



BACK TO THE BIBLE SERIES: Win the Day!

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One of the challenges in Proverbs is that it often feels really kind of random. They're talking about a problem with anger, then a problem with your tongue, then a problem with money and so it just seems kind of like a miscellaneous gathering of proverbs. Some people solve that by just pulling out all the verses that deal with anger and all the verses that deal with money and trying to study them topically. We are doing it differently than that. We're just taking the book as it's written because I think it's written that way for a reason. I don't think life is so compartmentalized that you're doing great in every area of life but have one little area where you're struggling. Life just doesn't work that way. If you have a problem in one area, it's bleeding into other areas. Life just isn't as compartmentalized as sometimes we tend to think.

I think who you are in private is who you are, and without question it dramatically affects what you do in public, your ability to fulfill whatever job description, whatever role you fulfill in public. For example, if a man will cheat on his wife and lie, I have absolutely no doubt that same man would not hesitate to cheat and lie to a customer, to a client, to an employee, to an employer because that's ultimately who that person is. So, who we are in private bleeds out in so many ways to who we are in public, and that's the way the proverbs are written.

So, this morning we talk about your money, about your work, and we talk about your neighbor's wife. So, if you have a Bible, turn with us to Proverbs, Chapter 6. We pick it up in verse 1:

**My son, if you have become surety for your neighbor,
Have given a pledge for a stranger,
If you have been snared with the words of your mouth,
Have been caught with the words of your mouth,
Do this then, my son, and deliver yourself; (*NASB, Proverbs 6:1-3a)**

So, let's just stop there and try to clear up, "What are we talking about?" Over the years I've heard a lot of speakers—primarily they tend to be financial people—take a lot of these statements out of Proverbs and just apply them to a modern-day culture as if there isn't any difference between the ancient world and the modern world. The text is actually talking about basically being a cosigner, offering some sort of a pledge for somebody to get a loan.

So, let's kind of sort out modern and ancient. In the modern-day world there are credible lenders—so a bank, a lending agency—and they are willing to lend you a certain amount of money under certain conditions that are all clearly spelled out for a reasonable rate in order for you to purchase something. At the end of the day, let's say borrowing money for a house. Most of us don't have that big of a chunk of money sitting in our bank account, so in order to own a home, you go to a lending agency and they offer you money at a reasonable rate. They lay out all the conditions. All that is heavily regulated, and you agree to those conditions. That basically is a business transaction where, if done correctly,

everybody wins. I get a house; I pay the rate; it's a fair rate; the bank makes their money, and, in essence, everybody wins in that scenario.

There are also times where for one reason or another I may want to co-sign for somebody. I believe somebody to be responsible; I understand the conditions; I understand my responsibility in it, and I choose to do that. I don't think there's anything in the Bible that prohibits lending, that prohibits borrowing, that even prohibits co-signing if it's done wisely.

What was happening in the ancient world was they didn't have banks; they didn't have lending agencies. They didn't have social organizations; they didn't have government programs to take care of people. It was just a very different world. So, for example, in the Hebrew culture if someone was out of money and destitute, then the Hebrew culture believed that those who had means would lend that person money, but it was not a business transaction. It was an act of compassion. There was no interest that was charged, but it was understood that that person would be responsible to pay back that loan. It was more about *shalom*. It was more about us together as a community making it.

But anytime you have an arrangement like that, there will always be people who will take advantage—that's just the way people are. So there are people who would take the loan but would not repay it; and they would take another loan from someone else, and they would not repay it; and eventually there was no one who would loan them money because they were just working the system, taking advantage of people. So then into the picture comes what we would call today a loan shark. This was someone who was willing to loan that person money but at a ridiculous interest rate with the understanding that, "If you do not pay it back, I get everything you own, and oftentimes, I get you. You now become my slave." And so, in desperate times, someone would agree to that— usually couldn't pay the interest rate, would lose everything they have and basically be sold into slavery.

So, you imagine you're one of these people who has worked the system. Nobody else will give you a loan, but the loan shark is street smart enough to know, "I could loan you that money at a ridiculous interest rate, but you don't have anything. So, if you can't pay me back, you have nothing to offer me, so I'm going to make you cosign. You have to have somebody else that cosigns; then I'll give you the money." So that's what's happening in this particular text. That person who's been reckless and irresponsible now can't even get a loan from the loan shark so, "I need somebody to cosign in order for the loan shark to give me a loan," and so the father is saying to the son, "*Whatever you do, don't do that. These are people that are working the system. These are people that will take advantage of you. If you do that, you will end up losing everything that you have.*" That's basically the background of the warning there.

So, then that becomes obvious starting in verse 3:

Do this then, my son, and deliver yourself;

Since you have come into the hand of your neighbor

(**hand** would be like shaking hands; we've signed the contract),

Go, humble yourself,

(That word **humble** is a very graphic Hebrew term. It basically means, "Allow yourself to be trampled on." In other words, "Lay prostrate before somebody and let them trample on you. Do whatever is necessary to get out of this deal.")

Go, humble yourself, and importune your neighbor.

Give no sleep to your eyes,

Nor slumber to your eyelids;

Deliver yourself like a gazelle from *the* hunter's hand

And like a bird from the hand of the fowler. (Vs. 3-5)

Basically, you're the **gazelle**. The **hunter's** coming after you. You'd better do whatever you can do to get out of this deal fast, or you're about to lose everything that you have. That's the basic idea of verses 1 through 5. I think it's just a reminder in our culture that we need to be *skillful* with what we have. There are people around us that legitimately have needs and, for reasons often beyond their control, the needs are very acute at a certain time and we think, "Is this an area where I want to step in and help?" That's very different than enabling somebody to live a careless, reckless, irresponsible life, and that's the idea. You need to be skillful and decide when is the right time to step in, and when am I actually just enabling bad behavior and in a sense contributing to somebody's destruction? 10:57

Now starting in verse 6, the writer of Proverbs is describing the reckless, irresponsible person. He says:

Go to the ant, O sluggard, (Vs. 6a)

That word **sluggard** is an interesting Hebrew word. It's only used in the book of Proverbs, but it's used a lot in the book of Proverbs. It's a word that basically means somebody that's lazy. It means somebody that's reckless and irresponsible, somebody that mooches off others and takes advantage of others and basically will do whatever's necessary to work the system in order to profit personally.

**Go to the ant, O sluggard,
Observe her ways and be wise,
Which, having no chief,
Officer or ruler,
Prepares her food in the summer
And gathers her provision in the harvest.** (Vs. 6-8)

There are several places in Proverbs where the ants are used as like a model of *shalom*, like a model of efficiency and community. Entomologists tell us the ants are quite remarkable in their social order. They really don't have a boss. They don't have a queen. They don't have any of that. They just all seem to mutually get it, and they spend their summers working really hard to accumulate so they survive the winters. So again, and again, the writer of Proverbs says, "*Look to the ants because they seem to have an understanding of this concept of working together for the greater good,*" and challenges then the **sluggard** to learn from the **ant**.

Verse 9:

**How long will you lie down, O sluggard?
When will you arise from your sleep?
"A little sleep, a little slumber,
A little folding of the hands to rest" —
Your poverty will come in like a vagabond
(we would probably say like a *homeless person*)
And your need like an armed man.** (Vs. 9-11)

The second part of that verse in my opinion is unfortunately translated. It's not talking about the sluggard being robbed and that is why he's out of money. It's talking about basically being a beggar. Literally the Hebrew is "someone with a shield," which could be translated "someone with a cup," like a beggar. Basically, the text is just saying, "*The sluggard who works the system, who is lazy, who sleeps all day, who is relying on kind of working the system to survive, eventually ends up with nothing.*" I think this is the person that's got himself into trouble, that's looking for a cosigner—that's referenced in verses 1 through 5.

The Bible has a very strong work ethic. You see this again and again. It's based on the fact that work is not a result of sin and *the Fall*. Work is a result of being made in the image of God. There was work to do before sin ever entered into the picture, and there will be work in eternity. Work is good and it's right and it's noble. It's part of what gives life meaning and purpose. God never intended for somebody to sleep their days away and just waste their life on mooching and working the system and taking advantage of others. There's meant to be this mutual commitment to *shalom* —that we all work together; we all do our part in order for a community to function. When Paul was writing to the Thessalonians, he said, "If somebody doesn't work, then don't let them eat." That's a pretty strong statement—basically saying if somebody's just lazy and working the system, they may have to learn a lesson the hard way. Let them go without food until they're eventually rightly motivated.

Understand just because something is legal doesn't mean something is morally right. I don't know where we're going as a culture. We seem very confused on the nobility of work right now as a culture. But just because you can legally work the system and get something for nothing, doesn't make it morally right before God. If you are physically able, God expects you to have a purpose, to contribute, to work, to do your part. It's a very high biblical value.

A few years ago I was having a conversation with a young lady, late teens/early 20's, and she was just kind of telling me a story about somebody at work that figured out that she could actually quit her job, stay at home, work the system, and make more money—so that's what she did. She quit her job, and she just works the system, sleeps till noon, is basically what the proverb is calling a sluggard, and actually ended up with more money than if she was working. And this young lady that I was talking to thought that was kind of funny and so I asked her, "Where do you think the money comes from that she's getting paid to stay home and sleep till noon every day?" "Well, it's from the government." I said, "Well, the government doesn't have money. The government's money is the people's money, so you need to understand: Every time you get your paycheck, which isn't very big, and you look at that little line that tells you, 'These are the taxes that were taken out of your paycheck,' it's that money that is going to pay her to stay home and spend all day as a sluggard at home." I don't think I used that term, but in the spirit of Proverbs, all of a sudden, she didn't think it was so funny anymore.

The reality is there are people in our communities that through no fault of their own do need help. You notice in verse 11 the word **poverty**. It's kind of a unique Hebrew word, and it's only used in the book of Proverbs. It's a word that basically means *to be destitute, to be homeless, to be all out of resources*. The typical Hebrew word used for the poor, that's used throughout the Old Testament, is a word that carries much more the idea of someone who is oppressed, someone who is disadvantaged, someone through no fault of their own has ended up in a place where they are struggling to survive. And the biblical value in both the Old and New Testaments would be that we as God's people have a moral responsibility to take care of those people. We need to make sure that they're cared for, that they're fed, that they're housed, that their needs are met. What he's talking about here in the proverb is someone who is fully capable of working, fully capable of taking care of himself or herself but chooses not to. They're lazy; they're a sluggard; they just work the system. They mooch off everybody else, and that's a whole different discussion.

Verse 12:

A worthless person, a wicked man, (Vs. 12a)

The grammar of that verse would say that's the same person, so we're back to the definition of **wicked**. We've talked about this. In poetic literature it's not just somebody that murders or somebody that rapes or steals, but the wicked is defined as *someone who disadvantages others in order to advantage himself*

or herself. That's a perfect description of the **sluggard**—somebody that's just working the system in order to personally gain.

**A worthless person, a wicked man,
Is the one who walks with a perverse mouth,
Who winks with his eyes, who signals with his feet,
Who points with his fingers; (Vs. 12-13)?**

Basically it's describing what we would call a con man or a con woman, somebody who's a smooth talker, somebody that's kind of shifty, somebody—the idea of fingers, we would say crosses his fingers—who makes promises they don't intend to keep. It's just working the system.

Verse 14:

**Who with perversity in his heart continually devises (or schemes) evil,
Who spreads strife?**

Part of the game plan of people who work the system is they always keep things in conflict. There's always a level of disarray and conflict. That's part of how they work the system. Somehow, *they're* always the victim.

**Therefore, his calamity will come suddenly;
Instantly he will be broken and there will be no healing. (Vs. 15)**

So basically, the text is saying, at the end of the day, that person brings **calamity** on himself or herself. You put the first two discussions together, and basically, it's saying that if we're physically able, we should do our part. We should not be counted among the sluggards who selfishly work the system and begin to unravel and break down *shalom*. But it's also saying that we should be very skillful with the resources we have, to know when it's appropriate as an act of compassion to help people and to know when you're enabling bad behavior. You're not actually helping someone when you're enabling irresponsible behavior. You're actually contributing to their demise or their destruction.

Well in Proverbs 6 today we talked about several things, but I want to talk about this money issue. I think it's common for people to pull verses out of context in the Proverbs and we misunderstand a lot of what the Bible has to say about money. There's just a significant difference between an ancient culture 3000 years ago and what it looks like borrowing, and spending money today. We also have to wrestle with a very difficult question of helping people in need versus enabling people that are just working the system. And so, the proverb offers the ant as the model basically of *shalom* in the sense that the ants all work together to create a culture that flourishes. You know, the Bible puts a high value on hard work, on discipline, not expecting the government or other people to take care of us, but for us to do our part, for us to make our contribution. That's the whole idea of *Shalom* is everybody contributes to the flourishing of the community.

I think it's really important to understand that the Bible has a very strong work ethic. We don't work because of sin. We work because we're people made in the image of God. And even for eternity we'll have jobs and we'll work because that's part of what it means to be made in the image of God. And that's a part of where we find dignity and meaning to life. So, the big challenge we have is to generously, compassionately help those who genuinely need help, but not to enable those who are selfishly working the system. It's a challenge, but it's all part of skillfully living.