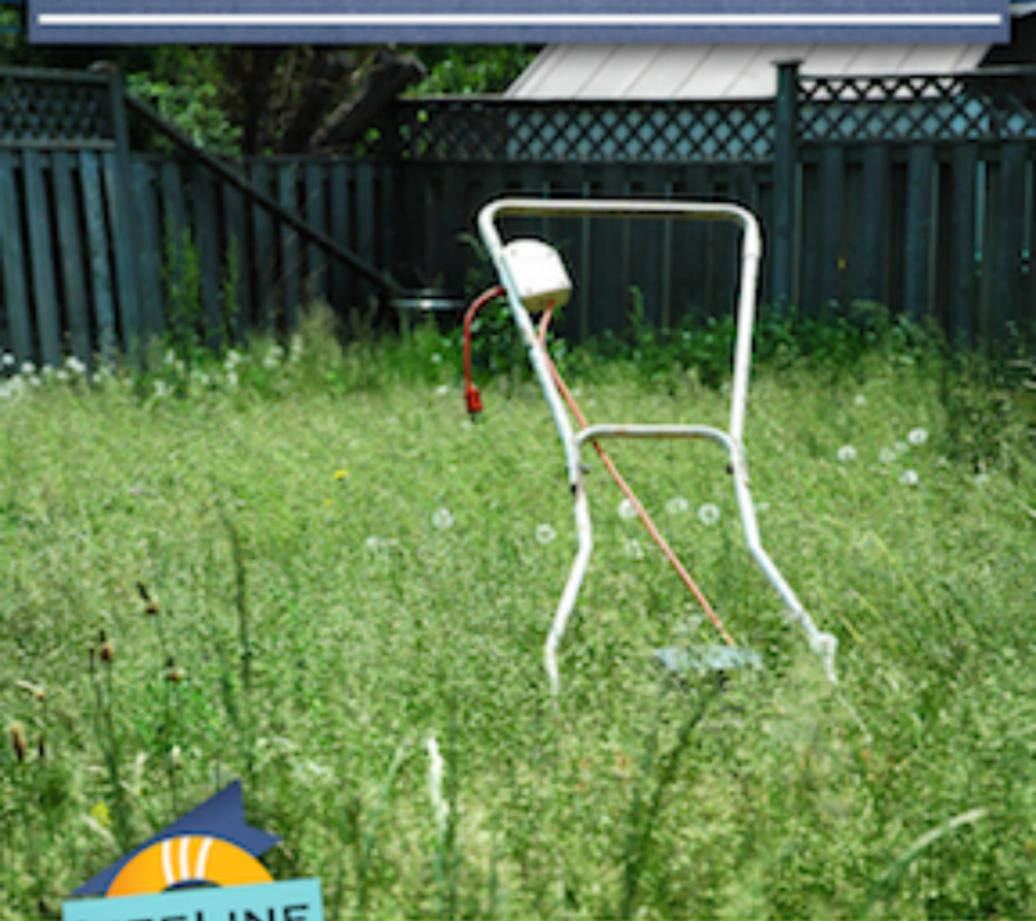


HELP!

I CAN'T GET
MOTIVATED



LIFELINE

www.lifeline.org

adam embryo

HELP!

I CAN'T GET
MOTIVATED

Adam Embry

Consulting Editor: Dr. Paul Tautges

© 2011 Adam Embry

ISBN: Paper: 978-1-63342-036-6

ePub: : 978-1-63342-037-3

Mobi: 978-1-63342-038-0

Shepherd Press

P.O. Box 24

Wapwallopen, PA 18660

All rights reserved

All Scripture quotations, unless stated otherwise, are from the English Standard Version, Crossway, 2001.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, or stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, mechanical, electronic, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of Shepherd Press.

First printed Day One Publications

Web site—www.shepherdpress.com

CONTENTS

Preface	6
Introduction	9
1 The Problem: Ruled by the Curse	14
2 The Consequence: The Curse of Death	22
3 The Solution: The Great Reversals	32
4 The Transformation: Work to Please God and Love Others	38
Conclusion	45
Personal Application Projects	49
Where Can I Get More Help?	63

Congratulations! By picking up this booklet you've taken the first step to overcoming your denial that you're not motivated!

Seriously, even though most self-help books say overcoming denial is the first step to recovery, this is no self-help booklet. We struggle with laziness and need divine help, not self-help. For this reason, this is a gospel-centered booklet. We're already self-centered enough, and that's part of the reason we lack motivation in different areas of our lives.

There are several reasons I have written this booklet. The senior pastor with whom I serve, Brian Croft (author of *Help! He's Struggling with Pornography*), and I preached five sermons through the book of Proverbs in the summer of 2010. One of my sermons was on the lazy person. The encouraging reaction from church members affirmed that the topic of laziness is one that is neglected but necessary for God's people to consider. This booklet is an adaptation and expansion of that sermon. I'd like to thank Brian for reading the manuscript and offering

pastoral and theological suggestions that improved this work. Also, thanks go to Scott Wells and David Dykes for their biblical critiques and insight.

Another reason I have written this booklet is that our world presents us with many motivation killers. We have so much work to do, but who can get work done when we update our Facebook status every hour, watch every Saturday ballgame, sleep in too often, or just sit around doing nothing? Personal ease seems to be our greatest ambition. All of us have seen talented people fail to live up to their potential because they are unmotivated. There were no incentives that could motivate them because they didn't understand and live out the gospel.

The last reason I have written this booklet is that I myself am lazy. That sounds counterintuitive, because unmotivated people typically don't write books. Well, through this study of laziness I've discovered numerous ways that I waste time, lack motivation, and defame the name of Christ. This booklet is as much an indictment of my sin as it is an opportunity for you to consider in what way your lack of motivation is sinful. It is also a reminder of how much you and I need the gospel. Only its power will change our lives.

Adam Embry

Have you seen those motivational posters that are so popular in the corporate world? Each black-bordered poster has a picture, usually of an object that is inspirational—like an eagle, a runner, or mountain range—along with a motivational buzzword like “leadership,” “teamwork,” “commitment,” or “success,” and a catchy phrase describing the motivational word. Imagine the meeting in the conference room as your boss explains a way to recover last quarter’s company losses. He points to the poster behind him, hoping to motivate his employees. “Success,” he reads from the poster. “Some people dream of success ... while others wake up and work hard at it.” He concludes, “Let’s get to work, people!”

But have you seen the de-motivational posters? They’re a spoof on the motivational posters. Their humor and purpose are captured on their website in the phrase “increasing success by lowering

expectations.”¹ These posters look the same as the motivational ones, so they’re equally recognizable. They’re not meant to motivate, but to make fun of our faults and lack of motivation. Will reading a poster on success really motivate employees to greatness? Not likely! Here are the sayings from a few of the funnier posters: “Losing: If at first you don’t succeed, failure may be your style.” “Worth: Just because you’re necessary doesn’t mean you’re important.” Then there is the “Mistakes” poster. “Mistakes,” your boss reads from the demotivational poster as he points to you. “It could be that the purpose of your life is only to serve as a warning to others.” Obviously, such a poster never hangs in a conference room, but it is possibly in the mind of your boss.

People search everywhere for motivation, even on posters. We struggle to find the will and energy not only to get things done, but also to get things done with excellence. Does it really take financial incentives from our bosses or verbal pats-on-the-back from our spouses to get us to do our jobs or clean the house? Aren’t we OK if we just acknowledge and laugh at our faults and lack of motivation? If we are Christians, we’re supposed to do all things for God’s

1 Visit Despair, Inc., at: despair.com/viewall.html.

glory (1 Corinthians 10:31), but why do we often find ourselves not wanting to do anything at all?

Sadly, even few Christians think often about the sinfulness of laziness. That is probably because we're unmotivated when it comes to examining sin in our lives, and that takes effort. Regardless, laziness was noted as a specific sin throughout the history of the church. Throughout the Middle Ages it was classified as one of the seven deadly sins: lust, gluttony, greed, wrath, envy, pride, and slothfulness (laziness). Christians guard against the lust of the flesh, the greed of the eyes, and the pride of life (1 John 2:16), but when it comes to laziness we often don't take any precautions. What we fail to realize is that being lazy provides the opportunity for other sins such as lust, greed, and pride to grow and take over our hearts. As the saying goes, "Idle hands are the devil's playground."

This booklet will help you observe what Scripture says about laziness in order that you may defeat it. The book of Proverbs describes the lazy man, and it is not difficult to observe him. Observing his senseless behavior gives us instruction on foolishness and wisdom (Proverbs 24:30). The unmotivated man doesn't move around much because he is too lazy to get out of bed. We'll get to hear this man mumble

his excuses as he rolls over to sleep some more. Now, the lazy individual might look and sound comical, but laziness, contrary to the message of those demotivational posters, is no laughing matter.

The problem with laziness is that we fail to live as the people God created us to be. The imagery used in Scripture to describe the lazy individual was meant to remind God's people that the sin of laziness is rooted in the fall, when Adam and Eve, the first man and woman, disobeyed God in the Garden of Eden. The consequences of laziness are disastrous, as laziness destroys our well-being and our relationships with others, and, most importantly, it costs us our lives. So what is the solution? Buying a motivational poster? Having better self-esteem? Channeling our inner energies? No; the solution is the gospel: that Jesus Christ came to die for our sins. He paid the punishment we deserved for our sin—sin such as our laziness. He rose from the grave in order to give us spiritual life, to reconcile us to God, and to give us his perfect righteousness as a gift (1 Peter 3:18; 2 Corinthians 5:21). As a result, we can now live to please God. So how does transformation come from the gospel? It comes by understanding that laziness can be defeated when we work to please God and serve others.

My hope is that this booklet will help you defeat

laziness and live a productive, motivated, God-glorifying life because of the gospel.

1

The Problem: Ruled by the Curse

Why are we not motivated? To answer this we need to ask why we don't want to work and be productive. Deciding to give ourselves to laziness instead of living industriously is a result of sin. The problem with our lack of motivation is that our hearts do not want to work to serve God in anything we do. So how did our hearts get this way? We must first understand why God created us, and the tragic account of how humanity rejected that purpose.

God's design in creation was for humanity to reflect his character and rule the earth on his behalf. Put in scriptural terms, God made us in his image. The context of Genesis 1 makes that clear. Since God is the Ruler of the world, part of bearing his image means ruling the world on his behalf. God

took divine counsel with himself and pronounced in Genesis 1:26–28:

“Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion ... over all the earth ...” So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, *“Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish ... and over the birds ... and over every living thing ...”*

Humanity is given control and dominion over the earth on behalf of God. Genesis 2:15 records the specific way Adam was to do this:

The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.

Work, then, is God’s idea. God himself is a worker; he rested only after he created the universe (Genesis 2:3). But after Adam and Eve sinned against God and disobeyed his command not to eat from a specific tree in the Garden, God pronounced a curse on the

ground that Adam worked. God's words are recorded in Genesis 3:17–19:

And to Adam he said, “Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, ‘You shall not eat of it,’ cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”

The good, productive work Adam did in the Garden would now be laborious and painful, as he was kicked out of the Garden to cultivate the land in exile (Genesis 3:24). Adam was still to rule the earth for God—that command was never taken away—but he would do so through hard labor.² Instead of having a lush garden to work, Adam would labor with sweat and exhaustion against thorns and thistles of the hard earth. And, in the end, the very ground he tilled

² The command to subdue the earth and rule it was reiterated after the fall in Genesis 9:1–7.

would defeat him, as Adam, who was taken from the earth, would return to it in death. Sin turned God's good plan of work into hard labor that ends in death.

Yet Scripture records that humanity fought bravely against the thorns. Genesis chapters 4 and 11 both mention the creation of cities and culture—civilization. We have uprooted many thorns today as we have developed technology and medicine, or channeled solar and wind power. However, though humanity battles to uproot the thorns and take dominion over the earth, we can never defeat death. We can conquer the curse for only a little while. And so, at the end of life, we march in cadence with the words repeated throughout Genesis 5: “And he died ... and he died ... and he died.”

Scripture records that the desire to conquer the curse proved unsustainable. If all that awaits us after a life of hard work is death, why should we work hard? This is why the author of Ecclesiastes asks honest questions we've all thought:

*What does man gain by all the toil
at which he toils under the sun?*

(1:3)

What has a man from all the toil and

striving of heart with which he toils
beneath the sun?

(2:22)

Many people today disobey God's command to subdue and have dominion over the earth by not working diligently and productively in a fallen world. We call such people "sluggards," "sloths," "slackers," "couch potatoes," "lazybones," or "loafers." Solomon, the great king of Israel, saw such a lazy individual and left us with this description:

*I passed by the field of a sluggard,
by the vineyard of a man lacking sense,
and behold, it was all overgrown with thorns;
the ground was covered with nettles,
and its stone wall was broken down.
Then I saw and considered it;
I looked and received instruction.
A little sleep, a little slumber,
a little folding of the hands to rest,
and poverty will come upon you like a
robber,
and want like an armed man.*

(Proverbs 24:30-34)

One striking fact about these verses is that the lazy individual owns property. We're not told where he received it from. Perhaps he bought it, or perhaps it was passed down to him through the family. But, due to his laziness, the thorns overtook his land. A similar depiction of the lazy individual is in Proverbs 15:19:

*The way of a sluggard is like a hedge of thorns,
but the path of the upright is a level highway.*

Charles Spurgeon, the famous British minister, preached a sermon on Proverbs 24:30–32 that highlighted the connection between Adam's duty in the Garden and the lazy man's sin:

When God put Adam in the Garden of Eden it was not that he should walk through the glades and watch the spontaneous luxuriance of the unfallen earth, but that he might dress it and keep it, and he had the same end in view when he allotted each Jew his piece of land; he meant that the holy soil should reach the utmost point of fertility through the labor of those who owned it. Thus the possession of a field and a vineyard

*involved responsibilities upon the sluggard which he never fulfilled, and therefore he was void of understanding.*³

In a farming society like Israel's, thorns were a part of life and in the Bible were always used negatively as a reminder of the curse in Genesis 3 that affects us and the earth.⁴ The thorn imagery was so powerful that the Old Testament prophets used it in connection with Israel's exile, when Assyria and Babylon conquered them because of their sin. Thus in Isaiah's prophecy we read that Israel, God's vineyard, would be overgrown with "briers and thorns" (Isaiah 5:5-6) and "all the land will be briers and thorns" (Isaiah 7:23-25). Here, perhaps, is an echo of the condition that befell Adam when he and Eve were exiled from the Garden.⁵

The thorn imagery continues in the New Testament. Paul prayed for the removal of either a troubling situation or a sickness, something he described as a "thorn ... in the flesh" (2 Corinthians 12:7). Jesus, the

3 C. H. Spurgeon, "The Sluggard's Farm," in *Farm Sermons* (London: [n.p.], 1882), 16.

4 "Thorns," in Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit, and Tremper Longman III (eds.), *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1998), 865.

5 *Ibid.*

sinless descendant of Eve who crushed the head of Satan on the cross (Genesis 3:15), bore the curse we deserved as he died on that cross wearing a crown of thorns (John 19:2). Those who give no evidence of saving faith, the author of Hebrews argues, produce thorns and thistles instead of a fruitful life that accompanies salvation (Hebrews 6:4–12).

So, in the Old Testament, and later in the New, thorn imagery represents the effects of the curse and sin, and this is the significance of the imagery in Proverbs 24:30–34 and 15:19 for the lazy individual. The thorns, representative of the curse, have conquered the lazy individual's land. Our laziness is rooted in the curse and sin.

Thus the Bible says that laziness is a decision to let sin and the curse rule. It is a failure to be a ruler in God's world. This is very important to recognize because the sin of laziness strikes at the heart of why God created humanity: to serve and obey him on earth. So why are we lazy? Because sin dominates us.

The problem of laziness is rooted in the problem that we are sinners, and as sinners we make excuses for our sin and bring devastating consequences upon ourselves. So, before we look at the solution, what excuses do we make for being lazy, and what are