

A LITTLE BUG Proverbs 6:6-8

INTRODUCTION:

Have you ever heard of a Myrmecologist? Myrmecology is the study of ants. A Myrmecologist is one who devotes his life to the study of ants.

I don't know about devoting one's entire life to studying those little insects, but I do know that the Bible says we are to at least consider the ways of the ant. In Proverbs 6:6-8, Solomon wrote:

⁶ *Go to the ant, you sluggard;
consider its ways and be wise!*
⁷ *It has no commander,
no overseer or ruler,
⁸ yet it stores its provisions in summer
and gathers its food at harvest.*

We don't need to be full-fledged Myrmecologists to learn from the ants. We just need to note what the Bible says about them. When we see what Solomon wrote about ants, we will find that they are quite amazing creatures; and there is much wisdom that can be gained from watching them.

OUTLINE:

I. IT IS IMPORTANT TO WORK

Solomon contrasts the industry of the ant with the idleness of the sluggard. The term sluggard occurs 14 times in the Bible; every time in the book of Proverbs. The book of Proverbs begins like this:

¹ *The proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel:
² for attaining wisdom and discipline;
for understanding words of insight;
³ for acquiring a disciplined and prudent life,
doing what is right and just and fair;
⁴ for giving prudence to the simple,
knowledge and discretion to the young—*

Solomon wrote this book so that we can learn from his teaching. And he warns us about sluggards. The word "sluggard" comes from the word "slug". A sluggard is a slug-like person.

You know what slugs are, don't you? Sometimes of a morning, you see the silvery trails they have left behind. They are slimy wormy creatures like snails without shells. Technically, they are gastropod mollusks that lack a shell.

Some varieties of slug hibernate underground in the winter while others simply die off in the fall, their young hatching out of their eggs the next spring. Because slugs are either dead or inactive in the winter, they store no food. While active, they simply devour whatever they can hold with no thought for tomorrow. I know people like that. Apparently, so did Solomon; and he called them sluggards after the slimy creature with similar habits.

Solomon tells the sluggard to consider the ant and learn from him. If we consider the ant, we will notice his industry. Ants are active. In fact, they are known for the way they work. "The Ant and The Grasshopper" is one of Aesop's Fables.

One summer day a grasshopper was singing and chirping and hopping about. He was having a wonderful time. He saw an ant who was busy gathering and storing grain for the winter.

"Stop and talk to me," said the grasshopper. "We can sing some songs and dance a while."

"Oh no," said the ant. "Winter is coming. I am storing up food for the winter. I think you should do the same."

"Oh, I can't be bothered," said the grasshopper. "Winter is a long time off. There is plenty of food." So the grasshopper continued to dance and sing and chirp and the ant continued to work.

When winter came the grasshopper had no food and was starving. He went to the ant's house and asked, "Can I have some wheat or maybe a few kernels of corn. Without it I will starve," whined the grasshopper.

"You danced last summer," said the ants in disgust. "You can continue to dance." And they gave him no food.

Aesop said that the moral of the story is: *There is a time to work and a time to play.* But the sluggard does not realize that there is a time to work.

When I was a kid, I had an ant farm. Do you remember those? In an ant farm, sand is filled between two panes of glass or transparent plastic and then ants are added. The joy is watching as the ants make tunnels and rooms in the sand. When you feed the ants, they never sit on top of the sand and eat the food; they take it into the tunnels and share it with the nest or store it for later.

Have you ever seen a slug farm? Me neither. Ant farms are interesting because you can watch the ants work. Slug farms would be boring because slugs don't do anything.

God intends that we, made in His likeness and in His image, will find satisfaction from meaningful work. Work is not a curse: it is a blessing. If you don't believe that is true, talk to someone who is unemployed and he will tell you what a blessing it would be to have a job.

We have a number of retired folk in our church. Most retired people I know tell me they are busier now than they were when they were employed. They do not have to work to earn an income but they choose to be busy because it is a blessing to have meaningful work. What a double blessing it is to be able to derive meaning from your work even when you don't have to derive your income from it.

From the ant, we can learn that it is important to work. And from the ant, we can learn that it is important to work together.

II. IT IS IMPORTANT TO WORK TOGETHER

This being the Sunday before Veterans' Day, I thought we might want to give special attention to the Army ant. There really is one, you know. Actually, there are over 200 ant species in different lineages that are known as Army ants due to their aggressive predatory foraging groups, known as "raids", in which huge numbers of ants forage simultaneously over a certain area, attacking prey *en masse*.

Prey? Yes! Army ant raids can kill and eat up to 100,000 animals in a day. Most of these animals are arthropods such as insects and spiders. Working as a team, army ants can also kill larger animals such as lizards, snakes, chickens, and small mammals. They also climb trees and attack birds in nests. But no individual ant could ever accomplish such a feat alone. They have to work together. That's something we can learn from the ant: the importance of working together.

Another shared feature of Army ants is that unlike most ant species, army ants do not construct permanent nests, and an army ant colony moves almost incessantly over the time it exists – much like an army on the march. For shelter, army ants ARE their nest. Army ants create a temporary nest out of their own bodies. Individual ants fasten onto each other using hooks and spines on their feet and their mandibles. In this way, the ants form a living nest, complete with walls and tunnels. Interestingly, the technical name for these living nests is "bivouacs". Inside the bivouac, the queen and her eggs and developing young are safe from weather and from predators. Workers bring prey inside the bivouac. They may also move the eggs to different parts of the bivouac.

All types of ants must work together or perish alone. They cannot survive long independent of the colony but working together, more than merely

survive: they thrive. But that means that the workers don't hoard what they bring back to the nest. Nor do they expect glory. Like bees, ants communicate to the others where the food is so others can share in the toil and in the spoils.

In the church, there is much good that could be accomplished if we would all work, if we would all work together, if we would share the benefits and seek no recognition or glory.

From the ant, we can learn that it is important to work and that it is especially important to work together. And from the ant, we can also learn that it is important to work in the right season.

III. **IT IS IMPORTANT TO WORK IN THE RIGHT SEASON**

Solomon said of the ant, *"It stores its provisions in summer and gathers its food at harvest."* The ant is wise enough to know that there is a proper time and a proper season during which he must gather and store food. It is important to work in the right season. In John 9:4, John records Jesus as having said, *"As long as it is day, we must do the work of Him who sent Me. Night is coming when no one can work."*

There is an old hymn, based on John 9:4, that emphasizes the importance of working while we can and especially in Christian service. The words were written in 1854 by an 18 year-old Canadian girl, known then as Annie Louise Walker. (Annie married a wealthy merchant, Harry Coghill, in 1883.) Her poem was first published in a Canadian newspaper and later in her own book, *Leaves From the Back Woods*. Mrs. Coghill eventually attained prominence as a poet and author, producing several volumes that enjoyed wide circulation.

Philosophers and writers have made many profound statements about the intrinsic value of labor; but none has been able to state more simply and meaningfully the joy of being coworkers with God in worthy labor than has Annie Louise Coghill in this hymn text:

*Work, for the night is coming. Work thru the morning hours;
Work while the dew is sparkling; work 'mid springing flow'rs.
Work when the day grows brighter. Work in the glowing sun;
Work for the night is coming, when man's work is done.*

*Work, for the night is coming. Work thru the sunny noon;
Fill brightest hours with labor—rest comes sure and soon.
Give ev'ry flying minute something to keep in store;
Work for the night is coming when man works no more.*

*Work, for the night is coming under the sunset skies:
While their bright tints are glowing, work, for daylight flies.
Work till the last beam fadeth, fadeth to shine no more;
Work, while the night is dark'ning, when man's work is o'er.*

Friends, this is not just an admonition to save for your retirement or to invest for a rainy day. This is also a warning that now is the time you must prepare for your eternity. The Bible cautions that it is appointed unto man once to die and that after that comes the Judgment. God gives us many chances and second chances in this life but when we pass from this life, there are no more chances. Work now because the night is coming when man's work is done and when God's Judgment is final.

It is important to work and to work together. It is important to work in the right season and it is important to work for the right reason.

IV. **IT IS IMPORTANT TO WORK FOR THE RIGHT REASON**

Let me list a few appropriate reasons why we should work and work now.

A passage I have shared with you before is I Corinthians 4:1 & 2. In that text, the apostle Paul wrote: ¹ *So then, men ought to regard us as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the secret things of God.* ² *Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful.* One appropriate reason we should get to work is because we have been given a trust. God has seen fit to entrust the good news of the Gospel (the message of salvation) to us. Because we have been given a trust, we ought to get to work and fulfill that trust. That is what is required of us.

Another appropriate reason for us to get to work is for the good of each other. I touched on this issue earlier but let me speak to it now. Biblically, the church is a community in which each of us works for the benefit of the rest of us. Just as each ant labors for the good of the nest, so each Christian labors for the good of the rest. In the New Testament, the church is variously described as a community, an army, a body, a building and several other figures of speech. One thing all of these images have in common is that the whole is made up of many parts working together. It is important for us to work for the reason that we must rely on each other.

It is important for us to work together now because there is a night coming when no man can work. What is done now is all that counts because now is all we have. Yesterday is gone. Tomorrow may never come. This moment is the one we must use for the Lord because it is all we have. Work for the night is coming when man's work is done.

It is also right for us to work because one day we will be judged. We will be called to account for every word, every deed and every thought. It is important to work because our work will be judged and the scriptures say we will be rewarded or punished based on the work we've done for the Lord.

CONCLUSION:

I want to ask you a question: Are you an ant or a slug? Ants are ants and slugs are slugs and they can't help it. But you can. Solomon says that the sluggard can learn from the ant. If you learn from the ant, you will work together in the right season and for the right reason. The right season is now and the reason is because the night is coming.

INVITATION: *"Work For The Night Is Coming"* (#218 in our old hymnal)