well among fools without becoming one. But sin has made us all fools, so we need wisdom from God to overcome the folly of sin.

To live wisely and well you have to live with the goal, the destination in mind, you have to live with an eye on eternity, on God's ways, not the world's ways.

Proverbs gives us God's wisdom for every facet of our lives from birth to death and everything in between. So it stands to reason that work would be a significant topic in Proverbs since work constitutes a huge part of all of our lives. We all work and benefit from those who work.

The world is against work.

The problem we encounter when talking about work is the world is against work. We humans seem to have a love-hate relationship with work. Many see work as that necessary evil we have to do as a means of survival. That is all the motivation they have. And if given the opportunity to be able to survive without working, they would take it.

We are increasingly seeing generations of younger people adverse to hard work. We hear cries for a four day work weeks. We want more time off for personal time, maternity and paternity leave, more vacation days, etc. Our culture increasingly treats leisure as the goal and work is an unfortunate interruption.

God is for work.

So we need to do a reset. We need to know what God says about work and then we need to shift our attitude in response to what God says. Remember the options, wisdom or folly.

Why do we work? Is the goal of work just to make a living, to make money and then hopefully have enough at some point so we don't have to work anymore?

Let me give a basic ***Biblical theology of work***. Straight from the Bible, from God's wisdom.

The first mention of work in the Bible is in Genesis

Genesis 2:2–3 On the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.

Three times it says God worked. Let's be clear work is not a curse, it is not because of the fall. God worked and God still works. God is working all through history to rescue and redeem mankind, to turn back the curse of the fall.

Second, we are made in the image of God and our working reflects that image.

Third, we are called to work. It is part of the creation mandate. It is the ***first command*** of God for his image bearers.

Genesis 1:28 God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

Work is God's idea, He created it and created us for it. The entire economic system on earth is God's design and purpose. He didn't have to make our world this way. Just look at the angels, they don't make money or live in houses or drive cars or grow gardens. Our work is ordained by God, it is a divinely given gift created by God, who created us to do it. It is a life-long calling.

Gen. 2:15 The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.

"The world is God's garden, and He asks each of us (in our own ways and with our own gifts and resources) to make His garden beautiful. God has made each of us gardeners, made us responsible to tend and nurture His vast, abundant creation" (John Robin).

Work has inherent, intrinsic value and dignity. All work is sacred. It is from God and it is fundamentally good and pleasing to God. All work is an act of obedience to God. Your work is important and valuable. We are made in the image of God who is a God of work, so we work.

The temptation not to work.

We all battle a temptation to not work, to be lazy and slothful, to procrastinate, to put off doing, to resent having to work, to see it as a necessary evil, to long for the weekend and to long for the day when we don't have to work.

Our labor is hard because of the curse of the fall, and because the enemy of our souls tries every way he can to make anything good from God into something bad.

Sin and Satan influence us and create a desire to be lazy, or to use Proverbs word, to be a ***sluggard***. What is a sluggard? A habitually lazy person, someone who just wants to sleep, be a couch potato, put forth as little effort as possible, to not give their best effort. This is not about someone who for good reasons is unable to work. This is a person who is able to work, but is simply unwilling to work, the sluggard is sinfully slothful.

Proverbs 6:6-11

God wants us to learn the wisdom of hard work and he uses the productivity of the ant to teach us. In our laziness the ant rebukes us. It is humbling, shameful to have an ant as our teacher.

Though incredibly small, weak, frail, the ant is diligent, industrious, wise, prudent and hard working. Notice, the ant doesn't have anyone to rebuke or correct or hold accountable or watch over the shoulder. He doesn't need someone to prod, wake up, motivate him. He is wise, considers the future, plans ahead, takes responsibility. He is self-disciplined, a self-starter who takes initiative, who uses time and energy wisely and well.

The sluggard procrastinates to his own detriment and others. He substitutes wishing for working.

His problem is not rest, but refusing to get up and do what needs to be done.

The slothful sluggard avoids responsibility, wastes time in endless entertainment, fails to prepare and neglects to finish, all the while making excuses. We all want to be lazy.

How many of us procrastinated in school, with an assignment or preparation for an exam and paid for it? We know the cost and the foolishness of it.

We all carry an extraordinarily powerful tool in our pockets for wasting time. The modern version of "a little sleep, a little slumber" is now a little YouTube, a little Facebook, a little Instagram, a little scrolling, a little video game, repeated for hours.

Working hard or hardly working.

Every day you face a choice of what you are going to do and how you are going to do it. Every day we will be tempted to take the easy way, the low road, the path of compromise or procrastination.

Here is the ironic twist to taking the easy way or the hard way. It is the lesson of the ant.

Satan spreads a deceptive lie that the easy way is easy. It only looks easy. Once you start down the easy way it starts turning into the hard way. It leads down a road to poverty, destruction, misery, starvation and financial hardship.

The easy way is the way of wasted hours, days, months, years, frittered away in mindless activities, entertainment, screens, games. Or relying on others all the time.

The hard way looks hard, but once you do the hard thing in life it becomes the easy road. It is the road of blessing, fulfillment. It leads to a harvest.

In Proverbs the opposite of the sluggard is the diligent, the hard working, the one who is upright (13:4; 15:19). Remember the prudent, the one who not only sees, but foresees, who looks ahead, who anticipates, plans, prepares.

The hard path is getting up early enough to spend time with the Lord in Scripture and prayer even when you don't feel like it. The hard way requires planning, diligence, integrity, giving your best, doing what you are asked to do, even going above and beyond. The hard way calls for sacrifice, putting others first, putting God's kingdom first ahead of our own interests or the interests of our career of achievement.

The hard path is getting off the couch or out of the basement or garage. The hard way is making no more excuses and getting in the game, at home, at work, at church, in the community.

What road are you on? What road do you want to be on? You reap what you sow. What are you sowing now and what kind of harvest will it produce? What would an ant say to you?

How many unfinished tasks or projects are there in your life, things started and left undone, books started and not finished, the list started and still waiting to be completed? What is undone in your life? How many times do you do the minimum to slide by?

Girls, don't date a guy who doesn't work, or complains about working or just does the least he can, who is self-centered.

Parents, teach your kids to work before they need money. Teach them the basics of a good work ethic.

There is a ditch on the other side of the road from being a sluggard, it's being a workaholic. Both are idolatry, both are sinful approaches to work.

The sluggard and the workaholic are self-centered and self-motivated.

The sluggard idolizes his free time. The workaholic idolizes his work time. The one makes pleasure his god, the other makes work and career his god.

The sluggard craves comfort and ease, in his laziness he refuses to work. The workaholic is driven by desires for success, wealth, position, self-worth, control, or greed.

The sluggard needs to get off the couch, the workaholic needs to get off the treadmill.

Work-Life Balance.

One more thing about work and the deception of work-life balance.

The modern idea of "work-life balance" treats work and personal life as opposing enemies. The idea of "balance" assumes that "work" is a necessary evil that steals

our happiness and therefore is a burden to escape, and "life" is what happens only during leisure time.

The term assumes work and life are two distinct entities fighting on a seesaw, creating guilt and stress as we constantly try to find a 50/50 split between work and life.

The modern balance model assumes your job is secular and your personal time is sacred or meaningful. All of life is lived ***Coram Deo*** (in the presence of, under the authority of, and to the glory of God). A Christian's job, home life, marriage, parenting, and rest and play are all part of serving God, and all belong entirely to Him.

The Bible commands a rhythm of work and rest. God gave us the Sabbath pattern: six days of faithful labor and one day of holy rest.

Implications and application.

There is another kind of sluggard and that is the ***spiritual sluggard*** who squanders God's gifts of grace, and the means of grace given us. Who procrastinates or neglects time to read Scripture and pray, lead the family in spiritual growth, with eternity in view? Not investing in heavenly fruit and rewards, taking their salvation for granted.

Why do we think ***hard work*** is such a virtue in the physical world but not in the spiritual world? Why are fathers proud their sons are such hard workers, but lazy spiritually? What does it profit a man to gain the whole world and lose his soul?

Paul calls us to spiritual work and spiritual effort. We don't coast into Christlikeness or drift into holiness.

Especially don't be a sluggard when it comes to sin. But be diligent in rooting it out and fighting against temptation. Take advantage of the summer of your life before winter comes. How impoverished are our souls from neglect, from laziness?

I say something at every graveside service I do about the folly of investing and planning for the next 20, 30, 40 years and neglecting to plan for the next 10,000 years.

Sloth and laziness are a sin, and they produce bad fruit. It must be disciplined and trained out of children, and it must be resisted by all of us, and never excused or blamed on others or circumstances.

Proverbs offers a better way: Work diligently, work faithfully, work wisely, honestly, humbly, and remember that your ultimate master is the Lord.

"I am not ultimately working for my employer. I am working for Christ."

Press on with earnestness. Confess your stumbling efforts and failures, confess what you haven't done, don't resign yourself to where you are, or that any effort is hopeless at this point or that you are too old. Lies, all lies from the pit of hell. Heed Paul's admonition:

Galatians 6:8b-9 ... the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. 9 And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.

Remember the Gospel. Your work matters, but your work doesn't save you. We do not work in order to be accepted by God. We work because, in Christ, we have already been accepted by God. In Christ we are new workers, made new by Word and Spirit, transformed by the wisdom of God with a new perspective on our work and why we do it and how we do it.

Ephesians 2:10 We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Colossians 3:23-24 Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, 24 knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.