

Let me take you back to 1984, to the philosophers of our time.

'Cos I'm not getting younger
Life's too good to work
That is something I'm learning

Everybody wants to work
No, no, not me
Everybody wants to work
No, no not me
Everybody wants to work
No, no, not me, not me.

Well I could sleep till lunchtime
There's nothing else to do

Doctor, lawyer, banker, fool...

Who is this sage of our time? Brian Mannix from the band, the Uncanny X-men.

Is Brian right? Is work something to be avoided? Seen as something foolish?

The message he is giving is that you are ripping yourself off if you work. You need to pursue leisure, which is defined as not working.

When I used to do a lot of fishing, amongst my non-Christian mates there was a saying that always came out when we weren't catching anything: "A bad day's fishing is better than a good day at work".

What's your attitude towards work?

How should we view work?

When we look at God's word, we get conflicting views of work, but these conflicting views reflect our experience with work.

Because work can be a great source of fulfilment and source of significance for people, work can be very satisfying and rewarding.

But on the other hand, work can be drudgery, a trap, a slave master: "I don't want to do this, but I have no choice". I can feel that what I do is of no value and what I get paid is barely worth it.

And we can see this reality in Genesis.

Gen. 1:26 Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

We are created in the image of God; we share attributes of God; we are to be creative like Him; we are to rule like Him; we are to take care of all of creation as his agents in his creation. In the created order, we are made to rightly rule over all the earth and all things - and this is work.

We are created to work, and, like God, we can expect to get the same joy and satisfaction as we look upon our work and sit back and say and it was 'good'.

I'm pretty sure for those of you who work, that you have had those days where everything has gone right and things happens as they should and you go home and say to yourself, "Yes, that was a good day".

But we can also point to many days when that isn't the case and work is just hard.

In Genesis 3 we read:

'Cursed is the ground because of you;
through painful toil you will eat of it

all the days of your life.

Gen. 3:18 It will produce thorns and thistles for you,
and you will eat the plants of the field.

Gen. 3:19 By the sweat of your brow
you will eat your food
until you return to the ground,
since from it you were taken;
for dust you are
and to dust you will return.'

Work is toil, because of Adam's and our sin.

Work is a frustration.

Work is a necessity.

By the sweat of your brow
you will eat your food
until you return to the ground,

And again our own experience is a testament to this: that we all will need to work till we return to the ground.

Work is also not just paid work, it is *all* those things we have to do to live.

At our church houseparty, I was rightly corrected when I was interviewing Anna Tyler and I said: "Anna, you don't work. You stay at home and look after the kids", and she rightly said, "No, I do work. It's not paid, but it is work."

The situation is the same if you are retired. There is still shopping to do, meals to get ready, home maintenance, looking after grandchildren, and more.

If you are a student, your work is to study, as well as everything you have to do at home.

We are created to work, and work can be a joy but due to our sin work will be a frustration as well.

So what should our attitude be? What is the wisdom for work?

When we look at Proverbs it paints us a picture of what we should *not* be rather than what we should be.

Proverbs paints us a portrait of 'the sluggard'.

And the sluggard is quite a comical character. Each time I read about the sluggard it puts a smile on my face, like a Leunig cartoon. These caricatures work because they make light of a serious subject.

And the genius of the work is to make us laugh but then stop and think: 'Oh, there is truth in that'. Or 'Oh! That's me...'

And I confess that this has happened to me.

So let's meet the sluggard.

Prov. 6:9 How long will you lie there, you sluggard?
 When will you get up from your sleep?

A sluggard lies down not wanting to get up from sleep. This is what the sluggard wants to do: sleep and do nothing, expend as little energy as possible.

He doesn't want to work. He doesn't want to do anything!

And in Chapter 26 Proverbs paints an even more comical picture:

Prov. 26:14 As a door turns on its hinges,
 so a sluggard turns on his bed.

You can see it, can't you? Like a hinge, he goes nowhere, just moving backward and forward.

The sluggard is lazy, so his aim is to do as little as possible.

Prov. 15:19 The way of the sluggard is blocked with thorns,
but the path of the upright is a highway.

The sluggard here is contrasted to the upright.

Prov. 21:26 All day long he craves for more,
but the righteous give without sparing.

Here, he is contrasted to the righteous.

So the sluggard is not upright or righteous. The sluggard is lazy and dishonest.

I remember when I worked in the hospital, most of the time it was the blokes who were the sluggards. Not all, but some would turn up for work, and be really slow, or unable to be located or just messing about. These guys would have more sick leave than anyone else, and their work would not get done or the standard of their work was poor.

But working in an emergency department, things had to get done, so others would have to pick up the slack, to cover for them. And when they were corrected, they would improve for a little while, but then fall back into the same routine.

I remember having to speak to them and in most of these conversations I would point out to them that they were ripping off their friends and colleagues, because other people were doing their work. And I would tell them that they were ripping off the hospital because they were being paid to do a job at a standard that they weren't achieving. I would ask them how in all good conscience they could collect their pay at the end of the fortnight. And finally I would tell them that they were ripping off the public because people come to the hospital with an expectation of a level of care, but because they were too lazy, that care was not provided. The whole department was compromised because these guys were not carrying their weight.

Being lazy, being a sluggard at work, means you are ripping people off and is dishonest and self-centred. It is self serving and in most jobs it won't be tolerated. And the sluggard will lose their job.

Because the sluggard is a burden on everyone.

Prov. 10:26 As vinegar to the teeth and smoke to the eyes,
so is a sluggard to those who send him.

This describes the irritation the sluggard causes for those around them.

Prov. 18:9 One who is slack in his work
is brother to one who destroys.

The sluggard is a hindrance to a work team, destroys rather than building up and they are not only non-productive themselves, but they become a drag upon those around them.

But even out of the work place, at home, someone else is having to support the sluggard: parents or other family, or social welfare.

The sluggard is a burden that other people have to carry.

If the sluggard does work they never finish their work or do a good job.

Prov. 12:27 The lazy man does not roast his game,
but the diligent man prizes his possessions.

Prov. 26:15 The sluggard buries his hand in the dish;
he is too lazy to bring it back to his mouth.

The sluggard goes to trouble of hunting and catching his game, but is too lazy to cook it.

He does half the job. "Mañana" – Spanish for 'later' or 'tomorrow'.

"Don't do today, what you can put off until tomorrow."

The sluggard only does half the job, and in the end, it would have been better that they didn't even start, because it becomes a waste.

The quality of the sluggard's work is poor:

Prov. 10:4 Lazy hands make a man poor,
but diligent hands bring wealth.

Prov. 6:11 and poverty will come on you like a bandit
and scarcity like an armed man.

Prov. 20:4 A sluggard does not plow in season;
so at harvest time he looks but finds nothing.

Prov. 21:25 The sluggard's craving will be the death of him,
because his hands refuse to work.

In the end the sluggard will be ruined, financially and socially. His desire to do nothing will lead to death. His desire to do nothing is a sin and he will be judged.

Lastly, we sadly see that the sluggard deceives himself:

Prov. 26:16 The sluggard is wiser in his own eyes
than seven men who answer discreetly.

"She'll be right." "I'm not causing harm." "All you other guys are wrong, I've got it right."
The sluggard will say.

But when we look at the sluggard we see him as a fool. Because of his laziness, he brings ruin upon himself and he doesn't even realize it.

So what are we to do with this portrait of the sluggard?

Prov. 24:30I went past the field of the sluggard,
past the vineyard of the man who lacks judgment;

Prov. 24:31 thorns had come up everywhere,
the ground was covered with weeds,
and the stone wall was in ruins.

Prov. 24:32I applied my heart to what I observed
and learned a lesson from what I saw

Let's apply our heart to what we see and let's learn from it.

First of all it is a caricature, and as I said before, we laugh and smirk, but we need to ask ourselves: "Is this me?" Because the sluggard is not who we should be.

I ask myself these questions all the time because my natural sinful tendency is to be more like the sluggard.

I need ask myself:

Am I lazy?

Is my laziness causing harm to others?

Do other people have to cover for me?

Do I enjoy my lifestyle at other people's expense?

Am I a burden or a blessing to people?

Do I only do half the job?

Am I a 'gunna'? Do I say: "Yeah, I'm gunna do this or that ..." but never do it?

Do I procrastinate? This one bites deep with me. I love putting things off. I love getting distracted when real works needs to be done. If you know me, you will know that my study is a mess, but give me an exam to revise for or an essay to write and my study becomes neat and tidy. Because cleaning allows me to procrastinate from the job at hand.

Friends, as Proverbs tells us, we are really good at kidding ourselves, so we are not the best judges of our own behaviour. If we want an honest answer, we need to ask someone we trust to answer these questions about ourselves.

If you are like me, you will find that in some areas you are a sluggard.

And today the message of Proverbs is clear: don't be a sluggard.

But the reality is, if left to myself, I am unable to change myself.

Like some of the blokes I use to work with, I can change for a little while, but I won't be able to sustain it.

What I need is real change; my nature needs to be changed. How to change is not found in the book of Proverbs. The book tells us that we need to start with the fear of God.

Friends, the book of Proverbs drives us to Jesus.

For it is only through Jesus' work on the cross that real change can happen. It's only through the power of the Holy Spirit that we can live a life of repentance and become more like Jesus.

When we read Proverbs, we see what God requires and how God wants us to live. The only way we can do that is through Jesus.

Friends, we also need to acknowledge that this is about being a sluggard not about being unemployed. There are many people who want to work and are actively looking for work but can't find it. So don't hear me say if you don't have a job you are a sluggard!

Work is what we do, it is not who we are.

As Christians we need our identity to be found in Jesus not in what we do.

Our New Testament reading points out that, in our work, we need to be working for Jesus. And that is something we must get right, no matter what type of work we find ourselves in. You are working that job to honour Jesus.

My job now as a paid minister is no more honouring to God than when I worked in the hospital. I worked for 15 years as a Registered Nurse, because that is where God wanted me then. And now he wants me here, but if he wants me somewhere else in the future, then I will do that.

You honour God best by being where he wants you to be.

You honour God by obeying him.

We honour God by not being a sluggard.