

DANGER: LIFE AHEAD! NAVIGATE WISELY.

THE BOOK OF PROVERBS, PART 7

THE PROBLEM OF PROCRASTINATION

TALKINGPOINTS WALKINGPOINTS

Talk together about the glory of God's kingdom. —*Psalm 145:11*
Love the Lord your God and **walk** in all his ways. —*Joshua 22:5*

"Talking Points, Walking Points" is a publication of
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Starter Question:

What from Sunday's message interested you? ...made sense to you?
...confused you? ...intrigued you? ...upset you? ...encouraged you?
...and why?

Questions for Reflection or Discussion:

- What's one trivial thing, and one important thing, for which you really need a "round tuit"?
- Read Proverbs 24:30-34. Pastor Doug said that there are two ways we can learn—from others' mistakes or from our own. What's a lesson you've learned "in the school of hard knocks"?



Solomon, the writer of Proverbs, "***applied his heart and learned a lesson***" (v. 32).

Tell about a time when you decided to learn the easier way—from ***others'*** painful experiences.

- Read Proverbs 22:13. What hints are there that this is a lame excuse rather than a real possibility?

Why do you think we see through others' lame excuses—but ours sound *so reasonable*?

- What are some of the implications of the fact that procrastination is a ***spiritual*** issue, not merely a personal management issue (Galatians 5:23)?

Take time now, as a Community Group, to ask God to help you grow in disciplined and self-control.

- Review Pastor Doug's three suggested strategies ("Divide & Conquer", the "Balance Sheet", and "Habit-Formation"; see Sermon Summary). Which one(s) have you tried? Tell us about it?

Which one(s) have you ***not yet*** tried?

This week, apply one or more of these strategies to those two things for which you needed a "round tuit"!

Choose a prayer and accountability partner from your Community Group and commit to call him/her.

Sermon Summary

We have all encountered the problem of procrastination, and in the Old Testament book of Proverbs, God provides instruction for how we can do something about it. In Proverbs 24:30-34, we meet the procrastinator par-excellence. King Solomon writes about the field owner who is a sluggard; whose field is covered in thorns and weeds. The sluggard would rather procrastinate than do the work that needs to be done, and pays the price: poverty and scarcity. Procrastinators always have excuses for their delays, for their lack of initiative. Sometimes their excuses border on the ridiculous. Consider Proverbs 22:13: "The sluggard says, 'There is a lion outside!' or, 'I will be murdered in the streets!'"

If you are going to be successful in God's world, if you are going to overcome the problem of procrastination, you must cultivate that quality of self-discipline. As a Christian, you have an advantage over your non-Christian friends. The Spirit of God who lives within you wants to progressively produce self-discipline in your life as you submit to his leadership on a daily basis and trust in him. Self-control is really synonym for self-discipline. We usually think of self-control as the ability to refrain from doing those things we shouldn't. But that is only half the story! It also involves the motivation to do those things that we should do, when we should do them. Procrastination is a spiritual issue, not just a personal management issue. How do you solve this problem of procrastination? The first and most important step is to ask God to help you in this area, to commit your lack of initiative to God. With that spiritual basis in place, you may wish to apply one of the following strategies:

The Divide and Conquer Approach

When you realize that you are procrastinating on a major task, divide it up into as many manageable "instant tasks" as possible. Promise yourself that you won't force yourself to get involved with the main job, provided you do at least one of the small steps on the list. If the task to be done is an especially involved, the number of slices into which you need to divide the task may be quite large. So make a long list. The key is to make each incremental task so simple and quick that, by itself, it doesn't amount to much. If possible, make it something that you can accomplished in a few minutes.

The Balance Sheet Method

Another method that can help you get started on tasks you have been putting off is to analyze in writing what you are doing. On the left side of a sheet of paper, make a list of all the reasons you are procrastinating on a particular task. On the right side, list all the benefits that will accrue if you go ahead and get the job done. The effect is usually striking. On the left side you will usually have one or two pathetic excuses such as, "It make be an awkward confrontation" or "I might be bored." On the other side, you will have a long list of benefits, the first of which usually will be a feeling of relief which comes from putting an unpleasant task behind you.

Habit Change

The third approach to dealing with procrastination is really the most fundamental. It recognizes that when we fail to act as promptly as we should, it is usually not because the task in question is extremely difficult, but rather because we have formed a habit of procrastinating whenever possible. Procrastination is seldom related to a single item; it is usually an ingrained behavior pattern. If we can change our habits of thinking, these first two methods will be unnecessary. How do you change an ingrained habit of procrastination? There are three steps: (1) Decide to start making the change immediately, while you are still motivated. Taking this first step promptly is crucial. (2) Don't try to do too much too quickly. Instead of trying to revolutionize your entire approach, just force yourself right now to do one thing you have been putting off. Then, beginning tomorrow morning, start each day by doing the most unpleasant thing on your "to do" list. (3) There is one caution: during the period when your new habit is taking root, especially during the first couple of weeks, permit no exceptions. It is like rolling up a ball of string. A single slip can undo more than many turns can wind up. So be tough with yourself, just for the first few minutes of each day for the next two weeks.

And don't forget to pray and ask God to produce the fruit of "self-control" as you begin to tackle procrastination.

Upcoming

3/06	New Member Welcome Service	
3/06	Explore	12:45-2p
3/07	PointMan Basketball	7-9p
3/08	Middle School Echo Groups	6:30-8:15p
3/09	AWANA	6:30-8:30p
3/11-12	MERGE Student Ministry Conference	
3/13	Daylight Savings Time Ends	
3/14	PointMan Basketball	7-9p
3/15	Middle School Echo Groups	6:30-8:15p
3/16	AWANA	6:30-8:30p
3/19	Membership Class	8:30a-12p
3/24	Maundy Thursday	6p Meditative Easter Art
3/25	Meditative Easter Art	7-8p Service
3/27	Easter	12-7p

Digging Deeper in Your Daily Quiet Time

Let's organize what we can learn about "laziness" from the Book of Proverbs. In the passages on the next page, the words in **RED, though translated into English in several ways, are from the same Hebrew word. (This is what we call "systematic theology"—systematizing what the Scriptures say on a certain subject.) **Enjoy!****

Monday—Read through all of the passages to the right, and then...

- Throughout it's lifetime, a door opens and closes—it moves—a lot. But how **far** does it ever **progress**? Explain this: "A lazy man is active—but not productive".
- What changes, if any, do you need to make in your life?

Tuesday—Again, read through all of the passages to the right, and then...

- It's difficult to get him get started on anything (24:33)—and he doesn't respond well if you try to get him to finish something. He never actually refuses; he doesn't come right out and say, "I'm not going to do that." He just puts it off incessantly. He deceives himself into thinking that he's going to get around to it. The sluggard is someone who's always "on his way"—but he never seems to arrive. His hopes of accomplishing something fritter away bit by bit, not by outright refusal.
- What changes, if any, do you need to make in your life?

Wednesday—Again, read through all of the passages to the right, and then...

- The sluggard is master at making excuses (26:13). Because he never actually intends to work, he's never lacking an excuse for his lack of movement. When idleness becomes a defining feature of one's life, you must live in the realm of fantasy, because you have to convince even yourself that you're "about to fill in the blank". He is so scared of hard work that he begins make up absurd excuses (22:13)—and to believe them! He's thought so much and so long about his reasons for inaction that he convinces himself that he's right.
- What changes, if any, do you need to make in your life?

Thursday—Again, read through all of the passages to the right, and then...

- The sluggard rarely completes anything (26:15). Even the most necessary exertion is a nuisance. He eats ravioli cold out of the can; he'd rather enjoy his laziness than his food. Taking the empty toilet paper tube off the holder is too much work; he balances the new roll on top of the old tube.
- What changes, if any, do you need to make in your life?

Friday—Again, read through all of the passages to the right, and then...

- The sluggard is always hungry for achievement—but never satisfied (21:25-26). His desires are always there, but they're never fulfilled. Nothing ever materializes. He craves, but never has, and so he always is restless. These desires crush him because he's never prepared to do the hard work necessary to achieve. So he's always desiring, but never fulfilled. He does the easy part—buying the gym membership, for example, but never the hard part. He's bought the illusion that he can achieve without effort. So his soul craves, but get's nothing. And its not because he can't, but because he won't.
- What changes, if any, do you need to make in your life?

Saturday—Again, read through all of the passages to the right, and then...

- The sluggard has a high opinion of himself (26:16). He is pathetically conceited. Everyone else sees that his life is falling apart (24:30-31)—but he's "wiser than seven men"! He's a comic-tragic figure: hinged to his bed, habitually procrastinating, happy with his own excuses, hopeless at completing anything, hungry for fulfillment, and haughty in his opinion of himself!
- What changes, if any, do you need to make in your life?

Proverbs 6⁶ Go to the ant, o **sluggard**, observe her ways and be wise, ⁷ Which, having no chief, officer or ruler, ⁸ Prepares her food in the summer and gathers her provision in the harvest. ⁹ How long will you lie down, 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 Your poverty will come in like a vagabond and your need like an armed man.

10²⁶ Like vinegar to the teeth and smoke to the eyes, so is the **lazy one** to those who send him.

13⁴ The soul of the **sluggard** craves and gets nothing, but the soul of the diligent is made fat.

15¹⁹ The way of the **lazy** is as a hedge of thorns, but the path of the upright is a highway.

19¹⁵ **Laziness** casts into a deep sleep, and an idle man will suffer hunger. ¹⁶ He who keeps the commandment keeps his soul, but he who is careless of conduct will die. ¹⁷ One who is gracious to a poor man lends to the LORD, and He will repay him for his good deed. ¹⁸ Discipline your son while there is hope, and do not desire his death. ²⁰ Listen to counsel and accept discipline, that you may be wise the rest of your days. ²¹ Many plans are in a man’s heart, but the counsel of the LORD will stand. ²³ The fear of the LORD leads to life, so that one may sleep satisfied, untouched by evil. ²⁴ The **sluggard** buries his hand in the dish, but will not even bring it back to his mouth.

20⁴ The **sluggard** does not plow after the autumn, so he begs during the harvest and has nothing.

21²⁵ The desire of the **sluggard** puts him to death, for his hands refuse to work; ²⁶ All day long he is craving, while the righteous gives and does not hold back.

22¹³ The **sluggard** says, “There is a lion outside; it will murder me in the streets!”

24³⁰ I passed by the field of the **sluggard** and by the vineyard of the man lacking sense, ³¹ And behold, it was completely overgrown with thistles; its surface was covered with nettles, and its stone wall was broken down. ³² When I saw, I reflected upon it; I looked, and received instruction. ³³ “A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest,” ³⁴ Then your poverty will come as a robber and your want like an armed man.

26¹³ The **sluggard** says, “There is a lion in the road! A lion is in the open square!” ¹⁴ As the door turns on its hinges, so does the **sluggard** on his bed. ¹⁵ The **sluggard** buries his hand in the dish; he is weary of bringing it to his mouth again. ¹⁶ The **sluggard** is wiser in his own eyes than seven men who can give a discreet answer.

Ecclesiastes 10¹⁸ Through **indolence** the rafters sag, and through slackness the house leaks.