

DATE: MAY 22, 2011

TEXT: Proverbs 6:6-11

TITLE: "REACHING YOUR GOD GIVEN POTENTIAL"

SERIES: "GET SMART" – Wisdom for Living from the Book of Proverbs #4

Note: Lots of scripture in this lesson from God's Word. I want to encourage you to read and reflect on the scripture during the week.

INTRODUCTION:

If someone were to ask the question, who was your favorite teacher in school, would someone quickly come to mind?

ILLUSTRATION: For me, it would be Mr. Greska. He was my 5th grade teacher at Popular Elementary School in Fontana, California. He made a big impression upon me. He drove a blue Corvette. He had done acting and was a quick draw and trick six shooter who had been a on the early Bonanza television show. He was very caring, personable and kind.

Through my years of education I have had a variety of teachers. (**Cartoon: John draw a funny cartoon of an ant teaching, perhaps standing by a black board with five points.) In this passage, we are told to be students of the ant so that we might learn be wise.

Theology is the study of God. Psychology is the study of the mind and behavior. Myrmecology is the study of ants. The ant is the most successful of all social insects. There are over 11,000 different kinds of ants. They are able to lift 20 times their own body weight. Ants have been found to build structures 500 times their own height. The brain of one ant has 250,000 cells, whereas the human brain has 10,000 million brain cells. The life expectancy of an ant is 45-60 days. How many of you have ever had occasion to cut the life span of an ant short? They live in colonies numbering from a few to over 20 million. There are approximately 1 quadrillion ants in the world today. (This is a 10 followed by 15 zeros!) Ants are so numerous that scientists say that if all the ants in the Amazon rainforests were weighed, they would weigh four times more than all the other specials of mammals, birds, reptiles and amphibians, living in that area, combined!

If an ant is industrious, how much more should you and I live up to our God-given potential. This morning, I want to look at five lessons from the ant that will help you reach your God-given potential.

LESSON I

(vs.6:6-7) REACH YOUR GOD-GIVEN POTENTIAL BY TAKING PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

"Go to the ant, you sluggard; consider its ways and be wise!" (Proverbs 6:6)

1. There are lessons all of us can learn from the ant, though he is specifically addressing the sluggard.
2. The term 'sluggard' refers to one who is lazy, idle, careless, sticks to nothing, minds no business, and brings nothing to pass.
3. The book of Proverbs has a lot to say about the sluggard.

“As vinegar to the teeth and smoke to the eyes, so is a sluggard to those who send him.” (Proverbs 10:26)

“The way of the sluggard is blocked with thorns, but the path of the upright is a highway.” (Proverbs 15:19)

“The sluggard’s craving will be the death of him, because his hands refuse to work. All day long he craves for more, but the righteous give without sparing.” (Proverbs 21:25-26)

4. We are to consider the way of the ant and be wise.
5. It is important to understand how wisdom played an important role in the creation of this world.

“By wisdom the Lord laid the earth’s foundations, by understanding he set the heavens in place; by his knowledge the deeps were divided, and the clouds let drop the dew.” (Proverbs 3:19-20)

6. Creation is the result of the wisdom of God.
7. So, consequently, there is much evidence of wisdom to be found in God’s creation.
8. Though there are many lessons that could be drawn, we will limit our lessons to those specific insights and lessons suggested in the text.
9. The ant is self-motivated.

“It has no commander, no overseer or ruler” (Proverbs 6:7)

10. It takes the initiative.
11. It does not have to be prodded or pushed along.
12. Have you ever known someone that needed to be pushed along every step of the way?
13. The ant does not have to be pushed along, but takes responsibility for itself.

ILLUSTRATION: *Truett Cathy, founder of Chick-Fil-A restaurant, has a saying that speaks of responsibility, “If it’s to be, it’s up to me.” (Truett Cathy – Chick-Fil-A founder)**

14. The ant is diligent to fulfill its calling without being prodded along.
15. The person who lives wisely is diligent, not lazy or slothful.

“Lazy hands make a man poor, but diligent hands bring wealth.” (Proverbs 10:4)

“Diligent hands will rule, but laziness ends in slave labor.” (Proverbs 12:24)

“The plans of the diligent lead to profit as surely as haste leads to poverty.” (Proverbs 21:5)

16. To be diligent is to be industrious, sharp or acute in business, perseveringly attentive.

EXAMPLE: The Apostle Paul was a teacher and mentor to Timothy. I Timothy records he had been giving instructions to him. Then, he gave this summary statement. “Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress.” (I Timothy 4:15)

17. Timothy was to give himself wholly to the ministry he was called to do.
18. The word ‘diligence’ means to train well so you can do your best.
19. The lesson from the ant is to live life to its full potential by living with wisdom.
20. Take the initiative to give life its very best.

ILLUSTRATION: **“Nothing of worth or weight can be achieved with half a mind, with a faint heart, and with a lame endeavor.” (Isaac Burrow)*

21. Give it your all without someone pushing you.

22. Because of our relationship with God, we are to take responsibility to give life our very best for the Lord and His Glory.

“Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men.” (Colossians 3:23)

23. The ant takes responsibility and does what it should do.

ILLUSTRATION: The American Personal Responsibility in Food Consumption Act, also known as the Cheeseburger Bill, passed in 2004 and 2005 in the U.S. House of Representatives but failed to pass the Senate both times. It sought to protect producers and retailers of foods—such as McDonald's Corporation—from an increasing number of suits and class action suits by obese consumers. To date, based on the last article I read, these suits have been turned down by the courts, sometimes in strong terms. One overweight customer, 56, tried to blame fast food places for his 2 heart attack, diabetes and weight problem. Another 15 year old student weighing 400 pounds blamed McDonalds. The purpose of the bill was to say we are responsible for our own actions.

24. To be diligent is to step up and to do what you know you should be doing for the Lord without waiting for others to push you along.

ILLUSTRATION: “Success on any major scale requires you to accept responsibility. In the final analysis, the one quality that all successful people have is the ability to take on responsibility.” (Michael korda)

25. It is not blaming the church, the culture, or the society around us.

26. It is stepping up by faith in the all powerful God and taking responsibility to reach your full God-given potential.

27. Don't be spiritually slothful or lazy.

28. Take responsibility. Step up by faith and be all God has created and empowered you to be.

29. Take responsibility for your spiritual life.

30. God answers prayer but we must take responsibility to pray.

31. God puts His love in our heart but He will not love our neighbor for us; we must love.

32. God gives grace to forgive others, but we must do the forgiving.

33. God gives the Holy Spirit to guide us, but we must do the following.

34. God gives the power to live right and holy lives, but we must do the holy living.

35. God gives strength to resist temptation, but we must will to resist.

36. God provides food for our souls, but we must feed upon His word.

37. God's grace provides the foundation for faith but we must do the believing.

38. To reach your God-given potential, you must take personal responsibility for your faith.

39. Reach your God-given potential by taking personal responsibility to step up and be who God has called you to be and do what God has called you to do through His power.

LESSON II

(v.6:8) REACH YOUR GOD-GIVEN POTENTIAL BY PREPARING WHILE YOU CAN

“Yet, it stores its provision in summer and gathers its food at harvest.” (Proverbs 6:8)

1. Summer provided an opportunity to store up for the future.
2. In contrast with the sluggard, the ant takes initiative, using the opportunity to prepare for its future.

“He who gathers crops in summer is a wise son, but he who sleeps during harvest is a disgraceful son.” (Proverbs 10:5).

3. The ant is not short-sighted.
4. He prepares for the future.

ILLUSTRATION: * Basketball legend, John Wooden, said, “When opportunity comes, it’s too late to prepare.”

5. The now of summer is the time to prepare.

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

6. The sluggard gets caught up in instant gratification.

ILLUSTRATION: A December, 2010, an article in *Newsweek* argues that after a brief period of cutting back, Americans are starting to spend again—whether they can afford it or not. Some experts call it "frugality fatigue"—in other words, we're weary of cutting back, and we're ready to splurge again. The authors argue, "The truth is that spending may be hard to contain. Entire generations of consumers have grown up with the idea of instant gratification and the credit culture that comes with it."

7. The ant chooses deferred satisfaction instead of instant gratification.
8. The sluggard thinks only of the now or the present.
9. Much adultery that takes place starts with someone getting caught up with instant gratification.
10. Much of sin in its broad sense is the result of instant gratification.

EXAMPLE: “By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh’s daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time.” (Hebrew 11:24-25)

11. He was not shortsighted and neither did he choose instant gratification
12. The instant gratification of sin blinds us to its consequences.
13. Marriages are wounded deeply when decisions are made centered around instant gratification
14. The "I want it now" perspective with no reflection on the consequence or impact for the future is a dangerous perspective.

ILLUSTRATION: W.T. Purkiser said, “Sin would have few takers if its consequences occurred immediately.”

15. The sluggard is indifferent to the demands of the future.
16. He just doesn’t have any sense of urgency about the future.
17. In contrast, we are to learn the importance of foresight, causing us to prepare for the future.

EXAMPLE The classic example of such foresight and industry in scripture is of Joseph as recorded in Genesis. 41. The pharaoh of Egypt had a dream. Joseph interpreted the dream and warned Pharaoh of the famine that would come. He told him to collect food and store it up for the times of famine. Pharaoh then said, “Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, ‘Since God has made all this known to you, there is no one so discerning and wise as you.’” (Genesis 41:39) He appointed Joseph a, there was food for they had prepared.

18. Some people don’t prepare for tomorrow and just live with the “what happens, happens” perspective.

19. Others prepare for this life - savings, insurance, retirement, but do not prepare for the reality of eternity.

20. Jesus spoke about the importance of preparation on several occasions.

“But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” (Matthew 6:20-21)

21. We learn from the ant the importance of preparation.

22. Preparing for life, death, and eternal life.

ILLUSTRATION: One of the top ten songs of 2010 was *I Can Only Imagine* by MercyMe. The song has touched my own heart, as it speaks of the beauty of Heaven.

23. Yet, the reality is that we must prepare through faith in Christ for eternity with Him.

ILLUSTRATION: Matthew Henry English, commentator on the Bible, and Presbyterian minister who died in 1714, was known for six volume commentaries. He said, “It ought to be the business of every day to prepare for our last day.”

24. Many believe in life after death but do nothing about it.

EXAMPLE: In Matthew 25:1-13, Jesus tells the story of the ten ladies. Five were foolish and five wise. The five that were wise were the ones that prepared for the future. They took extra oil with them so their light would be burning brightly when the bridegroom arrived. The five foolish in their actions went to get oil and when they returned the door was shut. “Let us in.” He replied, “I tell you the truth, I don’t know you.” **“Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.” (Matthew 25:13)**

25. Let us prepare now and prepare well.

26. Be ready now to meet Jesus face to face.

27. Know your sins are forgiven and your heart is right with God.

28. Prepare today and every day for your eternal future.

LESSON III

(v. 8) REACH YOUR GOD-GIVEN POTENTIAL BY USING YOUR OPPORTUNITIES

“...and gathers its food at harvest.” (Proverbs 6:8)

1) Ants are opportunists.

2) The ant uses the opportunity of harvest.

3) The ant does what it needs to do when it needs to be done.

- 4) As simplistic as it seems, harvest time is the time to harvest.
 - 5) The ant uses the opportunities of the harvest.
 - 6) Jesus understood the need of harvesting while you have the opportunity.
- Example: Woman at the well. A woman came along and Jesus ministered to her. Jesus said, “Do you not say, ‘Four months more and then the harvest’? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest.” (John 4:35)**
- 7) Now is harvest time.
 - 8) The prayer is for us to open our eyes to the harvest around us.
 - 9) No one else can work your harvest field.
 - 10) You have harvest field of ministry opportunities that no one else will have.
 - 11) No one else can pray the prayer you need to pray.
 - 12) No one can give your testimony and tell the story of Jesus working in your heart that you need to tell.
 - 13) No one else can reach your God-given potential for you.
 - 14) You have the potential to do ministry that no one else can do.
 - 15) Use the opportunity to work in the harvest fields now while you can.

“Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for in the grave, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom.” (Ecclesiastes 9:10)

16) If you are going to do something for Jesus, do it now.

17) The ant understood that now is the time for action.

18) Jesus understood the now of opportunity.

“As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work.” (John 9:4)

ILLUSTRATION: An old gospel chorus that says:

We’ll work ’til Jesus comes

We’ll work ’til Jesus comes

We’ll work ’til Jesus comes

Then we’ll be gathered home.

19) Now is the time of opportunity.

Example: (*Prop arrows for this story) Jehoash went to see Elisha. They were facing enemies. He told them to strike the ground with the arrows. “The man of God was angry with him and said, ‘You should have struck the ground five or six times; then you would have defeated Aram and completely destroyed it. But now you will defeat it only three times.’” (II Kings 13:19)

20) He did not use the opportunity before them.

“Be very careful, then, how you live-not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.” (Ephesians 5:15-16)

21) Use the harvest opportunities before you.

ILLUSTATION: Imagine being a frontline soldier and getting a message at night. There’s no way to read that message without lighting a lamp that will expose you to enemy fire. In the early 1800’s, this dilemma inspired a French artillery officer, Captain Charles Barbier, to create “night writing.” It was a code consisting of raised dots poked onto a piece of paper. The code used

combinations of twelve dots to stand for different sounds. Eventually, Barbier introduced his concept to the blind.

A thirteen-year-old boy at the Royal Institute for the Blind was one of the first to learn the new system. He was excited by the opportunities it offered, but thought it might be too complex, so he offered Barbier some ideas on how to simplify and improve it. The haughty Barbier did not welcome his suggestions – in fact, he was insulted that a mere boy could imagine he had something to offer. When the boy tried haltingly to explain, Barbier stalked out of the room. He angrily refused to even consider making changes.

The boy, of course, was Lou Braille. Instead of losing heart, he became determined to develop his ideas on his own. He labored tirelessly for two years to transform night writing into a far simpler system that cut the number of dots in half. He also decided to make them stand for letters instead of sounds. He was just fifteen years old when he completed his system of writing for the blind. And a new world was revealed to those without sight.

- 22) A new world can be opened to those blinded by sin if we will work in the harvest.
- 23) Open your eyes to the work and use your God-given opportunities for Christ.

LESSON IV

(vs.9-11) REACH YOUR GOD-GIVEN POTENTIAL BY STARTING THINGS THAT NEED TO BE STARTED

“How long will you lie there, you sluggard? When will you get up from your sleep?” (Proverbs 6:9)

1. The motto of the sluggard is, “Never do today what you can put off until tomorrow.”
2. Sluggards have developed the ability to put off starting a task as well as completing those tasks already begun.
3. The sluggard is a procrastinator.
4. Procrastination steals a person’s time, productivity, and potential.

ILLUSTRATION: **“You can't build a reputation on what you are going to do.”—Henry Ford (1863–1947)

5. Theologians know that one of Satan’s great tools is procrastination.
6. The enemy wants you to put off anything you are going to do for God or for your spiritual life.

“As the door turns on its hinges, so a sluggard turns on his bed.” (Proverbs 26:14)

7. He just rolls over and puts the pillow over his head and doesn’t get up in the morning.
8. He just sleeps his life away, putting off what needs to be done.
9. Many things don’t happen in our lives because we have not started them and not followed through to the finish.
10. Delay hinders us from reaching our God-Given potential.

ILLUSTRATION Prof. C. Norhcote Parkinson was known for his statement, "Delay is the deadliest form of denial." He was asked to explain it once at a tea. "I will," replied Parkinson, "in a few minutes." It never happened.

11. If you have a constant devotional life, it is because somewhere you started spending time with the Lord personally and you kept it going.
12. If you are faithful in your worship, it is because you have started worshipping and you are keeping worship a priority.
13. If you are in ministry, it is because somewhere you started and you are keeping it going.
14. A great devotional life will never take place unless you start having devotions.
15. Great understanding of the Word will not happen unless you start reading the Word.
16. Great worship in your heart will not happen until you start worshipping.
17. If you are praying together as a husband and wife, it is because you started.
18. If you are having a family prayer or altar time, it is because you started.
19. Are there some things you need to start or restart and stick with?

ILLUSTRATION: Author, Craig Larson, tells this story. “The winter of 2009 brought heavy snowfalls to Chicago, and at one point, the snow had piled up over a foot deep on the roof of our two-story home. Then, we had a thaw. One evening, when I returned home from work, I noticed that a thick sheet of ice and snow was hanging over the edge of the roof like a glacier hanging over a cliff. Our driveway runs right alongside the house, and one of our cars was parked directly underneath the overhanging ice. I thought to myself, ‘When that ice falls, it may land on our car.’ Even so, I did nothing. Our driveway is filled from end to end, single-file, with four family cars, and I would have to get permission from the police to park overnight on the street. The temperature was supposed to fall below freezing overnight, and it didn't look as though the glacier was ready to fall yet. We have lived in our home for 20 years and never had a chunk of ice fall on a car.

The next morning, when I went out to the car to leave for work, I looked up at the roof and noticed that the glacier was still in place. That night, when I came home from work after another warm day, the glacier was still in place. I thought to myself, ‘Just to be safe, I should at least pull my car as far as possible to the left side of the driveway.’ But I was tired and cold and hungry, so I decided to go in for dinner. Maybe I would move the car later that night. I mentioned the overhanging glacier to my wife. The night passed, and I went to bed.

The next morning when I went out to the car to leave for work, I looked up and noticed that the glacier was still hanging over the edge of the roof. I don't have time to mess with the cars, I thought. Moving four cars would take more than five minutes, and I would be late for work. I drove away hoping that for one more day nothing would happen.

My wife, however, had not forgotten about the glacier. When she went outside, she saw the glacier hanging two stories above our car and decided to move it. First, she decided to go in the house and take care of food cooking on the stove, and then she would come back out and move the car. A few minutes later as she stood in the kitchen, she heard a crash on the side of our house. She ran outside. The glacier had fallen, landing on our car. The front windshield had taken a direct hit and was shattered. Our out-of-pocket cost for a new windshield was \$250.”

20. The reason not to proceed seems pretty small.
21. Many things are never accomplished for God because they're never begun for God.
22. Say 'no' to procrastination and get started.
23. Take the steps you need to take.

LESSON V

(vs. 10-11) REACH YOUR GOD-GIVEN POTENTIAL BY MAKING WISE CHOICES

"A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest--" (Proverbs 6:10)

1. The little moments of our lives matter because they quickly add up to a lifetime.
2. The three appearances of the word little underscore the fact that minor neglects result in major deficiencies.
3. Opportunities slip away by inches and minutes not by hours and days.

ILLUSTRATION: **Christian author, Roy Zuck observed, "Little things are the hinges on which great results turn."

4. The little choices we make result in the life we live.
5. He rationalizes his excuses by saying, "Just a little sleep, a little rest."
6. We can talk ourselves into a lot of things.
7. Proverbs 22:13 says, "The sluggard says, 'There's a lion outside!' or 'I'll be murdered in the streets.'"
8. The sluggard can come to believe his own excuses.
9. We must leave our excuses at the cross.
10. Little things can rob us from doing or finishing the big things God wants us to finish.
11. A little sleep, a little slumber, a little rest can be an excuse that robs you from reaching your God-given potential.
12. The sluggard reaps the harvest of his own choice.
13. "And poverty will come on you like a bandit and scarcity like an armed man." (Proverbs 6:11)
14. The choices we make have consequences.
15. "The sluggard craves and gets nothing, but the desires of the diligent are fully satisfied." (Proverbs 13:4)
16. We sow what we reap or do not reap what we do not sow.
17. **"Do not love sleep or you will grow poor; stay awake and you will have food to spare." (Proverbs 20:13)**
18. There are consequences to the choices we make.
19. "The lazy man does not roast his game, but the diligent man prizes his possessions." (Proverbs 12:27)
20. He may go catch it but he does nothing with it.
21. **"The sluggard buries his hand in the dish; he will not even bring it back to his mouth!" (Proverbs 19:24)**
22. Jesus told a story that showed the seriousness of someone choosing to be lazy and not do what they should of done or reach their full potential.

EXAMPLE: Story of the talents. The one with one did not invest. “His master replied, ‘You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed?’” (Matthew 25:26)

23. It reveals a wasted opportunity though neglect.

EXAMPLE: Proverbs 24:30-34 paints a picture of the effect of laziness.

“I went past the field of the sluggard, past the vineyard of the man who lacks judgment; thorns had come up everywhere, the ground was covered with weeds, and the stone wall was in ruins. I applied my heart to what I observed and learned a lesson from what I saw: A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest--and poverty will come on you like a bandit and scarcity like an armed man.” (Proverbs 24:30-34)

24. What a tragedy to look at what is compared to what can be.

25. Don’t settle for less than reaching your God-given potential through His power.

CONCLUSION:

Jesus went to the cross so we could reach our God-given potential.

It starts at the cross with total surrender of ourselves.

To reach your full potential, live a life of wisdom.

In other words, as we have studied in Proverbs, fear God.

To fear God is to have a right relationship with God.

ILLUSTRATION: Go back to Greek mythology, to the era of the Argonauts.

Odysseus is sailing with his crew on a series of dangerous adventures. One adventure takes them past the island inhabited by the sirens. Now these creatures have the bodies of birds, the heads of women, and very beautiful voices. When the sirens begin to sing, passing sailors are so entranced that they rush toward the island in order to encounter these lovely creatures, only to be smashed to pieces and destroyed on the dangerous rocks and the treacherous surf around the island. This story is where we get the expression, “the siren voice of pleasure.” The hunger for pleasure is so great that we ignore the perils; yet in reaching our desire we find ourselves shipwrecked. (The siren myth is very much like the Teutonic myth of the Lorelei). Now Odysseus didn’t know how he was going to get by. There were two ways it could be done. First, by equipment. Odysseus plugged up all of the sailors’ ears and had them lash him to a mast so he couldn’t move.

But somebody came up with a better idea. There was on board the ship a man who was the greatest harp player of them all, Orpheus. (Have you ever heard of the Orpheum Theatre? That comes from the Greeks too). Orpheus made the most beautiful music on his harp – for more beautiful than the singing of the sirens. Thus as the men listened to the music of Orpheus they were not tempted by the songs of the sirens.

- What we need in our lives is a passion for something that transcends all of our other passions.
- We need to surrender and tune into the voice of God so we hear the voice of God and be unmoved by the siren voices of the world that lead us to destruction.
- We need a relationship with God that is so strong that it can dominate any other passion of life.
- A relationship with God that can help you to reach your full potential

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