



VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH

SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

Seven Deadly Sins

Part 5: Sloth: Old Lazy Bones

Tim Badal | September 4, 2016 | Proverbs 6:6–11



As we continue our series on the Seven Deadly Sins, we'll be in Proverbs again today. Up to this point we have addressed three of the sins: pride, envy and gluttony. I was at a wedding reception yesterday and some of our church folk were also there. There was a beautiful buffet and everybody who remembered last week's sermon was struggling—until they saw me in the line. Then they felt just fine.

This series has been a great incentive to really take stock of what we do and how we as Christians should be renewed in our fight against sin. Sin can be insidiously subtle, infiltrating our lives in ways we don't expect. So each week we're looking at one of these sins which the early church fathers said were the source of all sins and infractions. Because the church did not yet have written Bibles, this gave them a way to define their fight against sin and how to find victory in Christ Jesus through His death, burial and resurrection.

Today we'll be dealing with an issue that's a little different from the first three. In each of those, we have told you what not to do, or what to stop doing. This week we're going to tell you, "You need to start doing something." We'll be talking about laziness, a subject that a lot of us, quite frankly, don't want to think about on Labor Day weekend. During the summer I had the opportunity to speak at a family camp. Talk about being a vicious speaker—during their week of vacation I challenged the people to not be lazy. Today I'll draw from some of what I taught them, sharing with you what it means to be productive individuals rather than what my Grammie used to call an "old lazy bones."

Because we know that God Himself is creative and active in doing good works, we are called to imitate Him. We must not fall to the sin of laziness. So let's go to Proverbs 6 to learn about the sin the early church called the "sin of sloth." Proverbs 6, starting in verse 6, goes like this:

- ⁶ *Go to the ant, O sluggard;
consider her ways, and be wise.*
- ⁷ *Without having any chief,
officer, or ruler,*
- ⁸ *she prepares her bread in summer
and gathers her food in harvest.*
- ⁹ *How long will you lie there, 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 *and poverty will come upon you like a robber,
and want like an armed man.*

There's something about each of these sermons that greatly tempts us to look at the person sitting beside us, thinking, "This is a great sermon for So-and-So." Many of us as parents quickly look at our children and say, "Slothfulness. Sluggardness. Laziness. Boy, I hope my teenagers are listening—they really need to hear this."

I want to remind you that the issue of laziness—the "way of the sluggard," as the Bible calls it—is a message we each need to hear. It's a message that should resonate in each of our hearts, because quite frankly we live in a lazy world. I don't spend a lot of time on Pinterest, but Amanda said Pinterest might have some ideas regarding laziness. I went to that site and found some things that describe us:

- The lazy rule: You can't reach it? You don't need it.
- Organized people are just too lazy to look for things.
- I was going to do something today, but I haven't finished doing nothing from yesterday.
- I'm very busy doing things I don't need to do in order to avoid doing anything I actually am supposed to be doing.
- I'm sorry for my repeated check-ins at the gym that remind you of how lazy you are.
- If there was an award for laziness, I'd probably send someone to pick it up for me.
- You call me lazy. I call it selective participation.
- I'm not lazy. I'm just in my energy-saving mode.
- Of course Nike says, "Just do it," but our lazy world says, "Let's just do it...tomorrow."
- Lazy people fact 35463098210.... Aw, you know what? We were too lazy to even read the number.
- Rabbits jump, and they live for eight years. Dogs run and they live for 15 years. Turtles do nothing, and they live for 150 years.

Lesson learned, right? We can now close in prayer...

Our world is a lazy world. We believe it's okay for us to be lazy. Here's the thing again that I want to be careful with: As we look at the subject of laziness, please understand that I am not being critical of rest and relaxation for those who work hard. We know from the Scriptures that God worked very hard for six days, then He rested on the seventh day. There's nothing wrong with that. You should not feel guilty when you take a nap. You shouldn't feel guilty when you've worked hard and you take some time as a family to go on vacation. That's not what I'm talking about.

The issue of sloth the early church talked about is an idea that comes from Scripture itself. We are allured into not fulfilling the calling God has given us. The book of Proverbs describes the lifestyle and characteristics of a lazy person, saying we are not called to be slow or inactive regarding what God has called us to do.

The Bible says a lazy person is a sluggard, a word we don't use very often these days. It can be defined as "a spiritually or emotionally apathetic person who neglects what God has spoken and who is being physically and emotionally inactive." It could further be defined either as an outright refusal—or merely carelessness—in the performance of one's obligations, especially with regard to spiritual, moral or legal matters. Slothfulness can also indicate the wasting of time or resources due to lack of use. A sloth is unwilling to do what it takes for proper maintenance of their lives, their refinement or their willingness to support others.

So as Christians we might ask, "How important is it that I not be a lazy person? I'm not really hurting anyone if I'm lazy, am I? I'm only affecting myself." But we must recognize that there are four areas where our laziness can impact the lives of those around us.

First, when you are given to laziness, it is possible that you will have financial issues. If you're lazy and procrastinate and don't pay your bills, what will happen? They'll start turning things off. They'll say, "We don't know what you're doing over there at 410 Prairie View Lane, but if you're not going to pay your bills, we'll shut off the gas and the lights. We may even put an eviction sign on your house. If you don't actively pay your bills as you're supposed to, we'll start taking things away from you." So laziness can impact the financial integrity of a home.

Second—and this is important for kids who are starting back to school—laziness can cause you to flunk your classes. You've been given assignments, but you'd rather go out and play, or you'd rather hang out with your friends, instead of doing the work you've been given. Your teacher says, "This is not come-as-you-are, do-as-you-want. This is school." When teachers assign papers or projects, and you're too lazy to do them, they're *not* going to say, "That's all right. We all know you're plenty smart. We'll just continue to move you along." No. They'll recognize you're not accomplishing the required work. So instead of seeing A's and B's and maybe even C's, you're going to see D's and F's. And that will cause consternation when you're not promoted to the next grade, and eventually you'll even struggle to graduate.

Besides problems with education, laziness can also cause fiascos within the family. If my job as a father is to provide for and lead my family, if I'm not doing that, someone else will fill the gap. Someone else will stand in my place. The question is: am I living out my call and my obligations as a father?

When I was young we sang a song in children's church in which one of the verses talked about how everybody in the family needed to be active. It said, "Daddy mows the back yard, Mommy makes the bed, my brother cleans the play room, and I see the dog gets fed." It speaks of the roles each of us plays. Everyone in the family has a job to do and even the smallest tasks matter.

So dads, you're called to provide for and to lead your family—spiritually and emotionally. Moms, you're there to help nurture the family and to see that the house is a place of order, comfort and love—all the good things a family needs in the home. Kids—depending on your age—you've got a calling. Your first task is simple: obey Mom and Dad. Whatever you're told to do, it should be done, not in a lazy manner, but in a manner that is pleasing to the Lord. So when the family is lazy, it will find itself in all kinds of craziness that doesn't honor God.

Finally, laziness causes us to start failing spiritually. If you're a follower of Jesus Christ and you've fallen prey to this American heresy that says, "All I need to do is pray a prayer and walk down the aisle and a couple other spiritual things, then from that point on, I don't have to do anything. I can live however I want. I can spend my time and my money however I like. I don't owe anybody anything. I've got my fire insurance to keep me out of hell. I'm good to go."

The Bible makes it clear that we are to work out our salvation with fear and trembling. Just as we work every day to provide for our families, we must daily work out the salvation we've been freely given by grace through faith. We must recognize our personal responsibility in the process of sanctification. Every day we must choose to honor God in the way we speak, in the way we spend our money and in the way we use our time. If we don't do these things, but are lazy—not reading God's Word, or not becoming part of a church community—then we will begin to fail spiritually and will miss out on the blessings God has for us.

So these are four areas that can be affected by our laziness, impacting not only ourselves, but also others around us. You see, the Bible makes it clear that God has created us to be stewards. Throughout Scripture we are called to be good stewards of the resources, the time and the very life we've been given.

On the day of judgment, your laziness and mine will be brought up before us by a holy and righteous God. He will ask us, "What did you do with those 70 (or 80 or 40) years I gave you? Were you productive? Did you use all your time and opportunities to serve Me and serve the gospel? Or were you lazy and given to other things?"

Laziness is unbecoming of a Christian. The idea of being a sloth or sluggard is unbecoming for the child of God. Why is this so?

1. Laboring dates back to the beginning of time.

In order to combat the sin of sloth, we must remember that for all of human history we have been a people given to work—both for a living and for our wellbeing. In Genesis 1 and 2 we see that in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth, which required a great deal of laboring. And because God is to be our model, then we also are called to be like Him in our work.

The creation story reminds us that our Creator wasn't lazy.

Besides revealing the eternity of God—Who already existed "in the beginning" and Who will always exist—the next truth Genesis gives us is that He's a working God. He is not a lazy, lounging, "R&R" God, but a God Who created. He enjoyed His work. As He created things, He would say, "It is good! This is great!" He enjoyed the opportunity He had to make an imprint of Himself all over the world.

As we look at the created world, what do we see? God did not just create one or two things—He created billions of things. We see the vast variety of plants and animals and rock structures He's made. We see the atmosphere He created so that we might have life and breath. We can easily say, "God really loved what He was making." We look through our telescopes as far as we can into the galaxies, and what do we learn? As far as we can see with all of our telescopes, all we learn is there is more space out there, more stars we can't yet see. God created an immense universe, more than we can even imagine. Then we take the microscope to look at things invisible to the naked eye, and again we discover more and more things God created.

As we observe the human body, we are amazed that none of the seven billion people on this earth look alike. God did not make a bunch of copies, but formed us as unique individuals. God wasn't lazy in His creation. He shows us the great joy that we too can

have in being productive and finding pleasure in the fruits of our labors. As Christians, it is very clear that if we are to represent God in our world, then it is unbecoming for us to show any laziness whatsoever.

The creation story reminds us that God completed the task before Him.

Several years ago Amanda and I decided to build an addition on our house that would allow us to host events like the volunteer appreciation night we had last Sunday. I remember we wanted the project done by Christmas morning. Our team of contractors and builders hit it out of the ballpark. It was done in time, and the inside looked beautiful. But if you remember a few years ago, right after Christmas we fell into what they called “the polar vortex” when it reached 25 degrees below zero. The problem was that while the inside was done—painting, carpeting, everything was working—the outside had Menards Tyvek on it. I remember talking with a neighbor in March, three months after the date when I thought the project was done. My neighbor asked, “How’s the new place?” I said, “I’m so glad it’s done.” He said, “Hey, hey, wait a minute. It’s not done. It had better not be done. I don’t want to look out my window and see the word Tyvek on the side walls. It’s not complete.”

You see, part of our laziness is that as long as it works for us, we’re fine. That’s how I felt when I was sitting in front of my TV in a warm, carpeted, painted room, and I didn’t have to think about the outside. But the project wasn’t complete. We can fall prey to thinking that the projects in our lives are “good enough for now.” We can live with them—but they’re not really done.

But if we go back and consider what God completed, our hearts should be convicted. When we look at creation, we don’t see a world that’s incomplete. We won’t look at the moon tonight and see what we saw in the movie “Star Wars”—a half-completed Death Star. We don’t have to say, “Well, God’s working on the moon. It’s still buffering. He’ll get it done when He’s good and ready. He’s still waiting on some things.” No, it’s a completed moon. It’s a completed sun.

We don’t look at our bodies and think, “It sure would be nice to have a right arm, but I’m waiting for God to finish my body.” No, He finished it. He made us complete. He didn’t leave us with something lacking. He gave us what we need to go through life. He did not leave things unfinished.

And if we’re going to follow His model, then when we take on a project, when we say we’re going to do something, we need to bring it to full completion. Notice that in the creation process, no one had to remind God to “get on with this.” No one had to ask Him when He would get it finished. No, He completed it. He never had to be reminded to get back to work. The Bible says one of God’s attributes is His faithfulness in all matters. Therefore, He never calls in sick. He never asks for an extension or an exemption.

In fact, when Paul speaks of our salvation in Galatians 4:4, he says, “At just the right time Jesus came and was born of a woman under the law.” He didn’t delay. He didn’t say, “I fell behind because of traffic,” or, “Jesus would have come sooner had things in heaven been okay. But the devil really messed things up when a third of the angels fell, so we’re behind on productivity here.” No. At just the right time—and in just the right way—the plan of salvation was not delayed. There was no request for an extension of time. It was done just as He said it would be.

The creation story reminds us that God calls us to work, not as a curse.

So we need to take seriously the opportunity we have to model God’s faithfulness, asking Him, “How do we do this?” Because God made us like Himself, and because He’s a working God, He has created us to be a working people. He calls us to work, but not as a curse. The first job that is given to Adam, in Genesis 2:15, is to keep the Garden. He was to take care of the Garden that in turn would take care of him. So work has a circular nature to it. As Adam did something for the earth, it would in turn bring something back to him—and to us.

And remember, Genesis 2:15 takes place before Adam and Eve fall into sin. So if any of you wonder, “Why do I have to work? What a curse this work is! I don’t want to do it. I wish Adam and Eve hadn’t sinned, because then I wouldn’t have to go to work”—here’s the problem: it’s not biblically true. Adam was given the task of caring for the Garden—working—long before sin entered the world.

The creation story reminds us that work is a command for our good.

You heard it right. Work is a blessing from God for our good. Now, that statement is offensive on a weekend like Labor Day weekend. But work is good.

When was the last time that you, as a follower of Jesus Christ, took time to thank God for the opportunity to work? “Lord, thank You that I get up really, really early in the morning and work my tail off into the evening. Lord, thank You for that. What a blessing!” It just sounds weird saying it out loud, right? “Lord, thanks that I get to go and do the same thing over and over and over again. I

punch out from the same factory, or go to the same sales calls—it just doesn't seem right. I've got to spend time with the same kids at the same school." It doesn't seem like it would be a blessing.

But I want you to know that even though our world says we are to "work for the weekend," in reality work is one of the best things God has given us. Here's why: Work enables us to create things and relate to the world around us. Work allows us to see our gifts and how God has made us. It allows us to serve others. As I go to work, I'm able to provide for my family. I'm able to bring joy and satisfaction to my customers.

Work is also a protection. It keeps us from sin and trouble. I once heard it said that while laziness may not seem to be that big of a sin, laziness is one of the causes of all the major sins in Scripture. That's because a person had to have time and be bored enough to do the things they had been thinking about that went against God's Word and will.

When I was young, I would tell my dad, "I want to stay out later. I want a later curfew." But my dad would always say, "What good can come with boys who have nothing better to do in the middle of the night? Only trouble." I once read a *Wall Street Journal* article about the plight of the inner city. They claimed that one reason the inner city struggles so much with violence and crime is not that the inner city is filled with bad people. They're just like you and me—sinful individuals who have been created in the image of God. But the writer of the article said, "I believe the reason for this pattern is due to the lack of true employment in those areas. There is little opportunity for able-bodied men and women to be busy working." When we sit around and don't have things to do—when there aren't job opportunities—what do we do? We find ways to get into trouble. So work is a protection. Think about how boring our lives would truly be if we just sat around. Yet God has given all of us the opportunity to work and to serve one another.

Let's review the above points as one sentence: The creation story reminds us that our Creator wasn't lazy, but completed the task before Him, and now calls us to work not as a curse, but as a command for our good. Some of us need to re-acquaint ourselves with that sentence, because we have turned work upside down. We have made work a curse, something that we try to get out of. Instead, we should see work as an opportunity to shine the light of the gospel of Jesus Christ through our lives and into the lives of those who are working around us or those who are enjoying the benefits of our hard work.

2. Laziness can be detected through a test.

So then, how do we know if we're lazy? Laziness can be detected by answering some questions. How do we know if we're lazy? The Bible addresses it by using humorous descriptions of the lazy individual, that is, the sluggard. In the book of Proverbs, it says the sluggard is literally hinged to his bed. He can't get out of his bed. So we must ask, does that describe me? Are we given to that kind of laziness?

Question #1: Do you extend the deadline?

This question comes from verses nine and ten in our text: *"How long will you lie there, O sluggard? When will you arise from your sleep? A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest."* The writer is simply asking, "When are you going to wake up?" Teenager, is your mom yelling over and over again, "Junior, it's time to get up"? And then 15 or 20 minutes later, "Hey, honey, it's time to get up." And then the terms of endearment start dropping off: "Hey, lazy bones. It's time to get up." The question is: will it be 8:00, 9:00, 10:00, 11:00....? Will we go into the afternoon? How long will you slumber?

But the question is much broader than that. Do people have to wait around for you? Do you meet your appointments? Do you hit your deadlines? Do you fulfill your expectations or are you one who is chronically late? Are you always seeking a bit more time? "Just another day," you tell the teacher, "and the homework will be done." You tell your boss, "Give me another week, and I can have that presentation ready."

Promises are broken by adults and kids alike. How many times have I told my kids, "Well, maybe next week we'll get to that"? "But Dad, you said it would be done this week." "Well, I'm sorry, but the week got busier than I thought it would be. I'm just going to have to put that off." How many times have we tried to extend deadlines?

Again, we need to be careful and sensible about this. There are times when deadlines do have to be extended. Unseen circumstances arise, and we're simply unable to accomplish a task. That's okay. There are times when it is not humanly possible to do the things we're supposed to do. But we must ask: is this due to laziness or is this due to circumstances beyond our control?

Question #2: Do you make excuses?

Not only do we extend deadlines, but we also often make excuses. In Proverbs 22:13, the writer again gives us a picture of the lazy sluggard: *"The sluggard says, 'There is a lion outside! I shall be killed in the streets!'"* What in the world is he talking about? What does that have to do with anything? So ask yourself this question. When you miss a deadline—when you've made a commitment and you fall short of fulfilling it—what is your excuse? The writer of Proverbs says you are going to blame your lateness or your inability to complete something on something outside your control. We will go to great lengths to explain our lateness for a meeting or why we're unprepared for ministry.

Knowing we have not fulfilled our promise or need an extension on the deadline, we go to great extents—possibly even lying—to cover our tracks. We don't want anyone to know we simply didn't do it. This is how it goes in the Badal family: We learn about the project assigned two weeks ago by our kid's teacher just two hours before school starts and the project is due. And then all the excuses come: "I left it in my locker." "I didn't have time." "The teacher isn't being a good teacher." "The teacher didn't explain it well, and I didn't understand it. I know I could have asked 13 days in a row to get some help, but now I've got to turn this thing in." We extend deadlines by creating excuses.

What's the excuse in the verse in Proverbs? "I can't go to work because there is a lion in the street, and he may eat me!" That's like, "The dog ate my homework." It doesn't work. But this man is essentially speaking hyperbolically. We go to great lengths to make excuses, hoping to condone our laziness. "Oh, the traffic was terrible." "The kids are unbearable." "The dog—I'm so tired of that dog." "The car didn't start the right way." "The weather..." We can come up with all kinds of excuses.

But for many of us, the answer isn't the weather, the car, the dog, the kids, your wife, your husband—it's that you're lazy. I'm lazy. It's not because there's a lion in the street. Oh, you may get away with your excuses. Some of you have great excuses. You may even have moved up the corporate ladder using a good excuse. But not only are you cheating others, you're cheating yourself—and more importantly, you're cheating God. God has called you to do your best and be truthful. He doesn't call you to exaggeration or stretching the truth—or even lying—to excuse laziness.

Question #3: Do you try to expend as little energy as possible?

We meet the sluggard again in Proverbs 20:4. I want you to know nothing positive is ever said about the sluggard. We don't read, "The sluggard has a lot of bad qualities, but he's a pretty nice guy overall." It's always negative. Verse four: *"The sluggard does not plow in the autumn; he will seek at harvest and have nothing."* When he should have been working in the spring, he wasn't. He had other things he'd rather do, so does them instead of working in his field. So when he goes out to collect the harvest, he will find nothing there for him—because he did not give 100% earlier. When we choose this path, we steal from others, and we steal from ourselves.

When Noah was born 13 years ago, Amanda was finishing her year of school. We had decided this was important, and it only involved about 8–10 more weeks of class. So I boldly declared, "I will take care of our newborn son. I will take him on catering events. We'll go places together. I am a great dad." As a first-time father, I was clueless what that would involve. After day one, I had almost killed Noah. He had head contusions and all kinds of other issues. I'm surprised he even likes me now. But I remember that part of the problem was that I was lazy. Amanda would ask, "Are you sure you're feeding him at this time and this time and this time?" I'm thinking, "It's got to be easier than this." The poor little guy never left his car seat. I'd put him on a cart in the 5-B's Catering shop and just wheel him around. He'd watch the guys washing dishes or whatever else was going on there.

Amanda would say, "When you feed him, be sure to burp him." I would respond, "I've got it under control." Noah had a little mobile he could watch—for the 14 straight hours he was sitting in the car seat. The mobile had a circle around it, which was a perfect size to hold the bottle. Visualize a little rabbit feeder. All he had to do was arch his newborn neck a little bit to grab the bottle. He was fine, and I didn't have to feed him. I would put that thing in there, and he would be fine. You can see why he has strong neck muscles now.

Years later I told Amanda that's what I had done. She hated me for it. But I wanted to exert as little energy as possible. That's a lazy dad. We laugh about it now, but it was true laziness. And do you know what it did? It probably didn't hurt Noah. He has other issues, but he dealt with that little feeding problem pretty well. But do you know what I missed out on? Seriously, I missed out holding my son, looking into his little face while I fed him, spending time with him. Why? Because other things were more important. Remember a couple weeks ago when we talked about sacrificing the greater for the lesser? That's what I did, because I was a lazy dad.

How often do we try to expend as little energy as possible? “How little can I do and still get the job done?” Some of you right now are contemplating how you can do as little on that project and still get the customer to be okay with it. You think C-plus work is better than A-plus work, because you can still do what you want this weekend, and the customer won’t know any differently.

As a student, I was the last one picked. Oh, not just on the athletic field or the playground, but I was the last one picked in the classroom. When groups were being created and I was told, “Badal, you’ll be in this group,” my classmates would groan, “Oh boy. He doesn’t do a thing. He doesn’t try.” I loved group work, because I didn’t have to do anything. They would work really hard and we would all get the same grade. That’s communism at its best, right?

Whether you’re a student or an employee, God says that’s laziness. And here’s the crazy thing: it’s a sin. You might think you don’t have to work hard or do your best, but He says, “I did My best. I gave 100% and I did so for your good. When you don’t pull your own weight, when you mooch off others, you are doing that which is contrary to what I have modeled for you.”

Question #4: Do you expect someone else to get you moving?

In Proverbs 6:7–8 the writer tells us, “*Go to the ant.*” Get down into the dirt and look at one of the smallest creatures in the world. Observe the ants. Watch what they do. “*O sluggard, consider her ways, and be wise. Without having any chief, officer, or ruler, she prepares her bread in summer and gathers her food in harvest.*” They don’t have to be managed. They’ve got their job and they don’t have to be told every minute detail of what needs to be done.

Lazy people require management. You have to tell them, “As soon as you get this done, get this done. And as soon as that’s done, then move to this project.” A lazy person doesn’t look around and deduce the next thing that needs to be completed. They don’t ask, “Do others around me need help? Can I go the extra mile with the extra time I have? How can I make that presentation better, even if I don’t get extra credit for that?”

No, lazy individuals live for the moment. The ant “*prepares her bread and gathers her food in harvest.*” She’s thinking long-term. “Now that today’s work is done, what can I do to prepare for the future? How do I make sure I’m accomplishing what needs to be done?” She has the long view in mind, working diligently for something that is ahead.

These, then, are the four symptoms of laziness—which we can find in the classroom, in the office, in sales calls, in the home, at the catering shop, or in the pulpit. We have to ask God, “Is my behavior truly characterized by laziness?” And we have to ask ourselves these four questions. But that’s not enough.

3. Living productive lives involves both diligence and trust.

Paul tells us that whether we eat or drink, we should do all things for the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:23–33). That includes all our labor. The New Testament makes it clear that “Christian” and “lazy” should not be synonymous. In 1 Thessalonians 5:14, Paul makes this clear: “*Admonish the idle,*” the lazy, the ones who aren’t working, who aren’t pulling their weight. In 2 Thessalonians 3:6–11, he rebukes idleness in church members.

Jesus gives us a set of parables that speak of diligent stewardship, including the Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14–30). We are not to take what God has given us, dig a hole and bury it so we can go about our lives. Instead, we are to multiply what has been given us. This creates opportunities for us to do more for God and His Kingdom through hard work. Then when the Master comes, He won’t call us worthless servants, but rather good and faithful servants. However, two things need to be understood.

We need to understand God’s sovereignty.

Without an understanding of the sovereignty of God this sermon can sound like a “Try a lot harder and do a lot more” kind of message. For some of us, of course, this is true. We need to roll up our sleeves and work a little harder than we do now. But we need to realize that sometimes we can work our tails off and things still won’t go well for us.

There have been weeks in my life when I have rolled up my sleeves and worked dozens upon dozens of hours, only to see that I’m more behind at the of the week than I was at the beginning of the week. Different circumstances and issues had arisen that I had no control over. In these situations, we need to recognize that God is sovereign.

Some of you may feel convicted because you’re falling behind on a project and your boss is upset, even though you’ve worked your tail off. And now your pastor is saying you’re being lazy. No, it may be that you were given more than you could ever accomplish in the time frame you’ve been given. Or some of you students may be dealing with projects or papers, and like a

“perfect storm,” all your teachers have given you a huge workload all at once. You’re trying to get it all done, but you’re falling behind. I want you to recognize that in these situations you have to yield to God’s sovereignty. “I’m going to work hard, but I’ve also got to trust that what I do or how I study will be worthwhile, that the time I put into this project or presentation will be enough to get it done.” How often have you studied hard for a test, then when you get the test you discover it doesn’t cover anything you spent those hours preparing? In these moments we have to trust God. We still study hard and work hard, but we also can say, “God, maybe there’s something You want to teach me about failing. Maybe You’re going to teach me something about suffering, about how to deal with roadblocks that come along the way.”

We need to understand our responsibility.

But with the reality of God’s sovereignty, there is also the fact of our responsibility. Let me close with this. First Corinthians 15:58 says we are to abound in the work of God and not be lazy. There are three areas where this applies.

First, we need to be responsible in our work. We need to ask ourselves, “As an employee, am I being lazy?” “As an employer, how am I doing when I leave Village Bible Church and go to the workplace?”

The next question is, “How am I doing in my walk? Am I lazy as a parent, or as a spouse, or as a neighbor or community member?” When people see you, do they say, “That guy is working hard.” Or, “That lady is working hard. She’s always busy serving others and making sure everything is done in an orderly manner.”

Finally, how are you doing in your worship? How lazy are you regarding your devotions or your prayer life or with outreach? How many of you—and this will hit you right between the eyes—gave up on the sermon five minutes into it? You’re thinking, “I can’t do it.” So instead you’ve been thinking about other things. How lazy are you in your church attendance, or your giving or your service?

We need to be confronted in our sin of laziness. Maybe your laziness has impacted you. Maybe because of neglect you’ve lost a marriage or another relationship. Maybe you’ve lost job opportunities or schooling opportunities. Maybe through neglect you’ve missed out on opportunities to share your faith.

This passage in Proverbs should remind us that we are called to something greater than laziness. Let me remind you that Jesus Himself could have been lazy. He could have given up. He could have said, “This is too hard. This is too much, Father. I’m giving up on this. I’m not going to do it.” Three of the most powerful words you’ll ever hear are these: “It is finished.” Jesus finished His tasks (John 19:30). He showed us what it means to not be lazy.

So for all you sluggards and all you sloths, even in our laziness, you and I can find love and forgiveness because Jesus wasn’t lazy. That blood He shed on the cross and that empty tomb allow our sin and the debt of our laziness to be covered. And now He empowers us to live differently.

So let’s leave this place on a Labor Day weekend living like God. Let’s be creative and hard-working for the glory of God and for our good, so we might serve Him better and serve others around us. Then we will experience the blessing for ourselves.