

## **A Portrait of the Sluggard — Bryan Murawski**

Good morning. As always, I am grateful for the opportunity to share with you in chapel. Some time ago, I was preaching a sermon series in the Book of Proverbs, and as part of my preparation for that series, I had gone through the whole entire book, worked my way through it, and took every proverb and cataloged it according to the topic and theme that that verse addressed. At the end of that, I had somewhere around three dozen topics throughout the book, and I based a lot of what I was doing in my sermon series on some of those topics. And today what we're going to do is we're going to look at one of those themes, one of those categories that Proverbs addresses, and we're going to think about all of that as it applies to the university student and our lives right here. I think it's an appropriate theme for the beginning of April in the spring semester of your life. I've got to warn you, though, there's some of what I'm going to say that you're not going to like to hear. And really, I'm going to try to stick as closely as I can to the text as always,

but the text itself gets in your face, even makes fun of you at sometimes. And I think that's going to be a challenge for some of us that this pushes against some of the ways that we like to live our lives. But I'd like to talk about the topic of laziness and the portrait of the sluggard in the Book of Proverbs. We're going to see how Proverbs motivates us to a good work ethic, but I'd like you to open up your Bibles to Proverbs chapter 26. We're going to camp out in a couple of verses in Proverbs 26, and then we're going to use a few verses surrounding it that complement and support what you see in there. So Proverbs 26, we're going to jump into verse 13. I'll read a few verses, and then we'll come back through and work through them a little more slowly. So Proverbs 26, starting in verse 13. "The sluggard says, There's a lion in the road. There's a lion in the streets. As a door turns on its hinges, so does a sluggard in his bed. The sluggard buries his hand in the dish. It wears him out to bring it back to his mouth.

The sluggard is wiser in his own eyes than seven men who can answer sensibly." I hope you feel free to laugh because this was written with a great deal of exaggeration and humor packed into it. We might even say that Proverbs makes fun of lazy people. In fact, it calls them sluggards. Sluggards is not exactly the most honorable title. If sluggard is your parents' nickname for you, you have done something wrong in life. If your parents are calling you sluggard, it's time to sell your Xbox, get a job, and move out of their basement and do something different with your life. In the Bible, the word sluggard is only used in the Book of Proverbs, and it describes somebody who is slow and lazy. As you can see, Proverbs doesn't exactly hold the sluggard in high regard. So let's work back through these verses one by one and consider a couple of verses around it. We're going to see a portrait of a sluggard this morning. So starting again in verse 13, the sluggard says, "There is a lion in the road. There is a lion in the streets." You notice I put up on the screen here a nearly identical proverb in chapter 22.

"The sluggard says, 'There is a lion outside. I shall be killed in the streets.'" Now, just so you're aware, there were lions back in those days in Israel. However, there weren't usually lions in heavily populated cities or places where people lived. It would be like someone saying today, "I can't go to class today. There are bears in Pennsylvania." Well, I mean, yes, there are bears in Pennsylvania. There, right? But are they regularly traveling the path from Heritage up to your classes? Probably not. You're more likely to get attacked by a gaggle of geese on your way to class. I've seen it happen. I swear to you, a student was whisked away one time by a whole bunch of them, never saw them again. Chapter 22, verse 13, references, that reference exaggerates by saying, I shall be killed by this lion. And that word killed is actually usually translated murder in the Bible. It's a little bit stronger than just kill. I'm going to be murdered by a lion. There's an animal out there looking to murder me. The reference in 26:13 is interesting as well because it actually uses two different words for lion in the Hebrew original.

The second word lion is the normal word that you might see elsewhere. But the first word is probably better translated lion cub, which makes the claim even more ridiculous. I can't leave my dorm today. There's a lion cub in the road. There's a kitty cat keeping me from going to work. This is the first characteristic of a sluggard that we see. Sluggards make excuses. Sluggards make excuses. They will say and they will do anything to get them out of doing actual hard work. That's what these verses represent, unrealistic excuses. Some people use irrational fears for their excuse to be lazy. These are the kinds of people that can often be found using the phrase "what if." But what if this happens? What if that... But what if... Let me tell you something, Satan loves what ifs. Because what ifs paralyze us from doing what God intends for us to do. How many times have what ifs stopped you from evangelizing? All the what if questions. Well, what if they make fun of me? What if I don't know how to answer them? What if I don't know what to say? What if you don't do what God has called you to do?

Irrational fears. Now, could there be a lion in the street that will kill this guy on his way to work? I guess so. Is it likely? No. So it shouldn't paralyze this guy into laziness. Could it be that you might not know the answer to a question somebody asks you? Possibly. It happens to me just about on a weekly basis in my classes. That's part of the joy of teaching. It sharpens you. You go back and you refine and you dig and you figure out the answer and you come back with an answer that is helpful. But you have to do the hard work to get there. In fact, with any reward, there's going to be risk. Look for a moment at Proverbs 14:4. I love this verse, "Where there are no oxen, the manger is clean, but abundant crops come by the strength of the ox." The idea behind this proverb is that there is risk and reward. You need to invest something to gain something. If a farmer lacks oxen, sure, he's going to keep a really clean barn, isn't he? He doesn't have to worry about feeding a big, messy animal, doesn't have to worry about cleaning up to stink after that animal.

But then again, without those work animals, he cannot harvest as many crops. You're limited in your production. So a messy barn might be worth it if it means that you yield more product in the end. But you've got to take that risk in order to get to that reward. We might interpretively translate this today, where there are no tractors, the garage is clean, but abundant crops come by the strength of the machine. A productive life is not always a clean life. That's why my office desk is always messy. You will never find it clean. I try to be productive. That's why. That's at least what I tell myself. A productive life is not always a clean life, and it's not a risk-free life either. Going to college is not easy, is it? You have papers due, bills due, tuition, pressures at home, pressures right here. Sometimes you think it's just easier to quit, to give up, to wash out, to be done now before the finish line. Messy barns are needed for abundant crops. When I was going through my Masters of Divinity program here, I was working full-time in pastoral ministry. There was, as far as I remember, zero tuition benefit for me at that time.

I was paying every penny out of my pocket on a youth pastor salary, commuting an hour and a half each way, multiple times a week, and at least once per semester, I had a mental breakdown. At least once a semester. I had a moment where I was so stressed out. I had overwhelming stuff happening from my home, from the church, from school work, and I just thought, is this worth it? I was ready to quit. I'm glad I didn't. My barn was messy for a few years, but the crops are now abundant. You have to be willing to get out there to face the potential of the kitty cat in the streets and see what God will do with your faithfulness. But it's not the easy path. Now, going back to Proverbs 26, if verse 13 that we saw there represents what a sluggard says to get out of work, verse 14 represents what a sluggard does when he stays at home. "As a door turns on its hinges, so does a sluggard on his bed." This is a lovely comparison, isn't it? My grandmother used to say to me, "You make a better door than a window. Now, that wasn't to call me lazy.

That's usually when I was standing in front of her in view of the TV. You make a better door than a window, she would tell me. But here the sluggard is compared to a door for a different reason than why my grandmother compared me to a door. How does a door turn on its hinges? It opens and it closes. It opens and it closes. It goes one way, then another, one way, then another. But it never really goes anywhere, does it? It's attached by the hinges. And the comparison here, I think, is the sluggard on his bed. He is hinged to his bed. He rolls one way, and then he rolls another. And then he rolls back the other way, and then he rolls the other way again, to his left side, to his right side. He is hinged to his bed. He might move around a bit, but there's no progress really being made, is there? This is another characteristic of the sluggard. Sluggards are unproductive. This is where that door analogy breaks down because at least the door does something useful, but sluggards don't. Maybe today it's not so much the bed as it is the couch or the recliner when you get to go home.

Maybe the hinge is attached to your rear end. Your legs go up and your legs go down as you're sitting on that easy chair. Maybe it is the bed. Maybe you hit your snooze button, skip your 8:00 AM class, then later your 9:25, then after that, maybe you skip chapel, then noon rolls around, you're still in bed. It gets easier and easier, doesn't it? This proverb isn't so much about just getting out of bed. It's about wasting your life on things that do not matter. I shudder to think of how much time is wasted each year with things that have no eternal value whatsoever. Do you think that when you get to heaven, God is going to be impressed by how many seasons of TV you binged during your life? What do you think is going to happen? "Lord, I have watched every single moment of the baseball season for 20 years running." And he's going to say, "well done, good and faithful servant." "Lord, do you know how many fake worlds I built in Minecraft over my lifetime?" What is God going to say to you? Do you think he's going to be honored by how well you're able to watch someone else bake a cake on TV?

Quite frankly, I think we're going to be embarrassed about a lot of the things that we do. And I would encourage us to really ask some of these questions. There's not a problem with downtime, relaxation, I relax as well, and I have downtime as well. I watch some TV here and there. But a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest can lead to years of wasted opportunity. The very next verse in that passage says this in verse 15, "The sluggard buries his hand in the dish, and it wears him out to bring it back to his mouth." And this is another proverb that has a near duplicate pair in chapter 19 this time. "The sluggard buries his hand in the dish and will not even bring it back to his mouth." What a fun way to make a point. You get the picture of a couch potato sitting in his recliner, remote in one hand, bowl of chips near the other, and he grabs a chip and he goes to bring it to his mouth, and, ugh, that's just too much effort, too much work to bring the hand to the mouth.

I love how 26:15 puts it. "It wears him out to bring it to his mouth." Now, clearly, there is no one this lazy, too lazy to even bring food to the mouth. This is hyperbole. This is an exaggeration to make a point. It's making fun of laziness. This is the third characteristic we'll see this morning of sluggards. Sluggards are, quite frankly, ridiculous. That's biblical right there. Sluggards make excuses. They are unproductive members of society, and frankly, they are quite ridiculous. But you know how this can be. Do you know what kind of ridiculous excuses your professors hear from you sometimes? Do you even listen to yourselves before you start talking with these excuses? I almost wish that someone would say one day, "You know, Professor, I didn't finish the paper because I played too many video games over the weekend." At least that would be honest. I don't know if it would be refreshing, but it would be honest. But you'll never hear that from a sluggard. Do you know why? Here's why. Because a sluggard is wiser in his own eyes than seven men who can answer sensibly. This is the real problem here. A sluggard is never wrong in his own eyes.

He's one step away from being what Proverbs calls a scoffer. A scoffer is like the worst kind of fool in the Book of Proverbs. It's the fool that will not recognize when they're wrong, no matter what. You can have seven wise people say the answer is A, but the sluggard will say the answer is B, and it doesn't matter what anyone else says. They don't want to hear criticism of hard working people who have earned their living with blood, sweat, and tears. They don't want to be told that exercise and discipline and diet are the answers to obesity because that's too much hard work and might put the blame on themselves. They don't want to hear that they're out of a job because of their own ineptitude or because they've showed up late too many times. Instead, society is to blame, the boss is to blame, the situation is to blame. They don't want to hear they failed their class because they didn't hand in their work on time and because they sat there on their cell phone for four months in the semester. Instead, they'd rather blame the professor. They'd rather blame the assignments. They'll blame everything around them, but never are they to blame.

One of the big problems with sluggards is that they ignore wisdom. They ignore it because they think they already have it. Why listen to you when I'm right all the time? That is a dangerous path to travel as a believer. Now, besides this paragraph from Proverbs 26, we can briefly add a few more characteristics of sluggards from other descriptions in the Book of Proverbs. For example, I want you to look at this one in Proverbs 21:5. It doesn't use the word sluggard, but it gets at the same idea. "The plans of the diligent lead surely to abundance. But everyone who is hasty comes only to poverty." Now, I find this Proverb fascinating because it throws you for a loop. The contrast between the first line and the second line is imprecise. It doesn't line up. The first line talks about the diligent person. Diligent person plans ahead. Those plans lead to an abundance of wealth. Wise planning pays off is what it's saying. Now, we would expect the diligent to be contrasted with the lazy or the diligent to be contrasted with the sluggard. But instead, the contrast is with everyone who is hasty.

And what that unexpected change up does is it forces us to associate what we expected with what we are given. Now we've got multiple things floating around in our minds. We expected a sluggard, but the sluggard was exchanged for a hasty individual. Now, first, that sounds odd. Sluggards are not hasty. They are hinged to their beds. They are slow. They are immovable. You can't get them to do anything. But let's think about this association. Because I do think that you know how this works. When we procrastinate due to our laziness, what happens when the deadline is looming? We become hasty. When you start your paper and it's only two days away before it's due, you are going to finish it in haste. And oftentimes hast tempts to sin. It tempts us to do things with our academic integrity that we would not have done otherwise. Because we have waited too long. That's the association, I believe, between laziness and hastiness. Laziness causes us in those critical times to become hasty. Sluggards, simply put, fail to plan.

Sometimes we need to sit down and we need to look down the road and we need to say, If I really want to do this, what is it going to take for me to get there?

What planning do I need before I'm there? If I really want to move out of my parents' house when I graduate, what do I need to do now as a sophomore or now as a junior to help make that happen? Some of you are thinking about vocational ministry, maybe being a pastor, maybe being a missionary, maybe getting involved some kind of parachurch ministry. That does not happen overnight. Pastors and missionaries are educated. They serve God faithfully before they get paid to do it. If God is calling you into ministry, you need to ask yourself, "What am I doing to prepare for that right now?" And if you look at your life and you realize I'm not reading my Bible, I'm not using my spiritual gifts in my church, I'm not evangelizing faithfully, then maybe I would suggest that it's Satan calling you into ministry and not the Lord. And that's not meant to be a joke. Unfortunately, Satan is very effective in putting lazy men in pulpits. This should not be. As believers, our diligence is part of our Christianity. It is who we are and what we do. Work hard for the Lord. There's another proverb that says it like this, 'Love not sleep, lest you come to poverty. Open your eyes and you will have plenty of bread.'

Are you getting the point yet? Laziness breeds poverty. Diligence brings plenty. Now, remember, these are wisdom. This is wisdom literature. These are wisdom Proverbs, meaning this is not the case every single time for every person. There are poor people who work very hard, and there are rich people who don't work at all. But what this proverb is saying is that all of the things being equal, setting your alarm at the right time in the morning says a lot about your character and what you will contribute to the world and what you will get in return. Wake up early, spend time with the Lord, get to class on time or maybe even a little bit early, put in a hard day's work, fall asleep at night, satisfied with what you have done with your life. That is a good night's sleep. Now, one more thing about the sluggard before we move on. "Like vinegar to the teeth and smoke to the eyes, so is the sluggard to those who send him." Sluggards are aggravating and unreliable. How many of you, when you got up in the morning after you brushed your teeth, you took a nice swig of vinegar and washed it around in your mouth?

That's disgusting. Who enjoys making a nice campfire and then leaning over, opening your eyes wide and just taking in all that smoke into your eyes? These are irritants. These are things that are painful, even damaging. When you send a lazy person on an errand, it is just as frustrating as sour tasting vinegar in your mouth or smoke to your eyes. You send a lazy person on an errand and you'll wish that you just did it yourself. It could even be damaging to your reputation. If you find that you irritate others by your work ethic or lack thereof, you might be a sluggard. If you find that people have stopped asking you for things for help because you dropped the ball so many times, this verse might be referring to you. Let me recap what we've seen so far. The portrait of a sluggard. The sluggard is the kind of person who constantly makes excuses. They're unproductive. Their behavior is quite ridiculous. They ignore wisdom. They fail to plan. Their unreliability is an irritant to everyone around you. How many of you at this point would

self-diagnose yourself as a sluggard? I didn't think I'd get many hands because it's too much effort to lift it for the real sluggards, right?

According to Proverbs. I don't want to leave you here. I think, hopefully, you've learned a lot about the sluggard, but there's one more critical proverb that makes what Proverbs is saying about sluggards even more critical for you to hear before you walk out those doors in the back. We have to realize that above all, laziness is a spiritual condition. "The soul of the sluggard craves and gets nothing, while the soul of the diligent is richly supplied." ESV does a great job with this translation. Here, the soul of the sluggard, the soul of the diligent. It is not just about the stomach or the bank account or your grades. We are talking soul issues here. You see, Proverbs has fun picking on the lazy couch potatoes, but it also recognizes that laziness and diligence are spiritual issues. Let me say it in this way. Using AI to short circuit because you're being hasty, that is not an academic issue alone. That is an issue of godliness and integrity. Not succeeding in class because you're slacking off. That's not just an issue for that class. That's an issue between you and the Lord with your integrity. From the very beginning, God created man to work, even before the fall happened, before sin.

Genesis 2:15 says, "The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and to keep it." Not just to play in it and frolic in it and eat its fruit and swim in its streams. I'm sure there was a lot of that, too. But to work that garden, to keep that garden before sin entered the world. Now, I don't want to spoil anyone's idea of fun in heaven, but if you look at the other end of the Bible, all the way to the Book of Revelation, our future eternity is described in edenic terms. God describes our future in the same way that he described our past. God is going to make the world as it was originally intended to be. You see, work is not a result of sin. It's not a result of the fall. Work itself isn't sin. It's part of God's design for us as humans to produce, to make something of profit with our bodies in our knowledge, our skills, and what we have. If you are not a productive member of society, you're lacking something inherent to your created being. "The soul of the sluggard craves and gets nothing while the soul of the diligent is richly supplied."

Let me bring it together like this. Hard work brings spiritual satisfaction. The sluggard's soul is unfulfilled because he or she is not accomplishing anything for God. That's really what it comes down to. You are wasting potential that God has given you, throwing life away. And meanwhile, the soul of the diligent gets fat. It's richly supplied. It gets filled up with satisfaction because they are doing what God has called them to do. And at the end of the day, Christians, we have to realize that all of this talk about working hard, it's ultimately not just for a nice paycheck or for good grades or to have a good retirement when you're older. Those are benefits for sure. They usually come to the diligent. But at the end of the day, Christians are not just working for that. They're not just working for their families. They're not just working for themselves. Colossians 3

tells us this, "Whatever you do, work heartily as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord, you will receive an inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. Whatever you do, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ."

Whatever you do. That means when you go to a job, you go to your job, even if it's a job you don't enjoy, work hard at it. Work for Christ. Give him glory with your work ethic because it is him who you are truly working for. That means when you have a class that you don't like or a professor that you don't like. Anyone can get a good grade in an easy class with a fun professor. But you will show your grit and your spiritual maturity when you have a class that is difficult with a professor that you don't really care for, who is going to push you further than you thought you could go. What will you do in that class? That matters far more. Whatever you do, work hard for the Lord, not for men. There are no sluggards in God's kingdom. God has not called couch potatoes to his team. God has granted us what? 70, 80 years of life? I just turned 40 last week. I'm halfway to dead. Use your years for the Lord. Every one of them. Don't let Satan or the world outwork a Christian. The gospel itself has called you to a higher standard of living than the world.

Philippians 1:27 is another one that comes to mind. "Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ." Live worthy of that gospel. We have been called not to complacency or stagnancy or laziness in the Kingdom of God. We have been called to live worthy of the gospel. And hard work brings spiritual satisfaction. So I would encourage you today to think about how you are honoring God with the work of your hands and the attitude of your heart. Live worthy of the gospel to which you have been called. Let me pray to that end. God, I confess that I am lazier than I should be at times. I confess that there are hours, perhaps days in my life that I have wasted. And I ask, God, that you would help us all to have that eternal perspective, to think about glorifying you with every hour, every moment of our lives. Lord, for those who have been living a lazy life, I pray that today they would repent, that they'd open their eyes, that this is a spiritual issue, and that they would begin to work with diligence in every area that you have entrusted to them.

I pray for those who are working hard, who have a good work ethic, who have been doing things for you in that regard. I ask that you would give them the strength that they need to be steadfast and continue forward. And Lord, in these things, may you be glorified. May we not take the credit for the hard work or the product of it, but may you be glorified for putting that and stirring that within our souls today. And may we leave here as souls that have been well filled because of that diligence. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. God bless.