



Study SERIES

Episode Two

Life HACKS: Pocket tips from Proverbs for better living

Proverbs are among the most intensely practical of all the biblical literature; they are designed to be used in our day-to-day life. They are, as the title of this series suggests, “pocket tips”; short statements of generalised truth to lead us toward better living.

Bible

Proverbs 10:4

Lazy hands make for poverty, but diligent hands bring wealth.

Sermon Outline

In the Book of Proverbs we encounter several “stock” characters; characters whose features are exaggerated to make a point. One of these characters is “the sluggard”; the lazy person who will not work and yet expects all the good things of life (see Proverbs 6:6-11; 20:4). The sluggard is, throughout Proverbs, a negative example that we should not imitate. The proverb we are looking at today is 10:4, “Lazy hands make for poverty, but diligent hands bring wealth.” The principle is clear: hard work brings success. As general statements of truth, proverbs cannot say everything that could be said about a topic and it is important for us to make some simple observations about this proverb. First, it is laziness that is the shameful activity, not the state of being impoverished. We know that poverty is often a multifaceted and complex situation that has very little to do with hard work. Just because someone is impoverished we cannot assume that they are lazy. That’s not what this proverb says. Second, laziness is not the same as lazing around. In our busy, fast-paced society that is driven by the immediate, we sometimes need to rest and relax. Doing so is not a bad thing. Learning how to rest well is another facet of the wise and successful life.

The principle that diligence pays off is easily observed. We have all worked hard at something: an assignment, our jobs, our relationships, and seen that hard work pay off. This is how God created the moral universe to function. It does, however, suggest that it is worth asking, in any area where we are impoverished, whether our lack of diligence has contributed to that. Sometimes, as mentioned above, poverty comes for reasons that are outside of our control, but sometimes it’s because we have been lazy. There are, of course, more than one type of poverty. We can be financially impoverished, but can also experience a poverty of mind, of relationships, and of spirit. The last of these is important to consider. We can allow our relationship with God to become impoverished due to laziness. And I don’t just mean inactivity, but the apathy of busyness. Allow me to explain. Slothfulness is one of the seven deadly or capital sins; one from which many other sins stem. In the Middle Ages, sloth was not just doing nothing, but was not doing the important things at the right time. We tend to see laziness as doing nothing, but we can be very busy and still be lazy if what we are busy with isn’t the most important thing. How many marriages fall apart because one partner (or both) are so busy that their relationship is impoverished? How often are we lazily engaging with our phones, making us too busy to engage in relationships? This is ultimately laziness; not doing the most important things at the most important time.

In our relationship with God, diligence will bring success; an intimacy and closeness with God and an ability to more readily hear his voice. Are we filling our lives with so much busyness that we don't do the most important things such as invest in our relationship with God in Christ? Are there times when we could be leaning into our relationship with God, but instead fill the dark night of the soul, with the bright light of the Television?

Questions

These questions are a guide for conversation. Please take your time over them, and don't feel in a rush to finish them. The objective here is to engage in a conversation around a Biblical idea, and begin to consider its implications for our everyday lives. Take some time to pray and invite the Holy Spirit to lead your time of reflection.

1. Opening Discussion: Diligence leads to success in every area of life. Share with the group times where you have seen this principle at work for you.
2. Take a couple of minutes in silence to reflect on Proverbs 110:4. Invite the Holy Spirit to examine your heart. In what areas of your life might you need to hear the wisdom of this proverb. Share your reflections with the group.
3. Laziness is not just lazing around, but can be filling our lives with activity that doesn't accomplish much. How does this challenge your views of laziness and busyness, and where might we be busy doing unimportant things?
4. Social media, technology and entertainment can all become facilitators of laziness. What attitudes and practices might help us to more healthily engage with these aspects of life? (Try to resist demonising them entirely, as extreme reactions rarely lead us to sustainable practice, but how we might find a better balance?)
5. What diligent practices might help you gain the greater wealth of a deeper relationship with God? What is realistic, and what can you practically commit to?
6. In what situations might this proverb be helpful to recall this week, and what might help you to both remember and apply it?

Prayer

Take some time to pray for each other's responses to questions 5 and 6, that you might walk towards a deeper relationship with God. Invite the Holy Spirit to help you remember and apply the wisdom of proverbs.