

## Ants: Creepy but Captivating

### Proverbs 6:6-11

Some of the best known fables are those of Aesop who was purported to have been a slave living in Greece around 620 BC. A fable is a fictitious story that has a moral lesson often told through the characters of talking animals or insects. One of his fables is about the [Ant and the Grasshopper](#).

In a field one summer's day a Grasshopper was hopping about, chirping and singing to its heart's content. An Ant passed by, bearing along with great toil an ear of corn he was taking to the nest.

"Why not come and chat with me," said the Grasshopper, "instead of toiling and moiling in that way?"

"I am helping to lay up food for the winter," said the Ant, "and recommend you to do the same."

"Why bother about winter?" said the Grasshopper; we have got plenty of food at present." But the Ant went on its way and continued its toil. When the winter came the Grasshopper had no food and found itself dying of hunger, while it saw the ants distributing every day corn and grain from the stores they had collected in the summer. Then the Grasshopper knew: It is best to prepare for the days of necessity.

A man had to go to Madrid on business to see an official and arrived at his office around 5:00 in the afternoon. He found that the place was closed and deserted looking. Finding a doorman he asked if anyone worked in the afternoon.

The doorman answered that it was in the morning that they don't work and in the afternoon they don't show up.

These are a couple of fitting illustrations leading into our passage today found in **Proverbs 6:6-11**. You are invited to turn there with me as we search the Scriptures together on the issue of laziness.

*Laziness has been called the mother of intention.*

Proverbs provides some specific guidelines we need to consider if we would choose to be wise related to the issue of work and reveals the consequences of the fool who chooses to be lazy. Two points today.

[Consider the way of the ant](#)

[Consider the way of the apathetic](#)

## I. CONSIDER THE ANT – v. 6-8

### A. Consider its Ways – v. 6

We notice right away the command of the father to his son to take a page out of nature and consider how one of its species lives. It is not clear if the father is chastising the son for being lazy or if he is merely pointing out through the example of nature how to work hard and avoid the lifestyle of the sluggard in which certain consequences will result.

**“Go to the ant, you sluggard; consider its ways and be wise!”**

The word “go” denotes some kind of movement in general. It's a command, not a request. It is a word of emphasis encouraging the sluggard to rise from his lethargy. In Scripture the word sluggard is only used in Proverbs. It is a command to move in an appointed direction and here the father is directing him to observe something that perhaps he passes multiple times a day but with failure to notice. Go to the ant. **Why the ant? Why not the sloth? Why not provide a negative example as he does with other choices that must be made?**

Solomon may not have been aware of a creature called the sloth. They are only found in Central and South America. It would have been a good example to consider. When a sloth is in danger and in a tree which is its natural habitat it will move at a blistering pace of about 14 feet per one minute. If it's on the ground it only travels about six and half feet per minute. It moves so slow, it takes about a year for it to find a mate.

We might hear Solomon say “Son, here’s the ant, go and take a close look at its behavior. Don’t just look at it, observe it, watch how it works and interacts with the rest of the colony, inspect it, understand it. Notice how it moves, what it does, how it communicates. Son, the ant gives some important life lessons that will be valuable for you to practice.”

Ants are something we hate. If we find them in the kitchen we wonder if they are anywhere else in the house. They are creepy looking and we especially hope we don’t find them in bed or in the sock drawer. Immediately we rummage around the garage for the can of Raid and start spraying the baseboards. Or we call the Orkin man to come out and get rid of them.

I don’t know how much you know about ants but our passage invites us to take a closer look at them whether we like them or not. Let me share some things I’ve picked up this week about them.

It’s probably not new information that ants are hard workers. That’s why Solomon is drawing attention to them. Through the way they live and interact in their colonies they provide us with positive and specific guidelines that benefit us for daily living.

Ants are one of God’s most peculiar insects. Entomologists (that’s a zoologist who studies insects) estimate that there are over 10,000 species of ants in the world and are said to have descended from the wasp. I think we have had several dozen of those species in our house at one time or another. The word ant literally means “the biter” and is an old word that comes from a combination word meaning “away” or “off” and “cut” so that it means to cut away.

They are on every land mass except the Antarctica and a few inhospitable remote islands. They are prevalent especially in areas where there is tropical forest and along our kitchen counter. In some

locations they make up more than half of the insects. They are a particularly social group although I would dare say that they are not welcome in most homes where they enter uninvited. Colonies can range in size from a dozen or so to millions.

The driver ant found in Africa have such enormous colonies that when they are on the march can range to about a mile wide. They cross streams and rivers by forming an ant bridge in which they literally crawl over each other to reach the other side. They have been known to take down a tethered cow and suffocate it by swarming the nostrils and mouth.

The typical ants we see are worker ants comprised of wingless females who never reproduce, but instead forage for food, care for the queen's offspring, work on the nest, protect the community, and perform many other duties. (Sounds like the typical human female.) Male ants sit in their man caves and watch television received through the signal on their antennas and often have only one role—mating with the queen. (Sounds like the typical male.) After they have performed this function, they may die. The sole job of the queen is to reproduce so the colony is perpetuated. If the egg is fertilized it will be a female, if not it will be a male.

Ants typically live 1-3 years unless you wash them down the sink with the sprayer or use some ant traps. Queens can live up to 30 years in a colony. Some species can grow to be an inch long. **How would you like them raiding your sugar bowl?**

There is one species of ant that will enter another ant colony, steal the eggs and take them back to their own colony to hatch. When they hatch they think they are in their own colony and will begin to serve their new masters. This species has degenerated so much that if you put them in a jar with food they will starve to death. But if you put in a single black ant it will feed them all.

It has been said that the reason for their ability to adapt to most environments is due to their social organization in which they tap local resources, develop a strong defense and modify their habitats. They divide the labor among themselves communicating through the release of various chemicals emitted along a trail that warn of danger or the location of food sources.

Like the advice to his son, we would do well to consider its ways.

We would also do well to consider its work.

## B. Consider its Work – v. 7-8

Ants are organized and work ceaselessly. Solomon asks his son a couple of questions. I'm certain most parents have asked their children these questions at one time or another.

**“How long will you lie there, your sluggard?”**

**“When will you get up from your sleep?”**

The sluggard is someone who is habitually lazy. They don't want to do anything, they would rather not do it all or if possible get someone else to do it for them. There is nothing wrong with taking some time off once in a while to have a little R&R. We all need rest. The sluggard never does anything that would require rest.

Please keep in mind one very important fact that while God created and ordained work, He also instituted the need for rest, not that God needed to rest after He worked. He rested because His work was done. After He created man, man was given the task of working in the garden. Work didn't come after the fall of man; work was part of the creative order. But through His own example God incorporated the idea of rest.

On one specific occasion after they had been laboring hard, Jesus invited His disciples to get away with Him and rest.

God ordained work, He created us to work. So here is this admonition to consider the work of the ant who is a diligent worker. Notice what is said about the ant.

***It has no commander.*** There is no one in charge of directing the colony. They know their work and set about to do it instinctively. Ants don't have to be told to work. They just do it.

Ants that are to gather food, gather food.

Ants that are to guard the workers gathering food, guard the workers so they can work and not worry about being attacked.

Ants that are to care for the eggs and pupae do that. There is a species of ant that feeds off a chemical that is emitted from an aphid. These ants will build little shelters for the aphid and even stimulate the aphid with its antennae so that it excretes the honey-dew the ants seek.

They all do their thing without being told to do it. They have no commander to decide its duties.

***It has no overseer to inspect their work.***

There isn't another ant whose job is quality control. “Hey, bud, your work quota is down or your work is shoddy.” No one has to boss them. If you watch ants they are either going to the food source, eating from the food source, or returning back to the colony with the food.

The Israelites in Exodus 1 had to have slave masters over them to force them to work. **Who would want to work under those conditions?** Ants don't need task masters. They work willingly for the benefit of the colony. They don't work merely to sustain themselves, they think of the need of the entire colony. They have no overseer to inspect them.

***It has no ruler to prod them or reward them.***

The queen doesn't give orders, she just lays eggs. No one sends a memo that says the quota for the winter preparation is down so work needs to increase. Ants are an example of being industrious.

**Verse 8** says that in spite of the lack of command, they gather food to provide for the colony during the summer and they gather food in the harvest to prepare for winter. Just like Aesop's fable about the ant and the grasshopper. They prepare for both the present and the future.

In a few weeks we are going to talk specifically about work. But for now turn to **Matthew 25**.

### **Matthew 25:14-22**

**What does the ant get for its hard work?** More hard work. Faithful work is rewarded with more work. If you have ever gotten a promotion it wasn't because your boss came to one day after a stellar work history and said you know, you've been working here in this job for 5 years and you've done an outstanding job for the company. We want to promote you to a position where you can take it easy and let the people under you do the work for you. When you get a promotion it usually means more responsibility. Faithful work is rewarded with more work.

Today the ant works hard. It will wake up tomorrow and do the same thing all over again. Here are some of the lessons we learn along the way from the ant ways and work of the ant.

They show diligence.

They stay focused on the task.

They work in harmony toward a common goal.

They work together when the task is too big to handle alone. Others will join in to help carry an item too big to carry by one ant alone. In that they share burdens.

They are self-disciplined.

They have foresight working in anticipation of the future.

They are efficient and structured.

**John Phillips expresses the same desire Solomon has for his son by noting that "what ants do by blind instinct, people ought to do as a matter of common sense."**

We need to pay close attention to and consider the way and the work of the ant. By considering and following the ways of the ant Solomon suggests that we will be wise.

Notice that Solomon continues by asking his son to consider the apathetic.

## **II. CONSIDER THE APATHETIC – v. 9-11**

### **A. The Practice of the Sluggard – v. 9-10**

**Jules Reuard said "laziness is nothing more than the habit of resting before you're tired."**

So here is this sluggard (I think that's a great name, it's very descriptive), this extremely lazy person. Work is waiting to be done and he would rather sleep or do anything but work. **Do you know anyone like that, people who won't work or want others to work for them?** It reminds of that ant species that gets other ants to feed it. He's lazy. It's not that he can't work, he won't work. He'd rather sleep or sit and do nothing. They don't pull their weight on a project at work or for a class.

**One day there was an old farmer sitting on a stump near the edge of his field. A traveler spotted him and stopped to talk with him. He asked the farmer how things were going to which the farmer said that things were terrible. He told the traveler that he needed to cut down some trees but a cyclone came along and saved him the trouble.**

**The traveler said that was amazing.**

**The farmer responded that yes it was amazing but then lightning struck and set fire to the trees saving him the trouble of burning them up.**

**The traveler could only answer that that too must have been wonderful. He then asked the farmer what he was going to do next.**

The farmer stretched a bit, spit a stream of tobacco juice on the ground and replied “Oh, nothing much, I’m just waiting for an earthquake to come along and shake my taters out of the ground.”

Someone said that some people remind us of blisters. They don’t show up until the work is done.

Here are some characteristics of a sluggard.

### 1. He Loves Sleep

#### Proverbs 6:9-10

The question that is asked of the son is one that admonishes him to repent of his laziness and get working. In the original, the word sleep is plural, indicating that this activity is a defining character of the sluggard.

**Proverbs 26:13-14 “As a door turns on its hinges, so a sluggard turns on his bed.”**

Even though he knows there is work to do he wants just a little more sleep, just a few more minutes. Sleep is an escape from responsibility for the sluggard. The individual who works hard is benefited by a little rest, but the sluggard is hindered by it.

**Proverbs 19:15 “Laziness brings on deep sleep, and the shiftless man goes hungry.”**

**Proverbs 20:13 “Do not love sleep or you will grow poor; stay awake and you will have food to spare.”**

Robert Frost wrote “The world is filled with willing people: some willing to work and the rest willing to let them.”

### 2. He Won’t Start

Give him something to do and he drags his feet.

#### Proverbs 6:9-10

**Proverbs 10:4 “Lazy hands make a man poor, but diligent hands bring wealth.”**

**Proverbs 21: 25-26a “The sluggard’s craving will be the death of him, because his hands refuse to work. All day long he craves for more...”**

They lack motivation and desire. They say they’ll do it later or they’ll do it tomorrow. **What is the old adage? “Strike while the iron is hot.”**

### 3. He Won’t Stick with a Task to Conclusion

**Proverbs 19:24 “The sluggard buries his hand in the dish; he will not even bring it back to his mouth!”**

He can’t or won’t complete tasks given to him because he lacks the energy or endurance to complete it. He starts projects but never finishes them. He talks about it but never does anything about it. He dreams big but that’s all they are, just dreams.

### 4. He Always Finds Excuses

This person knows every excuse in the book.

**Proverbs 20:4 – I don’t like to work, maybe it’s too hot. “He doesn’t plow in season.”**

**Proverbs 22:13 – It’s too dangerous: “There’s a lion outside or I might get murdered.”**

He comes up with all kinds of excuses to avoid work.

### 5. He Keeps Company With Others Just Like Him

There is another great fable about the **Donkey** and his Purchaser

A man who wanted to buy a donkey went to market, and, coming across a likely-looking beast, arranged with the owner that he should be allowed to take him home on trial to see what he was like. When he reached home, he put him into his stable along with the other donkeys. The newcomer took a look round, and immediately went and chose a place next to the laziest and greediest beast in the stable. When the master saw this he put a halter on him at once,



and led him off and handed him over to his owner again. The owner was a good deal surprised to see him back so soon, and said, "Why, do you mean to say you have tested him already?" "I don't want to put him through any more tests," replied the other. "I could see what sort of beast he is from the companion he chose for himself."  
 "A man is known by the company he keeps."

The practice of the sluggard is apathy, they just don't care enough to get up and work.  
 So let's consider the problem for the sluggard.

## B. The Problem for the Sluggard – v. 11

Every action brings a reaction. Every activity has a consequence. There are consequences for his lack of desire to work.

Someone has aptly said that "The train of failure always runs on the tracks of laziness."

Paul was very clear in his second letter to the Thessalonians that **"If a man will not work, he shall not eat."** II Thessalonians 3:10

One day Pastor Don and I spent some time talking about calls that come from people looking for assistance. He related a story that one day the doorbell rang. Standing on the steps was a transient person passing through. He asked Pastor for some money so he could eat. Pastor said he would be glad to give him some money, but first motioned toward the lawn and stated that if he would pick some weeds, he would be paid. The man said in response "I guess I'm not that hungry."

Folks, Paul's point is clear. We should not feel obligated to help such an individual, Christian or not, who is able but unwilling to work. Here's the problem, if I can be so bold as to say it – the government is increasingly supporting such lazy behavior giving people what they neither worked for nor earned and they have no incentive to work when they are given food, shelter, healthcare and cell phones.

We need to go to the ant. As one author so aptly put it – **"The Christian must not be a loafer."**

Notice some consequences from Scripture for the person who is a sluggard.

### 1. His Ruin is Evident

**Proverbs 24:30-34**

### 2. He Suffers Poverty and Want

**Proverbs 6:11**

Notice the prophetic word of Solomon that if you are a sluggard, *poverty will come*. It doesn't matter how much you have when you start, the end result for the sluggard is poverty. He doesn't want to work for himself so expects God and others to provide for him.

The great preacher/teacher H.A. Ironside wrote that "it is the grossest presumption to act the part of the sluggard and then to expect divine provision in the hour of need." He goes on to add that "slothfulness on our part is a reproach to His name."

**Proverbs 20:4 "A sluggard does not plow in season; so at harvest time he looks but finds nothing."**

**Proverbs 28:19 "He who works his land will have abundant food, but the one who chases fantasies will have his fill of poverty."**

### 3. He Loses His Independence

**Proverbs 12:24 "Diligent hands will rule, but laziness ends in slave labor."**

### 4. He is Unreliable

**Proverbs 10:26 "As vinegar to the teeth and smoke to the eyes, so is a sluggard to those who send him."**

He fails to carry out his responsibilities. As vinegar is sour tasting and as smoke burns the eyes an employer is aggravated by an unreliable messenger.

As we close I want to shift gears a little before we come to the communion table. We have talked specifically about laziness with respect to physical work. We need to be diligent and do our very best for the Lord. But I want to stress that there is another kind of laziness as well. It's spiritual laziness, a lethargy that fails to develop into a spiritually mature person.

Oswald Chambers has written "spiritual sloth must be the greatest grief to the Holy Ghost. Sloth has always a moral reason, not a physical one; the self-indulgent nature must be slothful."

He adds "Jesus said, 'I am come that they might have life,' not laziness. Whenever we are in danger of nestling in spiritual armchairs, the clarion voice of the Lord comes and bids us neither 'sin nor stand but go!'"

The spiritually lazy person ignores the basics of Christian practices like prayer and Bible reading. They often ignore the importance of assembling with other believers in an effort to participate in worship. They choose to ignore any study of the Bible. Doctrine bores them. They are complacent in their Christian life, content to never change. Go to the ant

There are those who prepare for all kinds of contingencies in this life. They save and keep a little nest egg stashed away for emergencies. They buy insurance and plan for retirement all for what may or may not come. Yet how many of them prepare for future judgment at Christ's return.

**John 3:16** invites us, like the ant, to prepare for the future by placing our faith in Christ so that we won't perish but have ever lasting life.

The person who does that is like the ant, they have prepared for the future.

The person who ignores that decision is like the grasshopper and will not be prepared when judgment comes.

You may be a hard worker in this life, you may be a sluggard in this life, either way the question is this – **are you preparing in this life for the one to come? Are you preparing for eternity?**

And as I read on a church sign the other day – "Eternity is a long time."