



**LESSON 3:** "The Sluggard and the Ant" **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**KEY VERSE:** Proverbs 13:4 – "The soul of the sluggard desireth, and hath nothing: but the soul of the diligent shall be made fat."

### INTRODUCTION

Proverbs is filled with comparisons. The very word, "Proverb" (Hebrew, *mashal*) means, "To be like," or "To make a comparison." One of the most striking comparisons found in the book of Proverbs is that of the sluggard and the ant.

Have you ever watched an ant farm? If so, you can easily recall the industry of the tiny ant. Though the ant is physically insignificant, his accomplishments are immense. From the building of elaborate tunnels, to the stockpiling of food, to the burial of their dead, the ant is a study in diligence. On the other hand, a slug is a creature hardly known for industry! The slug tends to settle down comfortably and pay little attention to the world above the rock under which he is hiding. Hibernation is not a luxury that the slug saves for winter, it is a year-round respite. It is a small wonder then that no one is interested in building a "Slug Farm." God desires that the man of wisdom be diligent like the ant, not slothful like the slug.

Our topic today is of great import. Diligence is often the difference between greatness and mediocrity. Thomas Edison once said, "I never did anything worth doing by accident, nor did any of my inventions come by accident; they came by work!" The truth is often that the greatest accomplishments are not wrought by the greatest talents but rather through the greatest dedication. If "necessity is the mother of invention," then "determination is the father of invention."

**Theme:** God desires that the wise man be diligent like an ant, not slothful like a slug.

Let's learn some valuable lessons from the slug and the ant.

### INTRODUCING "MR. DILIGENT"

The Proverbs mention "diligence" seven times. Behind the word translated "diligence" is either the picture of "being sharp" or "quick." The diligent man is easily recognized. He is sharp in his thought patterns and prompt to meet his obligations.

Perhaps you are asking how you can become a diligent man; and if you become a diligent man, what will be your reward? Perhaps your life has been characterized by a constant condition of procrastination. You'd rather snooze and lose than jump-start your day. Is there any hope? Take a careful look at...

#### 1. *The person called diligent*

Proverbs presents two characteristics of the diligent person:

##### a. *He is planned, not impulsive (Prov. 21:5).*

Proverbs 21:5 says, "The thoughts of the diligent tend only to plenteousness; but of everyone that is hasty only to want." Have you ever watched a young man get ready for a date? If he is to pick up the young lady at 7:00 p.m., his preparations begin at noon or before. His clothes need to be cleaned, pressed, and matched. His hair must be neatly groomed. The car must sparkle. Everything needs to be just so. Why? He has a plan to win the heart of a young lady. There is no time for impulsiveness. He knows that the prize requires preparation. Even so, the diligent plan their work and work their plan. Remember, it's impossible to stay on schedule when you have no schedule.

##### b. *He is gratified, not greedy (Prov. 12:27).*

Moose Miller, the cartoon character, is a picture of slothfulness. The cartoonist once pictured Moose standing next to his neighbor's fence with a bow and arrow. Attached to the arrow was a rope with which Moose planned to pull back his target. Across the fence, the neighbor was lying contentedly on a hammock while his supper roasted slowly on the grill. Moose was taking aim at his neighbor's supper. The neighbor rested, gratified by his accomplishments, as Moose looked longingly at his

neighbor's dinner. Proverbs 12:27 says, "The slothful man roasteth not that which he took in hunting: but the substance of a diligent man is precious." Because God knows that a job well-done brings with it a sense of satisfaction, He set Adam in the Garden of Eden with a job to do (see Gen. 2:15).

## 2. *The promise to the diligent*

The book of Proverbs provides assurance that the diligent will be blessed.

### a. *He will have riches (Prov. 10:4).*

Almost every elementary school teacher has come to know the value of incentivizing school work. A star on a paper, a smiley face next to a grade, a small treat for a job well-done will motivate the little pupil. God uses incentives to encourage our diligence. Diligence will make a person rich.

- ***Physical treasure comes to the diligent (Prov. 17:4).***
- ***Spiritual treasure comes to the diligent (Prov. 17:4).*** The Bible can be read through aloud in 70 hours and 40 minutes and it takes just 18 hours and 20 minutes to read through the New Testament. Sadly, the average American will spend more than 18 hours watching television during any given week.
- ***Social treasure comes to the diligent (Prov. 12:24).*** David Livingstone would make an impact on the world. His body would be buried in Westminster. His heart would be buried in Africa. Livingstone began work in Dunbarton, England, at the age of 10. By the time he was 16, he had mastered Latin in order to read Homer and Virgil. By the time he was 27, he was a graduate of both medical and theological schools. Small wonder he stood before Kings.

### b. *He will have rulership (Prov. 12:24).*

Before one can become "his own boss," he must first conquer "his own spirit."

**Transition:** The diligent man is planned, not impulsive. He finds delight in accomplishment. His accomplishments bring riches and rule. But the opposite of diligence is slothfulness. Let's consider what the sluggard is like and find out what his end will be.

## INTRODUCING "MR. SLUG"

The sluggard is mentioned eighteen times in the book of Proverbs. The Hebrew Scriptures contain three different words to describe this man. The first word simply means "lazy." The second word means to be a "deceiver." The third word means to be a "quitter."

Our Creator places no premium on laziness, deception, or the lack of determination. While God ordained that man should rest on the Sabbath, He also established the need for man to spend six days hard at work. Let's consider the sluggard in order to avoid his way.

### 1. *Mr. Slug is described.*

The book of Proverbs goes to great lengths to describe the sluggard.

#### a. *His attitude betrays him.*

Slothfulness develops in the mind before it is seen in one's conduct.

- ***He is bothered by conditions (Prov. 20:4).*** For the sluggard, it is either too hot or too cold, too wet or too dry. The time is either too early or too late. Circumstances are never right for the sluggard to get to work!
- ***He is bothered by his perspective (Prov. 15:19).*** The slothful man is overcome by the difficulties and fails to see the possibilities. Even perfectionists can become sluggards! Faith is necessary for obstacles to become opportunities. The righteous man's perspective is changed as he considers Romans 8:28.

- ***He is betrayed by his excuses (Prov. 22:13).*** Lions lived in the grassy plains and did not walk the streets of a city. Nevertheless, the sluggard offered his lame excuse. Someone has said that an excuse is “the skin of the truth stuffed with a lie.” The sluggard masters the art of sharing excuses.

**b. His appearance betrays him.**

- ***For the slothful man, physical movement is an effort (Prov. 26:13-16).*** The slothful turns on his bed like an old rusty hinge. Even bringing his hand to his mouth to eat is a major effort. If you hide his money under his work boots he will starve to death.
- ***For the slothful man, professional accomplishment is absent (Prov. 24:30-31).*** The fields of the slothful are filled with thorns and the wall around his house is broken down. How we keep our things is a testimony to others. The dirty car, the over-grown lawn, the unpainted house, and the cluttered room mark the one given to sloth. God’s command to Adam to “dress and keep” the Garden has ramifications for us today.

**2. Mr. Slug is destroyed.**

Proverbs tells us that the fate of the sluggard is destruction.

**a. The reasons for His destruction**

God is gracious to tell us why slothfulness is deserving of punishment.

- ***He is deceived (Prov. 6:9-11; 18:9).*** The sluggard lives in decided oblivion of the outcome of his ways. God has given him a mind to consider the future but he lives in the luxury of the present. Eventually, the future will catch up to him. His failure to plan will become a failure to produce. Because he slept when he should have planted he will starve when he should have harvested. The Devil has destroyed many through procrastination. Ten minutes wasted daily will cost over 60 hours in a year. Twenty minutes wasted daily will cost over 120 hours in a year—that’s 3 full work-weeks.

- ***He is deceitful (Prov. 12:24, 27).*** The slothful man spends his time scheming when he should be spending his time working. While he surely eats to stay alive, he does not eat what he takes in his own hunting and remains constantly under tribute. What does the New Testament say about how the person should eat when he does not work (2 Thes. 3:10)?

**b. The results of his destruction**

- ***He is not trusted (Prov. 10:26).*** Sent on an errand, given a job to do, the sluggard will always disappoint and be like smoke in the eyes.
- ***He is not spared (Prov. 24:32-34).*** He has made no provisions for his future. Therefore, those who have depended upon him will fall into poverty. In his old age, he will have nothing. His lack of diligence has made him an easy mark.

Proverbs 6:6-11 encourages the man who would avoid the path of the sluggard to study the ways of the ant. Ants make careful preparation. Though they do not operate under authority, they are personally diligent (Prov. 6:7). Ants initiate their preparations early, knowing that winter is coming and they do so without prodding.