

The Little Foxes

Lesson 5 - The Little Fox Of Sloth

Song of Solomon 2:15 KJV Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines: for our vines *have* tender grapes.

Proverbs 10:4-5 KJV He becometh poor that dealeth *with* a slack hand: but the hand of the diligent maketh rich. [5] He that gathereth in summer *is* a wise son: *but* he that sleepeth in harvest *is* a son that causeth shame.

I. INTRODUCTION—THINGS THAT CAN SPOIL OUR WALK WITH GOD

So far in this series of Bible studies we have considered the little foxes of sinful speech, spiritual apathy, double-mindedness, and now we come to sloth. Perhaps there may be a tendency to scoff or wink at such topics in consideration of some of the much larger temptations and sins the devil may use to pull us away from the Lord. Yet there is something about these little foxes that can destroy our witness and could very well lead to our spiritual demise. These little foxes can damage the vines and hinder spiritual growth in such a way to cause heartache, sorrow, and disappointment.

At best it is almost hard to imagine that seemingly benign things such as pride, jealousy, envy, fear, and other little foxes would have the ability to destroy a saint of God. But that is exactly what can take place with these forgotten little sins. All that it takes for these things to harm our souls is for us to quit being diligent and vigilant in our walk. They are sneaky and often unnoticed but that does not remove their sinister effect if they get into the vineyards of our soul, our family, and our church. You can count on one thing the devil will take every opportunity he can to let these little foxes loose in our lives.

The fallout that takes place after the little foxes attack can be summed up in the results that follow:

- Our personal testimony and witness is lost to both believers and unbelievers.
- Our relationship with God in prayer and the Word loses its richness and life.

- Our actions as a saint are altered because of the associated baggage of guilt and shame that plague us.
- Our joy is robbed which often causes us to lose hope.
- Our convictions become dead to the condemnation of the devil.
- Our life follows a downward spiral of feelings of regret, sorrow, anger, frustration, and even depression.

Despite the presence of little foxes, there is a promise that we have that we desperately need to take to heart that is found in the Word of God:

1 Corinthians 10:13 KJV There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God *is* faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear *it*.

For every little fox that attempts to destroy the vine, there is a hope that we may have in Jesus Christ who has paid the price for our salvation. Despite the fact that the devil is working overtime to cause us to become discouraged, fearful, and defeated, we can know that there is a power that has been invested in us. This power of the Spirit is present to help us to escape the suffocating pressure that is brought about by the guilt and shame of failure.

Perhaps you have not fallen to any of the little foxes that we have covered up to this point. On the other hand, you may have allowed one of the sneaky little devils to take advantage of your vineyard and now you are dealing with the fallout from it. What the devil doesn't want you to do is begin believing again. He wants to kill any hope you may have of turning your spiritual life around. For those who have felt the clutches of the claws of the little foxes, there are a couple of passages that can help you:

Galatians 5:1 KJV Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.

Galatians 5:13 KJV For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only *use* not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another.

The one thing that can help us to detect and see the right direction to go is the Word of God. If you can just determine to practice what the Word of the Lord has to say, great freedom can take place.

John 8:31-32 KJV Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, *then* are ye my disciples indeed; **[32]** And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

II. GENERAL OBSERVATIONS ON SLOTH

Most people would hardly be willing to even consider the idea of slothfulness or laziness to be a characteristic of their life. In fact, if the accusation were leveled at them of slothfulness it might invoke a heated argument and maybe even come to blows. There is something repulsive to all of us about the idea of laziness.

What is very interesting about the condition of sloth is that it generally is the sin of highly civilized and advanced nations or societies. As sloth progresses in those societies there is a tendency for the men to become effeminate. Advanced societies all throughout history beginning with the Babylonians and progressing through the Romans and carrying through the cultures of our day have found great peril when its citizens were not under the stern necessity of working with their hands or their brains to gain their daily bread.

If you were to take a poll of the circle of people that you know in your “world” and ask them if they were lazy, most would immediately point out a busy schedule to bolster their argument against personal laziness. However, sloth and laziness have very little to do with work or the pace of life. It has to do with whether or not we are in a productive mode moving toward a purpose.

A. A Definition

Slothful is a word that has passed out of usage in our generation. It is a strong Old Saxon word that comes from the idea of being slow. It can be linked up to the habit of constant tardiness and a strong leaning toward inactivity and idleness. Sloth is the sin that believes nothing, cares for nothing, seeks to know nothing, interferes with nothing, hates nothing, finds purpose in nothing, and

lives for nothing. Sloth can be defined as to hanging around and wasting time when we should be taking on a challenge.

B. Quotes

Various quotes on sloth help us to see what it really means to fall to this little fox.

R. Tuck—It must be a sin to live a listless, easeful Christian life: a sin like that of a soldier who hides among the stuff or feigns a sickness when the trumpet blast is summoning all heroic souls to the front line.

Benjamin Franklin—Sloth, like rust, consumes faster than labor wears, while the key often used is always bright.

Benjamin Franklin—Sloth makes all things difficult, but industry all easy; and he that riseth late must trot all day, and shall scarce overtake his business at night; while laziness travels so slowly that poverty soon overtakes him.

Jeremy Taylor—Many are idly busy. Domitian was busy but then it was in catching flies.

Unknown—Excess is not the only thing that breaks up both health and enjoyment; many are brought into a very ill and languishing habit of body by mere sloth, which is both a great sin, and the cause of many more.

Anonymous—The soul's idling time is the devil's working time.

Colton—Sloth, it if has prevented many crimes, has also smothered many virtues.

Anonymous—An idle mind is the devil's workshop.

C. Biblical References

The book of Proverbs is loaded with defining slothfulness, laziness, and idleness as a sin. It is a great sin particularly when it comes to heart-felt religious

matters where a man just allows his soul to never take an initiative to do anything positive in walking toward the things of God.

Proverbs 6:6-11 KJV Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise: [7] Which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, [8] Provideth her meat in the summer, *and* gathereth her food in the harvest. [9] How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard? when wilt thou arise out of thy sleep? [10] Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep: [11] So shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth, and thy want as an armed man.

Proverbs 12:24 KJV The hand of the diligent shall bear rule: but the slothful shall be under tribute.

Proverbs 12:27 KJV The slothful *man* roasteth not that which he took in hunting: but the substance of a diligent man *is* precious.

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

Proverbs 18:9 KJV He also that is slothful in his work is brother to him that is a great waster.

Proverbs 19:15 KJV Slothfulness casteth into a deep sleep; and an idle soul shall suffer hunger.

Proverbs 19:24 NASB The sluggard buries his hand in the dish, *But* will not even bring it back to his mouth.

Proverbs 20:4 KJV The sluggard will not plow by reason of the cold; *therefore* shall he beg in harvest, and *have* nothing.

Proverbs 21:25 KJV The desire of the slothful killeth him; for his hands refuse to labour.

Proverbs 26:13-16 KJV The slothful *man* saith, *There is* a lion in the way; a lion *is* in the streets. [14] As the door turneth upon his hinges, so *doth* the slothful upon his bed. [15] The slothful hideth his hand in *his* bosom; it grieveth him to

bring it again to his mouth. [16] The sluggard *is* wiser in his own conceit than seven men that can render a reason.



The Evil of Sloth

Among the disciples of Hillel, the wise teacher of the sons of Israel, was one named Saboth, to whom every work was the greatest trouble and who gave himself up to idleness and sloth. Hillel was grieved for the youth and resolved to cure him of his fault.

To this end he took him out to the valley of Hinnom, by Jerusalem. There was a standing pool full of snakes and vermin and covered with muddy weeds. They reached this place and Hillel put down his staff, and said, "Let us rest here from our way." The youth was surprised and said, "How, master, near this foul bog? Dost thou not perceive what poisonous vapors it exhales? And what deadly serpents are here?" "Thou art right my son, answered the master, "This bog is like the soul of a slothful man. Who would wish to be near it?"

Then Hillel took the youth to a wasted field, producing nothing but thistles and thorns, which choked the corn and the herbs. Now, Hillel leaned on his staff and said, "Behold this field has good soil to produce all that is useful and pleasant but it is forgotten and neglected, therefore it brings forth thistles and thorns, and poisonous weeds beneath which lurk toads and serpents. A little while ago thou did see the soul; now behold the life of an idle man."

Then Saboth was full of shame and repentance and said, "Master why leadest thou me to see those lonely and weary spots? They are the reproachful picture of my soul and life!" Hillel answered and said, "Thou wouldst not believe my words, therefore I tried with the voice of Nature and it penetrated to thy heart." Saboth pressed his masters hand and said, "Thy endeavors shall not be in vain; thou wilt see that a new life has begun within me. And after this day, Saboth became an active youth.

Then Hillel took him to a fertile valley, by the side of a clear brook which flowered meandering between fruitful trees, flowery meadows and shady shrubs. "See here," said the old man to the rejoicing youth, "the picture of thy new industrious life. Nature, which warned thee, will now reward thee. Here beauty and grace can only give joy to him who sees in her life of a picture of his own."



III. THE BATTLE-GROUNDS OF SLOTH

To gain a practical understanding of the way that sloth works, it is helpful to look at some of battle grounds that sloth presents itself to the Christian.

A. Laziness

The most obvious battle ground that sloth initially asserts itself is just plain, vanilla laziness. One of the Proverb references (19:24) is actually quite funny in its presentation of the lazy man. It describes him as a man who is literally too lazy to feed himself. While most would not degenerate into this place, it is important to notice what the ideal American life is really about—a life of ease with very little work expected.

What happens to far too many is that they buy into the idea of life that is made up entirely of leisure with very little requirements placed on them. Then when the responsibility of work settles in on them, they feel justified in quitting because the task is too hard. Over the long haul of life, it produces much instability in their job history.

It is important for a true child of God to understand that an element of work is involved in accomplishing any goal in life. That means that blood, sweat, tears will always precede the glory of accomplishment. Great marriages do not just happen; they have to be worked at. Great business endeavors that flourish

Sloth & the Emotions

Sloth causes our emotions to be affected also. We can become emotionally slothful and it will be detrimental to us.

1. Lack of priorities, goals, and ambitions.
2. Selfishness
3. Lack of faith in God's call and ability.
4. A sense of pride.
5. Insensitivity to God and others.
6. Unfinished tasks.
7. A damaged testimony.
8. A weakened relationship with God.
9. Ignorance of the Truth.
10. Feelings of depression,

financially have required the discipline of work. Even in our spiritual life, we have to work at it for prayer, worship, and Bible comprehension to take place. There are no easy ways to success; it often takes years of faithful investment for success in any field to take place. People who do enjoy success have a measure of discipline that they do things that others are unwilling to do.

One commentator noted that laziness is the hatred of all things spiritual that require effort and it is faintheartedness in working through the difficult angles of striving for perfection. Laziness will not endure anything that requires self-sacrifice, hardship, or self-discipline. What we have to understand clearly is that when Jesus called for cross-bearing, it was a life-style that was directly opposed to laziness.

B. Tolerance

A very subtle battle ground of sloth is the idea of tolerance. In fact, it has become a political hot-button issue for us to show tolerance toward any and every thing that comes down the pike. It is almost as if we cannot voice any objection whatsoever to a lifestyle, behavior, or philosophy that is in direct conflict with our own set of values. This idea of tolerance has also led to a great position of doctrinal integrity in our day. Men who solely proclaim what the Scriptures stand for and declare are deemed as intolerant.

Tolerance and sloth go hand in hand when it gets mixed in with how we view others and also how we view ourselves. If we can have toleration for the value sets of those that we oppose, which are far lower than what a true saint should be comfortable with, it will not be too long before we allowing a sliding tolerance to influence us also. As this creeping tolerance sets itself up in our lives, we become prone to allowing lukewarm behaviors to hinder our walk with God. We soon can ignore problem areas in our lives and areas that need to have adjustments made are accepted as the normal level of accepted behavior. Tolerance causes us to shrug our shoulders and say, "Well, that's just how I am made." This is an attitude that is diametrically opposed to the concept of complete transformation taking place in our lives.

I would encourage you to take a look at your life and with careful spiritual eyes, assess what needs to be changed. Are their sins that need to be confessed? Are there promises to claim? Are there attitudes that need to be changed? Are

there commands that need to be obeyed? Are there biblical examples to be followed? Are there prayers that need to be prayed? Are their errors to be avoided? Is there something that needs to have thanks offered for? Is there something new that needs to be learned?

C. Procrastination

The third battle ground of sloth that comes to light is procrastination. You have heard that old adage that comes in the form of a question; why do today what you can do tomorrow? Procrastination is the act of knowing that something ought to be done but not having the energy and initiative to get it done. Procrastination destroys any sense of urgency that we may feel in accomplishing the task. There is a spiritual principle involved in seizing the day.

By putting things off everything good will soon die because of the withering drought of procrastination. This was the dilemma of the five foolish virgins in Matthew 25, they put off getting oil for their lamp. But they ended up being stranded in the streets when the call of the bridegroom came for them. They knew what the requirement for oil was but procrastination caused them to put it off. They had a responsibility for planning for their future but procrastination caused them to put it off. They knew that the priority was to have oil in their lamps but their priorities were on lesser things and they procrastinated in this area also. They knew the general time of the bridegroom's appearance but they waited too long. Procrastination muddles the mind, blocks the future, destroys our priorities, and causes our sensitivity to God's timing to be off.

Charles Spurgeon—Like wolves which hunt the flying traveler across the snowy plains of Russia, neglects and obligations follow a man with swift and sure pursuit, and there is no way of escape.

D. Busyness

The fourth battle ground of sloth will come as a shock because it has to do with being busy. This is an ironic paradox to grasp. Sloth generally moves about slowly without much hurry but sloth also works through busyness in that it happens because people are too lazy to take control of their schedule.




The Devil & Sloth

The devil is always looking for places to hide his little foxes. If we allow the little fox of sloth to run rampant through the vineyards of our lives, our families and our churches, we can count on products of sloth to grow.

1. **Problems**—Loss of a job, relationship, or internal peace.
2. **Stress and Pressure**—Employers and friends will not carry us through life because of our sloth.
3. **Emotional Pain**—You will always be in last place. It will have a terrible effect on your self-esteem.
4. **Lack of Peace**—Every person has a desire to count for something. Slothful living destroys peace.
5. **Poverty**—When you don't work, you don't eat!
6. **Penalties**—We reap what we sow. We always reap what we sow, more than we sow, and later than we sow.

This is most clearly reflected in the life of Martha. She became very upset because Mary was not helping her to take care of getting a meal ready for the Lord (Luke 10:38-42). Busyness leads to great distraction and frustration. There are great tradeoffs that take place with the busyness trap—we trade the substantial for the superficial.

One study noted that in the neighborhood of a 5,000 hour commitment a college degree could be obtained. Another 5,000 hour commitment could lead to a masters or a doctoral level in several chosen fields of study such as engineering or astronomy. The majority of people when they are told of this 5,000 to 10,000 hour commitment immediately say that they cannot do it. However researchers also noted that by the age of 20, the great majority of people in this category have watched 20,000 hours of television. As they age, they add about 10,000 hours per decade.



Busyness causes us to miss out on positive opportunities that can make our lives far better. If you are going to accomplish anything interesting and rewarding it will be because someone moved with constructive and consistently applied effort that was not idle busyness. Busyness prevents us from investing ourselves in things that really matter. Busyness ultimately causes a deposit of emptiness to overload the soul, destroy the heart, and waste a life. Yet our ego is often stroked by the sloth of busyness because we are outrunning everyone else on the way to nowhere.

IV. CONCLUSION—OVERCOMING THE LITTLE FOX OF SLOTH

There are some steps that we can take to overcome the demands that sloth would like to place on us.

A. Be Truthful

It is hard to say, “I am a lazy, slothful person!” We feel like our pride has been insulted when we say this. However, our flesh is hard-wired toward this slope of trouble. In fact, sloth has a voice that impresses us with the thoughts that laziness, tolerance, procrastination, and busyness are really the way to go. Sloth will tell you that you are owed this kind of life. But we have to realize that this is not a true statement.

If you can honestly look at how you are spending the minutes and hours of your life, you will suddenly determine that the priorities of life are really what matter. It takes courage to look at your life under the microscope but it is the way that we change.

B. Act on the Information

It is not enough to just be truthful and honest about sloth, you have to do something about the information that you have discovered. Some of this may involve repentance and it also may cause you to have more insight into the concept of spiritual warfare. I firmly believe that the spirit of slothfulness is an avenue of spiritual warfare that we often do not even realize is taking place in our walk with God. But God can forgive sin and we must rely on His power to walk us through the battle against sloth.

C. Refuse to Give Up

Walk with an understanding that this is a life-long battle to contend with. All of us, to some degree or another, have a tendency to believe that we are entitled to an easy life. Sloth robs us of developing the full potential that God has in mind for us. Refuse to give up the battle with this deadly fox!