

Proverbs 6:6-11; Prov.13:4 Sept. 12, 2021
Heb. 6:7-11

Diligence Pays ... in the Long Run

The book of Proverbs contains advice and insight on a variety of things we experience in life. Today I want to spend a little time considering another of the values highlighted in Proverbs: **DILIGENCE ...** and how it pays off in the long run.

Diligence: Does anyone use that word anymore? Diligence defined: careful and persistent work or effort (The New Oxford American Dictionary). Who among us values careful and persistent work or effort? I imagine many of us do. Parents, employers, pastors, teachers, and others appreciate diligence from their children, employees, members, students. But if we expect others to work with diligence then we need to practice diligence ourselves. The Bible, as you can imagine is pretty diligent about commending diligence. The Bible conveys the truth that just about anything of enduring value in life is gained through diligence: diligent work, diligent endeavor, diligent attention; that is careful and persistent work or effort. God looks at us, and His work, through the lens of eternity. And though we have strayed from God's original plan He continues to be diligent about bringing us back.... that's a long-term project. Do people think much about long-term results or consequences of decisions & actions?

Sister to Perseverance

The dictionary definition speaks to the close relationship between diligence and persistence. **St. Peter's advice to Christian disciples: ... make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 Peter 1:6. One quality flows from the other. Most of the important things in life come to us when we stick with it. Diligence requires a certain "stick-to-it" attitude that carries you through the difficult and mundane times.**

In the O. T. book of Ezra the rebuilding of the Temple and walls of Jerusalem is described. Five times the people are exhorted to do the work with all diligence. It was a hard and long-term project. The historian in 2 Chronicles reports how ...*The men in charge of the work were diligent, and the repairs progressed under them. They rebuilt the temple of God according to its original design...* 2 Chronicles 24:13.

How many people do you know who go through life without diligence? They don't pay attention to their work, or plan wisely, or take responsibility, or they

just don't stick with a task, or work consistently toward a goal, and so projects are never completed. Then when life doesn't turn out as good as they want, or worse, calamity falls upon them, what do they do? Some will realize their folly and change. Others blame God for their predicament. *A man's folly ruins his life, yet his heart rages against the Lord*, Proverbs 19:3. Or, they may carry around "The Book of Excuses" always ready to make an excuse for why they can't succeed. And there are still others who find themselves in the pit of life and have lost confidence in themselves, or lost hope in God who gives strength. Yet even in those circumstances one can begin with diligence. Diligence can save you from disaster and diligence can lift you out of disaster. It begins with one small step. (See video clip "Change The World By Making Your Bed" by Admiral William McRaven.)

Diligence At Work

Proverbs reminds us that success – be it simply providing for your family (and that is a praise-worthy success!) or fulfilling a lifelong goal – is rarely garnered in a short time. In fact, those who gain success too quickly are often spiritually stunted by it. As it says: *The plans of the diligent lead to profit as surely as haste leads to poverty*, Proverbs 21:5.

Here's a few more gems from Proverbs: *Lazy hands make for poverty, but diligent hands bring wealth*, Proverbs 10:4. Wealth is created ... by people who do useful work. *Diligent hands will rule, but laziness ends in forced labor*, Proverbs 12:24. Those who do not like to work will end up dependent on others. We were made in God's image to live lives of significance, and work is a necessary piece of purposeful living. We are not simply animals grubbing about for our existence

Please don't think your entire spiritual life is found here on Sunday mornings. God is vitally concerned about what you do with your life and the Christian life must always be lived out in daily life and work. A life well-lived is the result of diligence. *Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters...* Colossians 3:23.

Diligence in God's Work

Diligent work is God's work when you are doing what God wants you to do. Here's Paul giving advice to his young protégé Timothy. *Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity. Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching. Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through prophecy when the body of elders laid their hands on you. Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress, 1 Tim. 4:12-15.*

Often this passage is read in church on “youth Sundays” as a promotion of youth or young people in leadership positions in the church. We emphasize the line that says, “Don’t let anyone look down on you because you are young... But here’s the important advice Paul gave to his protégé Timothy: he told him to “be diligent in these matters.” What matters was he referring to? Paul was telling Timothy to diligent in reading Scripture, preaching, and teaching, because those disciplines grow one in knowledge and understanding. Additionally, Timothy is an example to other believers by his conduct, his speech, his faith, and love and so he must be diligent about those things. Paul reminds Timothy, as he might well remind all of us, to “give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress.” In your daily work don’t forget to work for God. Elsewhere Paul admonishes Christians: *Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, according to your means, 2 Corinthians 8:11. Though we must carry on for years, week after week, we must not flag in our efforts. Each of us can be planting seeds for God’s harvest long into the future.*

Diligence Honored

There is no guarantee that your careful and persistent work will be noticed by others, but your diligence is your witness to faith in the Lord. Others are counting on you. *One who is slack in his work is brother to one who destroys, Proverbs 18:9.*

There is a world out there that needs redeeming for God. We can’t sit on the sidelines. Go to someone who needs help and needs to know the Lord Jesus. You may have to go multiple times ... be diligent. Maybe it starts at home: raising good children requires diligence. It’s tough work that demands persistence. [There’s a proverb for people who just don’t get going: *As vinegar to the teeth and smoke to the eyes, so is a sluggard to those who send him, Proverbs 10:26. Did you know there’s also a proverb for preachers? Maybe it’s more of a warning: *All hard work brings a profit, but mere talk leads only to poverty, Proverbs 14:23.**

Careful and persistent effort brings transformation and lasting value; in our children, in ourselves, in our world. How we live proclaims the message that we were all created by a gracious God, described in the Bible, and whom we can know. Because of Him, we know that we serve a God who can forgive sin, assuage guilt, set sinners free, and transform lives from self-serving winners or losers, into those redeemed for goodness and eternally valued service to our Creator. We have the most incredible message in the history of the world. To faithfully proclaim that message takes diligence and God’s help.

Sharing and living the wisdom found in Proverbs, along with the good news of Jesus is a project of diligence. Our faith keeps us trusting God, but our

diligence keeps us serving God. God is in it for the long-term pay off. We must be also.

God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them. We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, so that what you hope for may be fully realized, Heb. 6:10-11.

May God help us to work hard at whatever He has called us to, remain diligent in our pursuit of His calling, and do all in a way that brings honor to Him.

The sluggard craves and gets nothing, but the desires of the diligent are fully satisfied, Proverbs 13:4.