

Responsibility Is Important

Proverbs 6:1-15 (04/30/17)

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William Arnot, a commentator from the 1800s and a favorite of Spurgeon's, titled Proverbs, "Laws from heaven for life on earth." When God calls you by His grace to faith in Jesus Christ, He calls you to walk responsibly in this world. By the inner motivation of the Spirit in your heart, you begin to travel a completely different path than others. As God leads you forward in sanctification, He doesn't make you less responsible for your heart attitudes and behavior. Proverbs is all about living prudently and responsibly, helping you to see the usual consequences of your actions before you commit them: "If you do this, then this will happen."

In Proverbs 6:1-15 God paints three pictures of irresponsible living to avoid. The prudent and wise man listens and learns from these three characters: the man who puts his life and family at risk financially, the sluggard who has developed the habit of sleeping or resting when he should be working, and the worthless big mouth who uses and abuses everyone in his life.

These are three areas over which husbands and wives often quarrel – when the husband wants to put the family finances at risk by co-signing for someone outside the family; when the husband is too lazy to work hard and pay the family bills; or when the man is impressed with a big talker whom his wife perceives to be a bad actor. These three actions will quickly cause the Proverbs 5 marriage to go from sizzling and singing to a sputtering halt. Many a wife has grieved and fretted over this kind of husband. Women are at times guilty of these three problems, but typically it's the man. Let's listen to God's instruction for living responsibly and prudently.

Don't make promises that destroy your freedom – vv. 1-5

1 My son, if you have become surety for your neighbor, Have given a pledge for a stranger, 2 If you have been snared with the words of your mouth, Have been caught with the words of your mouth, 3 Do this then, my son, and deliver yourself; Since you have come into the hand of your neighbor, Go, humble yourself, and importune your neighbor. 4 Give no sleep to your eyes, Nor slumber to your eyelids; 5 Deliver yourself like a gazelle from the hunter's hand And like a bird from the hand of the fowler.

Joe comes home from work and informs his wife he went down to the bank with Ron, his buddy from work, to help him out by co-signing for a \$30,000 loan so Ron could finally get rid of that old clunker and buy a sleek new Buick Cascada. He sees her questioning expression and quickly adds, "But don't worry, Honey, I have no doubt he'll be able to make his payments. He's making as much money as I am and he just had some unfortunate stuff happen and doesn't have a good credit rating. But he's really a nice guy and I wanted to help him out. Trust me, everything will be okay." This is when Joe should be using his "manslater" to interpret his wife's response. "Big mistake. Big mistake."

Nothing messes up a marriage, and a life, like rash, foolish financial decisions, even when they are made seemingly with compassion and concern for other people. If you want to help someone financially, give them the money as a gift. Charles Bridges says, "Christian prudence will keep us clear from such engagements." Another rash decision is tempting under the pressure of perhaps an intense sales pitch. "You would be a fool to not invest in this amazing deal. You'll be able to enjoy it for years to come, yadayadayada." They don't tell you about those pesky and increasing monthly fees, and that it is almost impossible to sell the thing. Getting out of these "amazing deals" can feel like a ton lifted from your shoulders.

Let's see what this loving father in Proverbs tells his son to do if indeed he has been caught in co-signing with someone outside the family. You are entangled, you have pinned your finances to the character of

someone you either hardly know or, even if you do know them, you have been snared by giving your promise. You have contracted with him, you've come into his hand, you are liable for him and even if things go ok, it changes everything. Nothing fouls up a good friendship like getting entangled financially. There are millions of witnesses to the truth of that. It seemed like such a great idea at the time. "If we combine our finances, look what we can do! We can go into a 50-50 partnership." Beware! It works for marriage, but that's it.

But once you sign the contract, you are snared and you've come into the hand of your neighbor. Your character is linked to his character. If he defaults, it could cost you dearly. One author described a friend who co-signed for \$250,000 and the man later defaulted. It took the friend ten years to pay off \$100,000 of that loan!

This Proverbs father is a very wise biblical counselor. He doesn't just tell his son how dumb he was for his decision. No, he gives clear direction, clear homework. Do these four things and do them today!

First, go. That's step number one when dealing with any issue between you and someone else. Even if it's an offense that your mouth got you into. Remember Jesus, "If you're getting ready to worship and there remember your friend has something against you, leave your offering at the altar and go." Go. Now! You need to deliver yourself from this situation, so go and go now. Not next week or tomorrow but today, right now. In fact, let's call him and let him know you'll be right over.

Second, humble yourself. Admit how foolish you were. The word humble here means to step on yourself. Swallow your pride and go. Don't defend yourself or make excuses, but humble yourself. If you have been snared with your words, the same action applies. If you were snarky with your wife, told off the guy at the tire store, lied to your friend to look better in his eyes, treated that young lady or young man badly and you know you offended him or her, go, and go humbly, stepping all over your pride.

Third, importune your neighbor. Importune means be bold or vigorous about it, ask persistently. Do whatever it takes to make it right. Ask forgiveness and get out of the contract, even if it costs you something. Beg the guy if necessary, going where your pride doesn't want to go. If your mouth got you in trouble, freely confess the wrong and ask forgiveness.

Astronaut Mike Massimino was interviewed recently about what it's like out there in space. He was asked, "How badly do you worry about dying?" His reply, "You can prepare all you want, but if the rocket blows up, what can you do? But you try not to go to space angry with anyone. You want to clear up every argument. I wanted to go in with a clear conscience just in case."

Fourth, do it quickly (vs. 4). Not, "OK, I'll go tomorrow." No, you need to go now! It is an urgent matter! You want to escape the hand of your friend or enemy. Don't sleep. Deal with it. Verse 5 puts it in living color. Look at that little deer kicking and fighting to get out of danger. That pigeon is fluttering and flapping and doing everything she can to escape the trap. Animals will work hard for their freedom, digging holes, climbing fences, chewing leashes. I trapped for muskrats as a kid. More than once I caught a foot. He was smart. "I'm not going down for these guys." Chomp, chomp! Rather three legs and freedom than no legs and death!

You can apply this principle of getting out of a foolish decision to many things. To live beyond your means, borrowing money so you can drive something to impress your friends and spite your enemies. Do you really need it? Will it affect your marriage and family? Is your wife with you in this decision? Nothing can so quickly sour a joyful heart as hasty, imprudent financial decisions. Live responsibly for God's glory. Don't enslave yourself to another man's character.

And now for the next foolish person – the sluggard. If you've seen Zootopia, you've met the sloths down at the BMV. They're the best part of the movie! Sloths work in super "slo-mo." And sluggards are worse; they don't even work.

Don't give in to laziness – vv. 6-11

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.

The ant and the sluggard! What a contrast. Here's a man made in God's image, at the top of the creation chain, created to work and subdue the earth, but too lazy to get out there and get a job. God says, "Okay you sluggard, you need instruction and I have a teacher for you. Go study under the ant!" Proverbs beats this drum over and over. The sluggard and the lazy man are mentioned at least 17 times in Proverbs, and nothing good is said about them!

What do you learn from these middle-eastern harvester ants? They are out there working while the sluggard is sleeping. They're industrious, self-starters and don't have to be bossed, browbeaten, or threatened with no candy if they don't get to work. They work in the heat of summer without whining and they plan ahead for the coming cold when those humans won't be on the deck dropping their cookie crumbs between the cracks. They don't spend all their money as soon as they make it; they are savers. That ant teaches the sluggard that God created him and you, the ant and the sluggard, to work. No, no, no, you can't lay around goofing off playing video games all day. Everybody is to work. Christians especially are to glorify God by working. If you don't work when you can, you don't get to eat. This is simply and clearly stated in 2 Thessalonians 3:10. Colossians 3:23, "Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men."

Next in verse 9 we see Dad finding this lazy oaf in bed at 2 in the afternoon. "How long will you lie down? When will you get up?" He has to ask twice! The sluggard says, "Just a little longer. I'm so tired. I worked three hours yesterday."

What's a sluggard like? They love to sleep. Then when you finally drag them out to work, they are more a nuisance than a help. They think they are smarter than everyone else. That's why they aren't working. They're too smart to work. The sluggard lives in a dream land, thinking he'll probably inherit a lot of money, so why work?

Let's go over to Proverbs 26, where we find a nest of sluggards.

Proverbs 26:13, *The sluggard says, "There is a lion in the road! A lion is in the open square!"* They are expert excuse makers with ten thousand reasons why they can't go to work today

Proverbs 26:14, *As the door turns on its hinges, So does the sluggard on his bed. He's hinged to his bed.* You can hear it squeak as he rolls over. He needs some WD 40 – "Work, Dude, 40 Hours!"

Proverbs 26:15, *The sluggard buries his hand in the dish; He is weary of bringing it to his mouth again.* "I'll get to it. Don't worry!" They start stuff, but don't finish it. You can tell by all the unfinished projects in their garage, shed, backyard, and desk drawers.

Proverbs 26:16, *The sluggard is wiser in his own eyes Than seven men who can give a discreet answer.* "Hey, I know what I'm doing. I know how to make a ton of money. Got a little cash you could loan me? My check's coming in on Monday."

Back to verse 11 – Poverty dogs his trail. He's too smart to take a regular job and watches any cash that he does have (probably from his mom or aunt who feels sorry for him) melt away as he wastes his days idling around, doing basically nothing. Laziness is not a weakness or handicap; it is a sin. Almost anyone can do something! And regardless of the kind of work we do, as long as it's legitimate labor, God is pleased when we do our work well and for His glory.

Just as God wants us to take pleasure in marriage, we are to take pleasure in being productive. Runner Eric Liddell told his sister Jennie, "When I run I feel His pleasure." God's people should say, "When we work, we feel His pleasure." Accountants feel His pleasure when the books balance, lawyers feel his pleasure when justice is done, mothers feel His pleasure when children rise up and call her blessed, nurses when they bring healing and compassion to suffering, hurting people, teachers when they know their students get it, plumbers when they stop that leak, mechanics when they fix that motor, musicians when they know they've brought pleasure to their audience, realtors when they know they've brought satisfaction to a new home owner, and the farmer when they realize their crops are going to feed many people. Statesmen feel His pleasure when they know they have done the right thing and honored freedom and truth. And preachers when they know they've helped people know the Lord even better. Of course, we work in a fallen world, so there is boredom and drudgery and long hours that seem to never end. But like Martyn Lloyd-Jones says, "Be a drudge for God!" Christ by His Spirit is at work in us, through us, and for us. We are his workmanship, created for good works! Live responsibly for God's glory. Get a job. Work hard. Do your best. Be that light and salt where you work every day.

Thirdly, live responsibly by avoiding this worthless fellow.

Don't be impressed by big talkers but bad actors – vv. 12-15

12 A worthless person, a wicked man, is the one who walks with a perverse mouth, 13 Who winks with his eyes, who signals with his feet, Who points with his fingers; 14 Who with perversity in his heart continually devises evil, Who spreads strife. 15 Therefore his calamity will come suddenly; Instantly he will be broken and there will be no healing.

First, notice that God isn't shy about using moral labels for sinners. Here you have total depravity on full display. You and I well may have been a worthless person like this guy. We were guilty. Don't tone down what God says. If God says lazy people are sluggards, that's what they are. And if bad actors are worthless people, that's what they are. But praise God, He can take water and turn it into wine. He can raise dead bodies and give them new life. He can take a robber and make him a saint. If you are a worthless fellow, a big talker and a bad actor, concerned all about impressing people and using people for you own good, God can change you into a humble, heaven-bound, forgiven, and adopted child of God with a glorious future ahead.

In the meantime, don't be suckered by this guy. Don't be impressed, no matter how big his talk. Notice how he walks with his mouth? He "walks with a perverse mouth." He's a bad actor. This world is full of these people. They take up God's space on earth, eat God's good food, breathe God's good oxygen, and engage in all kinds of self-pleasing activities, including using other people for their own purposes. They are like those two false witnesses who accused Naboth of cursing God and the king. They'll say anything if it gets them something. They are like so many in the media who make stuff up just to get ratings. They are like a Mason with all the signals of his hands and eyes and fingers to his associates. All they think about in their hearts is how to use people for their own advancement.

In verse 14 God has turned this son of the devil over to his own evil heart. Charles Bridges says, "Deep within lies the laboratory of evil, teeming with greater and greater abominations." He never seems to stop dreaming up ways to destroy the happiness and peace of others. He spreads strife like Samson's foxes spread fire throughout the Philistines grain fields.

But his big talk and evil acts will come to a gruesome and just end. Verse 15 – suddenly and instantly, he'll fall through the trapdoor of his own making into the fires of a just and eternal hell. There is only one remedy for someone like this, just like there's only one remedy for you and me. You must be born again. You must be created anew and become a new creation through faith in Jesus Christ who died for sinners like this, like me, like you! What about you? Doesn't verse 15 send chills through your soul? "Instantly broken, without remedy."

SO WHAT? God calls His people to walk a different path from this world. He calls us to live responsibly in every area of our lives. What about you? Are you living financially responsible? Are you being productive and working for His pleasure? And are you able to discern big talkers but bad actors?