

# Noble Diligence

*But the noble man devises noble plans;  
And by noble plans he stands.*

*Isaiah 32:8*

What good are our noble intentions, our God-sized goals, our intelligent plans, our implementation projects, if we fail to follow through with them? How many times have we started out with enthusiasm and then allowed the tyranny of the urgent to snuff out the important? How many times have we avoided taking a necessary step because the action is either unpleasant, or overwhelming in its size, complexity or consequence? How many times have we allowed the busyness to consume our time, leaving no margin for advancing the noble purpose that God has for our personal, business and professional lives?

In today's lesson we are going to study God's Word to gain a biblical view of "time management" that is practical truth for accomplishing your God-centered noble plans and purposes.

## Matthew 11:11-14

11 I tell you the truth: Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

12 From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it.

13 For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John.

14 And if you are willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who was to come. He who has ears let him hear.

## OBSERVE

*Leader: Read Matthew 11:11-14 and have the group say aloud and mark "forceful(ly)" and "lay hold." Then read the INSIGHT box.*

## INSIGHT

The greatness and least-ness of John the Baptist both relate to his role as the last old testament prophet. While "great" in the sense that he was privileged to introduce the long-awaited Messiah, Christ Jesus (he is the Elijah who was to come), to the nation of Israel, he was also "lesser" than any new covenant saint with a personal relationship with Christ.

The context of this passage is that things are different now that Jesus, the Christ, has arrived, and brought the kingdom of heaven with Him. Now is the time for strong men to eagerly lay hold of it.

The word translated "forceful" in the NIV is translated "violent" in the NASB, NKJV and KJV. The idea of the word in this context is to seek something aggressively, urgently, without fear or consideration of the consequences.

**Proverbs 21:5**

5 The plans of the diligent surely lead to advantage, but everyone who is hasty comes surely to poverty.

**Proverbs 10:4**

4 Poor is he who works with a negligent hand, but the hand of the diligent makes rich.

**Proverbs 13:4**

4 The sluggard craves and gets nothing, but the desires of the diligent are fully satisfied.

**DISCUSS**

What do you think it means to “lay hold of the kingdom of heaven?”

Am I “forcefully” doing this? Why or why not?

**OBSERVE**

Biblical force is not physical strength, but spiritual strength and resolve to stand firm, to “be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might.” (Ephesians 6:10) Forceful men stay the course, they finish the race (2 Timothy 4:7), they are diligent.

*Leader: Read Proverbs 21:5, 10:4 and 13:4 and have the group say aloud and mark “diligent” and the contrast word “but.”*

**DISCUSS**

Keeping the spiritual nature of your noble plans in mind (remember, a noble plan focuses on God’s interests, on spiritual riches), what impact does diligence, or lack of diligence, have on our plans?

Proverbs 21:5

Proverbs 10:4

Proverbs 13:4

Describe “diligence” by the contrasts in these three proverbs.

For example, in Proverbs 21:5 diligence is contrasted with being hasty, thus diligence means not being hasty, but rather patient, deliberate and thoughtful.

What do you learn from the contrast in Proverbs 10:4?

What do you learn from the contrast in Proverbs 13:4?

*Leader: Read the INSIGHT box.*

**INSIGHT**

"In the past I would have considered anything but sloth to be one of my problems because I seem to be very busy. Sloth doesn't necessarily mean we're doing nothing. Sloth is the failure to do what needs to be done when it needs to be done – like the kamikaze pilot who flew seventeen missions."

John Ortberg, The Last Taboo

Relate this concept of "slothfulness" to what we have learned about "diligence." Is busyness and activity the same thing as diligence?

*Leader: Read the INSIGHT box.*

**INSIGHT**

The Hebrew word translated "diligent" means to "cut, or sharpen," and "to decide." The same word was used for cutting fabric to make a garment. The seamstress lays out her pattern and plans her work, but once she cuts the fabric, she is committed to the plan fully! So it is with the diligent man. He has made his plans and is determined to finish the work, for what has been "cut" into his heart cannot be altered.

How diligent have you been in carrying out God's plan and purpose for your business?

**OBSERVE**

The apostle Paul was a forceful, diligent man intent on fulfilling Christ's purposes for his life and ministry. Lets see what else we can learn from his example.

*Leader: Read the CONTEXT box, and then read Acts 17:1-3, and have the group say aloud and mark "custom."*

Acts 17:1-3

- 1 Now when they had traveled through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews.
- 2 And according to Paul's custom, he went to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures,
- 3 explaining and giving evidence that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, "This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ."

CONTEXT

Paul wrote in Romans 1:16 *"For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek."* He recognized and embraced his calling to preach the gospel to the Greeks (non-Jewish peoples), but he also felt a primary responsibility to share the good news with his Jewish brothers first wherever he went.

**DISCUSS**

How did Paul's "custom" relate to his noble purpose and noble plans?

What principle do you see from Paul's example that can be applied to our daily schedules? Can someone share how a custom, a daily routine that they have established, ties into their noble purpose for their business?

**OBSERVE**

Why is it that so many forceful, diligent and effective men suffer "burnout" at some point in their careers or ministries? Is "burnout" a spiritual badge of honor or something that can, and should, be avoided. Lets look at Jesus' example to answer this question.

*Leader: Read the CONTEXT box and then read Mark 6:30-32 and have the group say aloud and mark "lonely place" and "rest."*

CONTEXT

Jesus' 12 disciples had just returned from their short term missionary training trip exhausted but excited about all that they had done. Jesus recognized that they needed physical rest, and perhaps He also needed a break, time to grieve the death of John the Baptist who had just been murdered by Herod.

**Mark 6:30-32**

30 And the apostles gathered together with Jesus; and they reported to Him all that they had done and taught.

31 And He said to them, "Come away by yourselves to a lonely place and rest a while." (For there were many [people] coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat.)

32 And they went away in the boat to a lonely place by themselves.

17 So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

**DISCUSS**

What did Jesus prescribe for his forceful and diligent disciples?

What is the principle here that we can apply to our daily, weekly and monthly schedules?

*Leader: Direct the group's attention to the first chart at the end of the lesson and explain how this relates to this principle of balance.*

## BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES DISCOVERED

- Noble men must be **forceful** and **diligent** in carrying out their noble plans.
- **Diligence** is not busyness, but rather a steady, determined, unwavering commitment to finish the task God has given you. **Slothfulness** is not necessarily physical laziness, it is the failure to do what needs to be done when it needs to be done.
- Establish **good routines** that reinforce and support your noble purpose and plans.
- **Balance** mission with maintenance to avoid “burnout.”

## BUSINESS APPLICATION

1. Invest in a planning system that works for you. If you already have one, use it!
2. In addition to your daily demands and “maintenance” activities, focus each day on taking an action step or two on an important project that relates to the noble purpose of your business. Measure in some way your progress on a weekly basis. Make adjustments to your schedule if you frequently do not make progress on important projects.
3. Deal harshly with your own slothfulness. Stop making excuses for yourself. Trust God that He will enable you to do what He has called you to do, and willfully determine you are going to do it. Seek accountability from your Forum group.
4. Establish good routines such as setting aside a time to plan each week, such as a morning Bible reading/study and prayer time prior to planning the day and getting started. What other routines might be helpful? How about filtering every business decision or circumstance through your noble purpose statement for your business that is prominently displayed in your primary work area?

## Mission versus Maintenance Chart

M I S S I O N	<b>BURN OUT</b> <i>Great mission, But no maintenance</i>	<b>WORKOUT</b> <i>Great mission &amp; proper maintenance</i>
	<b>RUST OUT</b> <i>No mission &amp; No maintenance</i>	<b>HIDE OUT</b> <i>Proper maintenance But no mission</i>
	M A I N T E N A N C E	

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**Mission** represents those Big Hairy Audacious Goals that relate to God's purpose for your life and business.

**Maintenance** represents taking care of yourself, your family, your relationships, your non-mission daily tasks at home and work.