

Proverbs 6:6-11

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/prov/prov-6/proverbs-66-11/>

Solomon warns against laziness and tries to encourage the reader toward action by showing the inherent dangers of apathy.

The previous section of Chapter 6 encourages Solomon's audience to avoid assuming responsibilities that properly belong to others. We need to be diligent to steward our own responsibilities, while avoiding making a guarantee for a responsibility that properly belongs to another. We should diligently avoid trying to control outcomes.

In this section, Solomon builds on the previous section by encouraging a focus on carrying out our own responsibilities. While we need to be diligent to avoid becoming "surety" for someone else's obligations, that does not mean we should shirk our own obligations. Quite the contrary, the main advantage of letting go of trying to control things we cannot control is it gives us more energy to tackle our proper obligations.

Solomon starts by commanding, with a rather harsh tone, *Go to the ant, you sluggard* (vs 6).

This is a continuation of Solomon's appeal to be diligent and avoid laziness. He said previously, "Give no sleep to your eyes" (Proverbs 6:4). Solomon's audience is young men, who can be notoriously sluggish, looking to do the minimum. Here, as in Proverbs 6:4, he is trying to stir them to action. To do this, he calls them to consider *the ant*.

Although ants are one of the smallest creatures, they are renowned for their work ethic. They can lift objects ten times their size, communicate with one another, and fulfill their roles with admirable diligence. Solomon wants his young men to be like *the ant*. So he invites them to *observe her ways and be wise* (vs 6). Not just *observe* but *apply*. *Wisdom* has a practical element throughout proverbs. "Learn and apply" is the heart of Solomon's instruction. Ants do not attempt to do the job of other ants. Rather they are diligent to fulfill their own role for the good of the colony.

The ants, *having no chief, Officer, or ruler, prepares her food in the summer and gathers her provision in the harvest* (vv 7-8). Interestingly, ants do not have a designated leader. They do not have a *chief*, no *Officer or ruler* telling them what to do. They have a queen, but the queen is not really an operations instructor. The *ants* have to work together to figure out how to achieve their objective.

This is a great example for Solomon to use because for the last several passages he has been talking about taking ownership of one's own journey. Not someone else's, but ours. The *ant*, having no *chief*, is forced to do this in order to be effective, in order to survive and thrive. Ants are not dependent upon orders. They *prepare food* and *gather provision*, all through a self-governing and cohesive effort.

This example of the *ant* is particularly poignant for Israel, because in their covenant/treaty with God, Yahweh directs them to live in a self-governing manner. God is their ruler; He made His treaty directly with the people. He gave them the three pillars of self-governance: rule of law, consent of the governed, and private property. The essence of a self-governing society is to honor God's law and in doing so love others as we love ourselves (Matthew 22:37-39).

To respect someone's property is the most easily measurable aspect of loving one's neighbor as oneself, the core application of self-governance. God's covenant with Israel clearly set forth that their blessings depended upon their actions. If they behaved as the *ant*, respecting their fellow Israelites while serving the community with their own gifts, they would be greatly blessed.

This was for two reasons. First, God made cause-effect in the moral universe just as surely as in the physical. When humans love and serve one another, they thrive. The second was that God is the sovereign ruler over all and chooses to pour extra blessings on those who follow His ways (1 Corinthians 2:9). A primary obstacle for humans is our selfish nature (Galatians 5:13-16). We are prone to being self-focused, which often manifests itself in self-centered laziness.

Solomon, perhaps after considering the self-seeking/lazy propensity of humans compared to ants, then enters a lament: *How long will you lie down, O sluggard?* (vs 9).

The question is meant to be an accusation. He is calling the youth apathetic, complacent: *When will you arise from your sleep?* "Come to life" he seems to be saying. Make your choices, steward your resources. Stop wasting your time. Live in wisdom. Stop trying to coast. Initiate. Be intentional. Have goals and objectives, and strive to accomplish them.

He then gives a rhetorical quotation, perhaps the kind of thing he hears from young people, to further emphasize the sentiment he is warning against: *A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest* (vs 10). Solomon has already told his audience to flee from the temptation of evil as if being attacked by a hunter (Proverbs 6:5), that there is no time to waste. The two paths—wisdom or wickedness are always at hand and we have to make our choice.

Solomon is showing how apathy can lead to slumber and slumber to a way of life. Solomon is pointing out here the basic attitude of apathy: "I will first indulge, and work later." The attitude of "A little won't hurt" is a corollary to "This doesn't cost much, I can indulge myself a little here." Both lead to *poverty*. Indulging a desire to purchase over a desire to save and invest leads to financial *poverty*. Indulging a desire to goof off over a desire for industry leads to a *poverty* of accomplishment.

What is the consequence of this? *Your poverty will come like a vagabond* (vs 11). The Hebrew word for *poverty* here ("reysh") is only found seven times in all of Scripture—all seven in The Book of Proverbs. It always carries a connotation of perspective within disagreeable circumstances. Often it is partnered with shame.

The Hebrew word translated *vagabond* has the idea of steady progress, as with someone who walks, or a river that flows. A lack of diligence leads to a steady and unrelenting stream of *poverty*.

Solomon exhorts to those who are lazy: *And your need will come like an armed man* (vs 11). Not only is the result of laziness an unrelenting and steady flow of *poverty*, your *need* will rush at you like *an armed man*. An *armed man* is aggressive, and assaults, seeking to extract. So it is with laziness. It aggressively extracts life from you, and robs you of flourishing.

So your *need* (what you lack) will come upon you like the tenseness of an *armed* soldier, desperate and violent.. The onset of *poverty* is also relentless and steady for those who lack intentionality and diligence.

In short, if you are not diligent, you are in big trouble. Your apathy is dangerous. You will be inattentive to the right things and overindulgent of the wrong things. The ruin that comes with passivity, indulgence, and inactivity leads to *poverty* as certainly as a river flows to the sea.

Biblical Text

**⁶ 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.**