

# Sloth & Bored

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Good evening, I am Neil, Neil MacMillan, and I'm the Minister of one of the church plants out of St. Columba's, it's called Cornerstone. So we're going through the idea of sort of looking at life from the point of view of wisdom in the church, different topics associated with wisdom and proverbs and so on, and really they've chosen the preacher according to what your kind of strengths are. So I got sloth and boredom. I am a lazy man then. I was going to preach to you tonight about laziness and sloth, but I can't really be bothered. I am kind of asking myself what's the point, because if you're here tonight you're not lazy are you, because the lazy people stayed home and the hard-working people came to church twice on Sunday, so I don't know if we should really bother at all. And that's one of the things about laziness is that we generally tend to think that laziness is someone else's problem. A few of us would probably say that we were lazy, and most of us are probably more obsessed with actually how busy we feel, and we live in a culture where people are always going on and on and on and on and on about I'm so busy, I'm so busy, you're so busy, we're all so busy, and yet beneath that sense of busyness and sort of hectic activity, often there's a lot of wasted time and futility in our lives. So a few weeks ago, Corey was preaching on wisdom, introducing this sermon series, and one of the things that he said is this, that a wise life is a life that is lived well in relation to God, in relation to others, and in relation to the world that we live in. Wisdom is a life lived well in relation to God, in relation to others, in relation to the world that we live in. Wisdom is about learning to make good ethical decisions in all the areas of life that the Bible doesn't lay down rules. So what job should I do? Who might I date? What time should I get up in the morning? How do I help the poor? What do I do about human slavery? These aren't things that the

Bible gives us prescriptive rules for, but they're important issues that we need to make decisions about, and that's what wisdom is. And Jesus, of course, is wisdom personified. He's come to rescue us from a life of foolishness. If you want to know what a foolish person looks like in the book of Proverbs, then I think the Proverbs says to us, he or she looks like a lazy person. Laziness epitomizes the foolish life. All the gifts, all the talents, all the time, all the resources that we have, laziness fritters those things away. The lazy life is a life of wasted opportunity, of gifts left to rot, of procrastination. The lazy life is unfulfilled potential, lost joys, beauty and goodness undiscovered, all because we couldn't be bothered. It seemed too much effort. Didn't really seem worth it. We're lazy about lots of things in life. Often we're really lazy about our relationship towards God. Often we're really lazy about our relationships with family members and colleagues. Often we're really lazy when it comes to caring for the world that God has put us in. We don't give any of those relationships the time, the attention, the thought, the prayer and the effort that would mark a life lived well. The lazy person is the person who's going to look back on life and feel that they've wasted so much and then they're going to say, but who cares anyway. I read an article on laziness by somebody called Andy Farmer. He wrote about the laziness trap. He's a sovereign grace pastor in the United States. He said this laziness ensnares and controls people in habits that last for decades.

Laziness lays waste to our potential. Quoting another writer, he says, laziness just grows in people. It begins in cobwebs, it ends in iron chains.

Laziness leaves us with the annoying pain of regret, a life of unfulfilled dreams, failed plans and disappointed loved ones. The lazy person feels like a prisoner in their own life. They're stuck but they don't know what to do about it. So we're going to just go through this idea of laziness, find out what it looks like, find out what it does to us, find out what the alternatives are and how we can embrace them. So the first thing is what does the lazy life look like? Well in some of the passages that we read it was described as slothfulness. That's the title of the sermon, the sloth. And a tree sloth is a creature that has one gift in life and that gift is the gift of sleep. Sleep is what the sloth does best.

So when I read that I was kind of worried because if you asked me what I do best I would say I am very good at sleeping. I can sleep anytime, anywhere. Just shut my eyes off I go. Love a good nap. The sloth only stirs when it's hungry. The craving for food becomes stronger than the craving for sleep. It's like you know laying down your remote or your control for your PlayStation for a few minutes so that you can order a pizza. That kind of deal. The main defense the sloth has against the hazards of life is inactivity. If I just stay still nothing can really go wrong. Lots of us are like that. We're kind of paralysed in life. We don't really attempt much because if we don't attempt much not much can go wrong.

[ 7 : 21 ] In the wild the sloth is often mistaken for a pile of dead leaves. Sloth is the English, old English for slow. So the slothful person is the slow person so we've got the sluggard who's described in some of these passages in the book of Proverbs and the word sluggard comes guess what from the word slug. Think of your garden slug meandering its way across the path. It rests more than it moves. Most of the time it's just stationary. Slothfulness the sluggard is someone who is a habitual disinclination to exertion. Don't exert yourself. Don't put yourself out. Don't make any great effort. The sluggard is the slacker, the loafer, the idler, the indolent and the inert. The lazy person loves idleness. It's what they want and long for and look forward to. Lazy people avoid anything that feels like pressure and they put things off for as long as they can. Laziness is often marked by tardiness and laziness are always looking for a moment of relaxation even when they're supposed to be working. The lazy person is constantly amusing and distracting themselves. Wait a minute I'll just look that up. Check my Facebook. Text my friends. Facebook messaging.

Catching up on the news for the fifth time that morning and all the time you're supposed to be working. Mark Twain said this. He said I have seen slower people than I am and even quieter and more listless and lazier people than I am.

But they were dead. Okay. That's the way so many of us are. The lazy person is a bit of a joke. Listen to what the book of Proverbs says. The sluggard says there's a lion in the road. There's a lion in the streets. They're making any kind of wild excuse they can just not to bother. As a door turns in its hinges so a slugger turns on his bed. The sluggard buries his hand in his bag of chips but it wears him out to bring it back to his mouth. This is the life of the sluggard and it's probably to some extent a description of your life at some levels.

Avoiding what needs to be done, making up excuses, always thinking about your own comfort. And the thing about this is that Proverbs doesn't just sort of laugh at the sluggard because laziness is folly and folly is sin. So we may think you know does it matter? And the Bible says yes it matters. Because the lazy person is living without the fear of God. They're living a selfish life and a self-indulgent life instead of saying how do I love God well and how do I love my neighbor? The lazy person doesn't want to give up their way of life or their comforts for anyone or anything. Andy Farmer who wrote that article in laziness said this, my definition of sloth, slothfulness is the determined bent of my heart that stubbornly insists on its own way. Do you get that? What's a lazy person doing?

They're really saying I want my own way. When we say I prefer not to do that, that is the sloth's way of saying no to God. So many lazy people and so many of us when we're being lazy, what we say is not now. Later we put things off because they might disturb our comfort. And many of the things that we put off, many of the things that we delay and procrastinate over are things that God has said are really important and that He's calling us to do now, not later. So that's what a lazy life looks like. What are the consequences of a lazy life? That's the second thing. Well the lazy life leaves us bored and dissatisfied. In Proverbs chapter 13 it says this, the soul of the sluggard craves and gets nothing, but the soul of the diligent is richly supplied. Craving but getting nothing. It's a life of dissatisfaction and bored. I'm fed up. I'm not happy. This sucks. That's the sluggard's life. Dissatisfied and empty. It's boring. Secondly, the second consequence is not fruitful. Proverbs 24, 20 verse 4 says this, the sluggard does not plow in the autumn, so he's not preparing. So when he seeks at harvest he will have nothing. It's a life that fails to bear real lasting fruit, a life that doesn't really make any difference in the long term. Verse 34 of chapter 24 says this, poverty comes on the sluggard like a bandit or like a robber. The poverty of scarce resources perhaps, but also the poverty of poor relationships.

[ 13 : 51 ] A poor relationship with God because we've not pursued it. A poor relationship with others because we're not learning to love them well and see their needs and serve them carefully. We don't make time to talk to the people that we really need to talk to. We don't make the effort to serve the people that we really ought to be serving. The sluggard is dull to the needs of others and just assume that everything's going to be okay. So the sluggard's life is boring, it's not fruitful. The sluggard, he makes life harder for himself, not easier. Being a sluggard or being lazy creates more problems than it solves. So in Proverbs chapter 15 verse 9 it says the way of the sluggard is like a path of thorns.

You know you think it's going to be the easy road but it's the hard road. The path of the upright is a level highway. So avoiding stuff just creates more stress in the long term, not less stress. And the sluggard, their life also creates problems for others. Chapter 10 verse 26, like vinegar to the teeth, smoke to the eyes so as the sluggard to them who sense him. The lazy person lets other people down. The lazy person is a pain to the rest of us or the laziness of others. Laziness makes us a problem to our family or to our colleagues. And when we are lazy people just lower their expectations of us. It becomes easier just not to ask anything. People have to work round us. And the problem is we're always people in community. What we don't do impacts others. So in the Proverbs it says he who gathers in summer is a prudent son. But he who sleeps in harvest is a son who brings shame. You see that? The son who doesn't gather in the harvest he brings shame, poverty, scarcity on his father, his family. What you do, what you fail to do, what you can't be bothered doing, what you leave to later is always having ripple effects out into the lives of those around you. So if you're a husband your laziness impacts your wife. If you're a parent your laziness impacts your kids. If you're a child then your laziness impacts your parents. Laziness affects our colleagues, laziness affects others in the church.

And so people have to compensate for us, work around us. Laziness is about neglect. It's about waste, disappointment and failure. The lazy life lets things go to ruin. We read from chapter 24 of Proverbs. I passed the field of a slugger.

So you know you're going through the countryside. You might look at different parts of the countryside around you. You might see some beautiful crops. And then you pass this field and it's the field of the lazy man, the lazy farmer. Behold it's overgrown with thorns. The ground covered with nettles and the stone walls were broken down. I looked at that farm he says. I thought about it and I received instruction just by that picture of the broken down farm. What's the instruction? A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest. Poverty comes on you like a robber and want like an armed man. A life of weeds. A life where things are crumbling around us. That's the life of the lazy person. Good things wasted because of a lack of effort. So what's the alternative to a lazy life? Well the alternative is a productive and fruitful life. Now to be human is to rest, okay? So it's not lazy to rest. God gives us rest. God delights in our rest and God himself rests. And I love the idea of rest. I used to read

Inspector Montalbano books, detective novels from Italy. And I loved him because every day after lunch he was a policeman in Sicily. He would have a long rich delicious lunch full of wine and seafood. And then he would go out and find a quiet spot, sit comfortably in the warmth and rest in a sort of sleepy way and just enjoy doing nothing. That seemed to me perfect. Lying in the grass in the sun listening to the birds and the insects just being in the moment. So there's nothing wrong with rest. Rest is a good gift from God. This is not a sermon about how good it is to be busy. It's not a call to activism. We don't believe in the creed that tells us that we earn the favor of God by being busy people. We don't believe that we find our identity in what we do. And we don't believe that we find our sense of worth and how much we run around. But we do want to live productive lives that bear good fruit for God, for His glory. We do want to live lives that are a rich blessing to our family, to our church, to our community. So the fruitful life, the flourishing life, the productive life that's the alternative that's put before us. It's not a hectic life necessarily. The example we're given is the ant. Go to the ant, oh sluggard.

[ 20 : 31 ] Consider her ways and be wise. Without having any chief officer or ruler, she prepares her bread and summer and gathers her food in harvest. So this simple picture of the ant is simply this. Here's a creature that knows its purpose in life and then just goes about and fulfills that purpose in a fairly straightforward and simple way. The ant knows what it needs to do and then is diligent in doing it. It is focused, it's determined. And so the wise and the fruitful life is the life that knows that we have a purpose from God and so we focus our life on living out that purpose. At a broad level, that purpose is to love God and love others. So that's the broad focus of our existence. Every day we say, how do I love God well today? How do I love my neighbor well today? How do

I love my family and my colleagues? All of us have particular gifting, particular skills, particular experience, particular training. And these help to shape your individual purpose in life, your particular purpose. And those gifts, that training, the skills you've got, you want to put them to work in a way that's not about just making money, earning a crust or getting by, but you want to use those gifts and training in a way that says, by this I'm going to glorify God. By this I'm going to be a blessing to others. So the alternative to a lazy life is to steward your gifts well, your resources, your talent, your time, your opportunities.

You're going to not waste them, you're going to seize them, you're going to take them and you're going to multiply them so that God gets glory. That's the fruitful life, the productive life, finding your purpose, your calling, pursuing it in a focused way. So what changes the lazy person? What motivates us to be productive?

Well the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom. The important thing in life and every day in life is to see God first and before everything else. The first look is always for God and the Christian needs to have a consciousness that all of life is lived out before the face of God. He sees it all. So you're living your life out before the face of God and as God has his gaze upon you, you begin to be more conscious of how you want to live your life in a way that pleases him. Now that in itself requires a change of desire sometimes because often we're really the lazy person is about pleasing me, it's about pleasing ourselves and you want to move them from a place about where you're pleasing yourself all the time even when you're doing good things to pleasing God. And that change of desire comes of course from seeing God in Jesus Christ. The thorny way is the way of the sluggard. You know we read that in chapter 15 verse 9 that the sluggards path is the way of thorns, overgrown with thorns. Now thorns in the Bible is a really interesting idea because we first are introduced to thorns back in the book of Genesis chapter 3 where when we sin against God and rebel against him the beauty and goodness of this world is spoiled by thorns, by curse, by struggle, by pain and by futility. But when we get to the New Testament and we read about

Jesus Christ we're told that as he died he is a crown of thorns placed and pounded into his skull. So there's this idea then that Jesus takes the thorns, takes the suffering, takes the futility of life, takes the pain, takes the disappointment, takes the selfishness. He takes all those thorny things so that we can live a new fruitful life. Jesus bore the curse. Jesus came to be a curse for us. He does what is needed to serve others. He works hard for our salvation. He rescues us from a life that is pointless and fruitless so that we can live a life that is fruitful and full of purpose. By grace Jesus works hard to redeem you and me from laziness to give us a life of new possibilities and new fruit. So we have to look to Jesus to bring the change. Andy Farmer again said this, how would I change? I couldn't just make a new commitment to self effort. I needed to acknowledge the sin of sloth in the face of a loving God who had made me for his purposes, not my own. I needed to turn my attention and affections away from selfish escape toward the freedom Jesus Christ had purchased for me on the cross. He has rescued me from the field of thorns and lost potential and placed me in a new field to cultivate new fruit. So he said I need to repent, turn away from selfish escape towards the freedom Jesus purchased. So I would do encourage all of us tonight, repent over those parts of life in which we are lazy. The places where you don't try, the places where you're lost in selfish escape, repent. Repent means putting off sloth and repentance is a daily thing isn't it?

[ 27 : 33 ] So I would encourage you in in everyday life repent in everyday ways. So after you've had dinner with your family and you just want to slink away from the table and leave everybody else to clear up, stay and do the dishes, repent of your sloth. When you're at work and you're surfing the net, repent and get on with your job. When you can't be bothered to talk into the neighbor as you pass them on the street, repent and stop and say hello instead of saying I'm too tired or I can't be bothered. Repent of sitting scrolling through your phone when you should be talking to the person who's right in front of you. That's what repentance for the lazy person looks like in everyday life. We put off those lazy habits and we put on new good habits. We put on passion. We should be passionately committed to what we're called by God to do in life. We should be passionately committed to living out the gospel. We should be passionately committed to hearing the word of God. We should be passionately committed to warming our affections towards God. We should be passionately committed to serving our community and our neighbors and our church and our city group and we should be passionately committed to the care of our colleagues, our family and the needy. The life of passion is the reverse or the antithesis of the lazy life.

So I really want to push you this evening to leave behind self-indulgence and laziness and to embrace a life living passionately for God who deserves all glory, honor and praise. I'm really pleased that there are lots of young men here this evening and I feel I want to say something especially to you and I have permission to say something especially to you because I'm a man as well. So the way of a woman is a mystery to me in many levels but the way of the bloke I get you okay. Quit messing about guys. Live a life of self-sacrifice and passionate commitment to God. Give up escapism, give up frivolity, give up frittering your life away. Stop avoiding the hard things in life. Stop taking the easy road. Make the big decisions. Be open about your faith and evangelize your unbelieving friends. Get involved in mission. Live your life well please brothers. Do things that will count for eternity. Make a difference in our broken world. You have one life. Don't waste it. Serve the poor, care for the broken and stop entertaining yourself. Who is going to stop modern-day slavery? Who's going to fight sex trafficking if it isn't young Christian men? If you neglect what is good and great then it will be neglected all together and God is calling you as young men to step up and live great lives for His glory. So I do plead with you. Learn from the slugard. Don't let yourself fall into habits of life that you will find really hard to change later on. Habits that are lazy, self-indulgent. Kill those things now so that you can live a life that you will be thankful for and it will bring great glory to God. Arise from your slumber brothers and sisters. Go and serve God.