

Series: **WHEN NO ONE'S LOOKING**—September 10, 2006

**DO WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE**  
**Proverbs 24:30-34**

**I. INTRO**

- A. Last summer when Lori and I decided that we wanted to replace the paving slabs on our patio with interlocking brick, I decided to use a philosophy Lori always kids me about: **Let's talk to someone who knows something about this.** So I talked to David Petri—and it was bad news. I had already sweat buckets and taken a bunch of ibuprofen digging and hauling limestone screenings. David said, “You gotta go deeper and haul more stone or it'll go wonky on you!” With the little bit of work I'd done already, I **knew** I didn't want to do it over again. So—I started digging and hauling. I thought I'd die—but I didn't—and now I'm glad!
1. Character is the foundation under all the interlocking pieces of our lives. Character is integrity. It's not your resume; it's being the same person when **no one's** looking **and** when **everyone's** watching.
    - Your character is the root system that keeps you standing when life falls apart. It involves honesty, initiative, hard work, courage, compassion, humility, and respect.
    - Character is what helps you build lasting relationships and a lasting reputation and a life that makes a difference. With character, there **are no short-cuts.**
  2. Truth is, character doesn't usually make headlines. It's not something you can brag about or put on your resume. Some people might even call it boring. Here's the deal. In life, we all want to deal with people of character. We want the people we do business with, who care for our children, operate on our bodies, handle our finances, run our country to be people of character. Would you agree?
    - If we're going to **marry**, we want that person to be a person of character; to have a great work ethic, to treat others—particularly us—with dignity, love and respect, and be trustworthy. To finish what they start, do what they say they'll do, right?
  3. You can buy a lot of things in our world—almost anything, really. But you can't buy one of things that probably matters most. Character. Character is the stuff you're made of. Ultimately, it's character that builds a great life.
- B. I've thought a lot about The Olive Branch and what we want to accomplish here. We're in the people business. That's hard, because people are all different. You can't produce people like widgets. Working with people is sometimes messy—and frustrating. But I believe our core calling is to build **GREAT PEOPLE.** Great people have great hearts, great lives, and great impact.
  - True greatness goes to the core; it's not about talent, it's about character. God looks under the surface of our lives—at our heart; and He looks for true greatness. Character. And I believe greatness/character starts with a willingness—and commitment to doing what needs to be done.

## II. LAZINESS AND WEEDS

A. Solomon, one of the most prominent kings of Israel, was a guy who seemed to have an amazing work ethic. He was one busy dude—learning, building, trading, building the temple in Jerusalem. The people under his leadership experienced peace and prosperity because he understood how life works.

1. At some point in his life—he summarized the lessons he'd learned under the inspiration of God, and wrote them down in a book called **Proverbs**.

-In this book, Solomon speaks very pointedly to the issue of work ethic, taking initiative, assuming responsibility for your life. Listen to what he says:

**I walked by the field of a lazy person, the vineyard of one lacking sense. I saw that it was overgrown with thorns. It was covered with weeds, and its walls were broken down. Then, as I looked and thought about it, I learned this lesson: A little extra sleep, a little more slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest--and poverty will pounce on you like a bandit; scarcity will attack you like an armed robber. (Prov. 24:30-34 NLT)!**

- a. Solomon isn't looking at this person's lawn; it's their livelihood. In a largely agricultural world, people's lives literally depended on what their fields, vines and livestock produced.

-So, when Solomon saw this mess, the issue wasn't someone whose lawnmower was broken; this person had been goofing off doing who knows what. The result was poverty.

- b. How does something get overgrown with weeds? Neglect. You can do a great job of planting something—but if that's all you do, weeds will choke your field to death. Same with vineyards. They take a lot of care. But that's not all here. The walls were broken down. He's not talking about interlocking brick stuff—these walls kept out pests and wild animals.
- c. Solomon looked at this mess—and asked, **Why?** The problem wasn't the land, it wasn't the forces of nature or the 2<sup>nd</sup> law of thermodynamics—it was a couch potato of a worker. It was someone who, for whatever reason, kept putting off the work that needed to be done.

2. Do you see the issue here that Solomon is trying to deal with? It's a character issue. It's **taking the initiative to do what needs to be done**—even when it's inconvenient, the weather isn't cooperating--you don't **feel** like it. It's finishing what you start. It's following the **work-first/play later** plan so that you can do what you agreed to do and need to do.

-People of character are responsible; i.e., they take initiative without waiting for someone else to come and do it for them. When you take initiative and work hard, you may experience some temporary inconvenience and tiredness—but you are actually building your future block by block. To put it crudely, **sweat stinks—but it's good for you!**

3. What are the alternatives to doing what needs to be done **when** it needs to be done? What happens when people see a problem that needs to be solved? John Maxwell, a writer on leadership, says that we are either **whiners** or **winners**. Some people are extremely good at spotting problems and describing them in precise detail. But that's all they do.
- a. They whine and complain about their kids, their spouse, their boss—heat, cold, being too busy--but that's where it ends. If you try to suggest some ways to deal with this stuff, they give you 10 reasons why they can't. What's a person called who has all kinds of problems and is powerless to do anything about it. A **victim**.
  - b. If a person doesn't get a grip on this, what happens next is **blaming**. Blaming, these days, is a major pastime in our culture. We blame our parents, our environment—anything that will release **us** from responsibility. We'll even blame God. Finding the root of why we are the way we are isn't a bad thing—but if we **stay** there, we get immobilized.
4. One of the worst things that can happen to us when we face obstacles and hard work we don't feel like doing is what one author called the **some day, some how** mentality. That a better future will just...happen—someday.
- \*Someday, life will improve...
  - \*Someday, I will just drift into better circumstances...
  - \*Someday, I'll feel like doing something with my life...
  - \*Someday, life will settle down and I'll have time to...
  - \*Someday, I'll start getting my schoolwork done...
  - \*Someday, the credit card companies will lose my records...or I'll win the lottery...
  - \*Someday, my marriage will change...
  - \*Someday I just won't feel like drinking anymore...
  - \*Someday, the fat will just melt away...
  - \*Someday, I'll feel like getting serious about my faith..
- Question. Has anyone ever seen life work like that? Solomon says here that if you wait for nature to take it's course, guess what happens? Weeds! Broken down walls. He says that waiting for things to improve—someday--brings poverty and scarcity. And that's true in every area of life if your solution is to sit and wait instead of **taking initiative**.

- B. The path that leads to laziness—this, “someday it will happen” mentality has some steps in it.
1. The first step is putting stuff off. Procrastination is the big word for it. It's this mentality that thinks that there will always be a better time than now for doing what needs to be done. Sometimes its fear. Fear of failure. Fear of making the phone call you dread.  
-I'll tell you what procrastination is at heart—it's a **play first/work later** ethic. It's a form of instant self-gratification.
  2. Now, how many of you would be willing to say, “You know, the problem with me is I'm just lazy. I like to loaf. When given a preference, I'd rather sleep or watch TV than work.

I'm just too darn lazy to pull weeds or keep the walls in good shape!" Laziness is hard to admit—so we make excuses.

-We practice them, hone these babies down—and we actually get to the point where we believe them. When we do, we call them **reasons**. So, let me ask you—do you give reasons—translated--**make excuses**, for a lack of motivation, for sloppy work, for a complaining, whining attitude? Have you come to believe that it actually is **someone else** that keeps you from doing what needs to be done? Character—assuming responsibility and taking initiative means you **stop** procrastinating, **stop** making excuses, **stop** blaming others for your life—and you move forward.

C. Now, some of you may be thinking about now, "Gee, I totally agree with what that guy Solomon is saying! I get sick of laziness. Laziness got pounded out of me by my old man by the time I was 10. I resented it then—but I'm glad now! There are no free rides in this world! In fact, I probably work **too** much."

-Well, let me mention another area that this **do what needs to be done** principle touches. It's not just **being** a responsible person; it's **taking** responsibility for your own life. All of it. Including your junk.

1. Question. Is there anyone here who's ever been wrong? Anyone here who's wrong **more** than once a year? A more important question: How many of **admit** at least once a year that you're wrong?

-People of character tell themselves on a regular basis, "I **could** be wrong." People of character are big enough to admit, "I was wrong." To anyone who needs to hear it—husband, wife, friend, boss, employee, children, parent. If you think you lose points by doing that—you're absolutely wrong. You gain credibility. You lose credibility when you know you're wrong and someone else knows you're wrong—but you won't own it.

-It's interesting. Jesus paid for our forgiveness with his life—but we never find it unless we confess our sins—say, **you were right and I was wrong**--and ask for His forgiveness.

2. See, grace and forgiveness and mercy only flows to people who have the guts to admit when they're wrong and own their stuff. Think of how things would've been different for Nixon in the whole Watergate scandal—and Bill Clinton in zipper-gate if they'd just told the truth instead of having it pried out of them?

-Those are high profile cases—easy targets. What do you need to take responsibility for? What do you just need to own instead of blaming, hedging, excusing and dodging? There's **grace**—but it only comes to those who own the truth.

### III. WEEDS GROW IN SURPRISING PLACES

A. Weeds don't just grow in fields. They seem to pop up in surprising places. Anyone ever seen weeds growing in a crack in a giant piece of granite up north—or in a sidewalk?

1. Weeds grow in the cracks of our character—and they need to be pulled. Sometimes people think—sometimes *I* think, “You know, I’m doing good, taking initiative in most of the areas of life. I can’t be **perfect!** I mean, if I get most of life right, isn’t that enough?” Bill Hybels in his book, ***Making Life Work***, calls this the “nine-out-of-ten club.”

-He tells the story of his dad, whom he describes as one of the most energetic and motivated men he’s ever met. ***Take initiative*** was his life theme. He went after business with a vengeance, bought a 45 foot yacht in Ireland, and sailed it across the Atlantic. This guy started businesses, helped ministries, flew airplanes. Hybels says, “He was disciplined and diligent in every area of his life except one: caring for his body. He was lazy and careless about that his whole life. He paid no attention to diet or exercise. Nine out of ten isn’t bad—unless the tenth one kills you (***Making Life Work***, p. 38).” His Dad died at the age of 53 of a heart attack.

2. Membership in the nine out of ten club include the parent who gets their kid into every sport and every activity—but can’t seem to get them weekly to a church where their character can get shaped.
  - a. It includes that the dad who breaks the sales records at work and is a scratch golfer—but never neglects the emotional needs of his wife and children. .
  - b. The 9/10 club is the highly relational person who’s hooked up by cell, IM, email, Starbucks—but never builds into the spiritual soil of their own lives.
  - c. The 9/10 club is the family that vows every year to create a budget because of the growing mountain of debt--but never gets around to it.
  - d. It’s the Mom who has cleans the corners of the house with a toothbrush, but hasn’t bothered with her own soul in months.
  - e. Instead of confessing others sins, let me confess my own membership in the 9/10 club. For the first half of my ministry I worked like a madman—feeling guilty when anything got left undone. I spoke four times a week, led everything in sight, worked at a camp and at national conferences. I hatched, matched and dispatched with flair, took my devotions seriously, played racquetball, and consistently saw people put their faith in Christ.

-But Lori cared for two, then three young children all day and was home alone most evenings—and served the church as much or more than any other volunteer. Number 10 hurt her, hurt the kids, hurt our relationship—and still hurts me. And it wasn’t God’s fault!

-Can you and I consistently hit 10 out of 10, day after day, month after month? Probably not—but we’d better make sure that, of those ten, we’re doing the right ones. Just a hint—the laundry can wait!

3. Solomon says that we need to take lessons wherever we can on ***doing what needs to be done***.

It's **not** a matter of knowing what needs done and reading books about it; it's a matter of taking the initiative to **just do it! GET STARTED!**

-And guess where Solomon sends us? It's the **ants**. **Take a lesson from the ants, you lazybones. Learn from their ways and be wise! Even though they have no prince, governor, or ruler to make them work, they labor hard all summer, gathering food for the winter (Prov. 6:6-8 NLT).**

-Solomon was a student of nature, and he knew that ants may be some of the hardest workers on the planet. The leaf-cutting ant can carry something 50 times it's weight for 100 yards. In human terms, that would be a 200 lb. man carrying 5 tons for 17 miles!

-But Solomon isn't talking about their strength. He's saying that they're self-starters. Even with their tiny brains, they **get** it; winter somehow shows up every year—and you have to prepare for it. **Do what needs to be done!** Work first; play later. The ant knows a few things about life!

B. As I close, I'd like you to keep an open heart to what I say. Are you growing some weeds in an important area of life—an area that, if you let it go is going to just get worse until it screams for attention—or sinks your boat?

1. How are you doing in the area of taking the initiative to **make peace with others**. That's what Jesus said to do. He said, "If you need to—walk out of a worship service. Make the first move. **You** go to the other person."  
-I'll tell you what the major barrier is here. It's pride. Maybe fear. I watch couples just let relationships drift and drift and drift—and it moves into resentment, and then divorce—and sometimes it's just laziness. Instead of shooting up the trouble flares, there's this weak, plaintive cry, "Help! I've fallen and I can't get up!"  
-Relationships take work—all of them do. Strange thing—a strained relationship doesn't get easier if you wait. It gets harder. How's it going in your relational world? Why don't you make the character move?

-I just need to say, friends, this is a big area that we can't afford to get lazy in. The final exam in life about love—not performance. But we'll have to take the initiative. We'll have to look at ourselves in the mirror—and ask, what **needs to be done?**

2. I've already touched on this—but let me mention it again. Are you giving your best at work? Sometimes you find yourself in a job you don't care for, or under a boss who's tough and obnoxious. Solomon says a lot about this.  
**Diligent work gets a warm commendation; shiftless work earns an angry rebuke (Prov. 14:35 MSG); Slack habits and sloppy work are as bad as vandalism (Prov. 18:9 MSG).**

-The word on this from the New Testament is that if a person doesn't support their family, they're an embarrassment to the community of Christ-followers. In fact, Paul says, "Work as if Jesus were your boss—even if you're a slave." **Do what needs to be done!**

3. Third area where I think we may need some encouragement. Are you taking the initiative to care for your health? No one else takes responsibility for my body—so

I have to. So do you. We are told in 1 Corinthians, that our body is God's temple...and we are to therefore honor God with it—but keeping it healthy; keeping it from sexual impurity, feeding our minds with good food; getting the exercise and rest and emotional replenishment we need. I just need to tell you—it won't be easier next year! **Do what needs to be done! Take initiative!**

4. A fourth area where laziness creeps—finances. If you listen to the messages blasted at you everyday in our world, they will tell you that what you own, buy and wear makes you a significant person. Listen to that, and it will walk you right into debt. It also tells you that your money is all yours, and how you spend it and use it is your business—no one else's—not even God's. The Bible says—**God** owns, **we** manage.

-The Bible says that our money and how we handle it is a very spiritual thing. But it won't just float into the places where it needs to be. We have to do some financial plumbing to get money from the source to where it needs to be—and make sure it's a servant and not a master.

5. There's one more area I want to talk about when it comes to taking initiative—being responsible—and that's in being rich toward God. Jesus told a story one day about a wealthy farmer that seemed to be prospering in every area of life—I mean, in the business world, he was hitting home runs every day. But something strange happened, right when he was in the middle of figuring out how he was going to stack it all a little higher. He **died!**

-And God used a very unflattering name for him. Anyone remember what it was? **Fool!** It's because he thought of being rich in every area of life—but never thought about being rich toward God.

-Without belaboring the point—we've got one life. One shot to make a difference. One shot at using the spiritual gifts and resources and opportunities God gives us. They're there—in us—but **we** have to take the initiative. When we do—when we engage—and find God's calling, God's blessing, God's smile—it's one of the most rewarding things we can experience. But **we** have to take the initiative to **do what needs to be done.**

#### IV. CLOSING THOUGHTS

- A. I've told you the story of the young guy who started working for his future father-in-law's construction company—and was given the responsibility to build an excellent house for the man's friend. Well, to put more money in his pocket for his wedding, he took a bunch of quality and safety short-cuts in this home. When he was all done, his future father-in-law handed him the keys and said, "This is my wedding gift to you and my daughter! Enjoy!"
- B. And that's the truth about life, isn't it? We have to live in the house, the life we build. Others have to live in it, too—or in the neighborhood. And someday you have to hand it in. So take responsibility; take initiative; own what you need to own, do what needs to be done—and **build well! Build well!**