# PROVERBS: EVERLASTING WISDOM FOR EVERYDAY LIFE

*Growing in the Fear of the Lord and Godly Character for Life in a Fallen World*

## The Wisdom of Diligence

## Key Idea:

Diligence is the path God has designed for blessing in every area of life, and by grace the wise person walks it, forming a diligent soul over time.

## Key Text:

*A slack hand causes poverty, but the hand of the diligent makes rich.*
**Proverbs 10:4 ESV**

*The soul of the sluggard craves and gets nothing, while the soul of the diligent is richly supplied.*
**Proverbs 13:4 ESV**

*The hand of the diligent will rule, while the slothful will be put to forced labor.*
**Proverbs 12:24 ESV**

*Whoever is slothful will not roast his game, but the diligent man will get precious wealth.*
**Proverbs 12:27 ESV**

*The plans of the diligent lead surely to abundance, but everyone who is hasty comes only to poverty.*
**Proverbs 21:5 ESV**

## Key Points:

- **Diligence Is a Key Theme of Wisdom —** Bret opened by recalling how, as a young boy near Chicago, he planted carrots and then did not look at them for months. In early winter he announced that he was going to check on his carrots, expecting a bountiful crop — and found nothing of the kind. It was a silly mistake for a child, but Proverbs warns that many of us approach life exactly this way. Diligence is a key theme of wisdom because in God's wisdom and providence, diligence brings blessing: "the hand of the diligent makes rich" (Prov 10:4); "the soul of the diligent is richly supplied" (Prov 13:4); "the hand of the diligent will rule" (Prov 12:24); "the diligent man will get precious wealth" (Prov 12:27); "the plans of the diligent lead surely to abundance" (Prov 21:5). Diligence leads to wisdom, financial blessing, freedom, and abundance in every area of life. If we want these blessings, we must walk the path of diligence.

- **Diligence and Its Opposites —** Proverbs contrasts diligence with a wide variety of opposites: the slack hand (Prov 10:4), the sluggard (Prov 13:4), the slothful (Prov 12:24; 12:27), and the hasty (Prov 21:5). Diligence is not slack toward its responsibilities and work but labors energetically to fulfill them. It is not sluggish, craving a crop without the labor of sowing. It is not slothful, unwilling to do even the bare minimum, but works energetically and consistently. And it is not hasty, rashly making promises and abandoning them, but plans carefully and follows through. A lack of diligence leads to a lack of wise character, unfulfilled desires, financial poverty, and bondage — in every area of life.

- **The Goal Is to Shape a Diligent Soul —** "The soul of the sluggard craves and gets nothing, while the soul of the diligent is richly supplied" (Prov 13:4). Some translations render this word as "desires," "cravings," or "appetites," but the ESV is literal: the soul is in view. This is not just about external actions; it is about the slow, lifelong formation of my soul. If I walk the path of wise diligence, over time it will shape my soul in a way that leads to wise desires and actions, which lead to blessing in all of life. Areas to grow in diligence include Bible reading and prayer, church involvement, physical health, vocation (present or future), rest and vacation, marriage, and children – or perhaps a different area the Holy Spirit brings to mind.

- **Prioritize and Plan for What Matters Most —** "The plans of the diligent lead surely to abundance, but everyone who is hasty comes only to poverty" (Prov 21:5). To fail to plan is to plan to fail. We need to plan for what is most important and then make everything else fit around that. Bret shared an example from family life: with four kids, if he and his wife had not prioritized church and family and then made plans in accordance with those priorities, they would have been overwhelmed. They laid out clear rules — no regular Sunday games and only two sports per year — to protect what mattered most. If we do not prioritize and plan, we will be forced to react hastily in the moment, which leads to poverty regarding what is most important. Ask the Spirit to help you think through and prioritize what matters most and then ask Him — and perhaps a wise friend — to help lay out plans to protect it. Often the most important step in developing a diligent soul is what we choose to cut out of life to make room for our real priorities.

- **Give Attention to the Small Things —** Solomon passed by the field of a sluggard and saw that it was overgrown with thorns, covered with nettles, and its stone wall broken down. "A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest, and poverty will come upon you like a robber" (Prov 24:30–34). We all want a rich harvest to provide for us, but to receive it the diligent person pays close attention to the small details: caring for the ground, the vines, and the walls. The foolish sluggard wants the rich harvest of food and drink but does not labor throughout the year in the small details God has ordained to produce the final results. The sluggard is like Bret as a child, expecting a harvest of carrots after months of ignoring them. Our culture loves the big, flashy moment, but God has designed the universe so that the small, quiet, out-of-the-spotlight actions have the greatest impact over the long haul. The key is doing the small thing consistently, not big things randomly.

- **Diligence Is Patient —** "Know well the condition of your flocks, and give attention to your herds" (Prov 27:23–27). We all want clothing, food, and provision, but the diligent person is patient, paying attention to the fields, flocks, and herds over time, knowing this will provide in the end. The foolish sluggard wants the result without patient, sustained, hard work over a long period of time. The diligent person realizes that we need to plant and care for the grass, which will feed the sheep, which will produce the wool so that we can get a sweater. Blessing is usually the result of long-term, sustained effort, not periodic actions.

- **A Diligent Person Plans to Live to Be a Blessing —** The diligent plan so that they can have abundance, which enables them not only to care for their own needs but also to help others (Prov 21:5). Paul puts it this way: "Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need" (Eph 4:28). Because God is a God who overflows and gives, we are called to be givers, not takers. This applies not only to material blessings but to every area of life, and the longer we walk the path of diligence, the more blessing we will have to share with others.

- **The Table of Grace —** This teaching comes with two warnings. First, beware of legalism: we are saved by Jesus' diligence, not our own. Second, beware of false condemnation: we live by grace. We are invited to the Lord's Table to receive grace for forgiveness and grace for growth in godliness.

## Discussion Questions:

- Bret began with the story of planting carrots as a boy and then ignoring them for months before expecting a harvest. It was a silly childhood mistake, but Proverbs warns that many of us approach life the same way. Where do you recognize the "carrot approach" in your own life — hoping for a harvest in an area you have not been tending? What is one thing you have been expecting to bear fruit that you have not really been working at?

- Five proverbs in the key text promise blessing to the diligent: riches, ruling, abundance, and a soul richly supplied (Prov 10:4; 13:4; 12:24; 12:27; 21:5). Bret said that diligence is a key theme because, in God's wisdom and providence, diligence brings blessing. Why do you think God designed the world this way? How do you hold these promises together with the reality that faithful, hardworking people sometimes still struggle?

- Proverbs uses several words to describe the opposite of diligence: slack, sluggard, slothful, and hasty. Bret explained that the hasty person constantly makes rash promises and abandons them, while the slothful will not do even the bare minimum. Which of these four do you find most tempting? Which area of your life is most affected by it?

- The ESV of Proverbs 13:4 speaks literally of the "soul" of the sluggard and the "soul" of the diligent, and Bret emphasized that the goal is the slow, lifelong formation of the soul, not just external actions. How have you seen habits, good or bad, gradually shape your desires over time? What does it mean to pursue diligence as soul formation rather than as productivity or self-improvement?

- Bret listed several areas in which to grow in diligence: Bible reading and prayer, church involvement, physical health, vocation, rest and vacation, marriage, and children. Which of these is the area where you most lack diligence right now? Is there an area where you are overly diligent at the expense of another, for example, work at the expense of rest or family?

- "The plans of the diligent lead surely to abundance" (Prov 21:5). Bret shared how, with four kids, he and his wife set clear rules, such as no regular Sunday games and only two sports per year, to protect their priorities. What do you consider most important in this season of life? Do your calendar and your habits reflect those priorities? What might you need to cut out in order to make room for them?

- In Proverbs 24:30–34, poverty arrives because the sluggard does not care for the ground, he does not remove weeds, and he fails to maintain the protective wall – so crops cannot flourish. Bret observed that our culture loves the big, flashy moment, but God designed the world so that small, quiet, consistent actions have the greatest impact. What small thing, such as a few minutes in the Word, a regular check-in with your spouse, or an evening walk, have you been neglecting that, over time, would make the biggest difference?

- The diligent person in Proverbs 27:23–27 tends the fields and flocks patiently because they provide in the end, and to get a sweater, we must care for the grass that will feed the sheep who will produce the wool so we can make a sweater for the cold. Where are you tempted to want the result without the long, patient work? How does the patience of the diligent differ from simple busyness?

- Bret said that a diligent person plans so as to be a blessing to others (Eph 4:28), because God is a God who overflows and gives. Who has been blessed by someone else's diligence in your life? How might your diligence in one area, such as work, prayer, or family, become a blessing to others?

- Bret warned against both legalism and false condemnation: we are saved by Jesus' diligence, not our own, and we live by grace. How can you tell the difference between pursuing diligence by grace and pursuing it out of fear, guilt, or a desire to earn God's favor? When you fall short in an area of diligence, how do you typically respond, and how would the Gospel have you respond?

## For Further Study:

- Read Proverbs 10:4, 12:24, 12:27, 13:4, and 21:5 together this week. For each verse, note the word used for the opposite of diligence (slack, sluggard, slothful, hasty) and the blessing or consequence attached. Which proverb speaks most directly to where you are right now?

- Study Proverbs 24:30–34 and Proverbs 27:23–27 side by side. Both passages describe a field or flock tended over time. What does each add to the picture of small, patient, consistent attention? What do the images of thorns, nettles, and a broken wall tell you about what happens to the neglected areas of our lives?

- Meditate on Ephesians 4:28 and consider how it reframes work. The goal of honest labor is not only to provide for ourselves but to have something to share with those in need. How might this change the way you think about your vocation, your use of time, and your goals?

- Meditate on Psalm 90:16–17 — the benediction text from Sunday. Notice that the psalmist, even while asking God to establish the work of his hands, depends on the Lord to make that work fruitful. How does this prayer guard against both laziness and self-reliance in the pursuit of diligence?

- This week, choose ONE area in which you want to become more diligent. Ask the Lord for grace in that area and take a few minutes later today to create a simple plan to begin tomorrow. Ask the Spirit to show you whether anything else needs to be removed from your life to allow this area to flourish.

- Watch After Hours (available Tuesday) for additional teaching and application on this week's topic.

- Visit the church website to explore teachings organized by series, by Scripture, or by topic for deeper study of character, wisdom and knowledge, calling and work and blessing.