

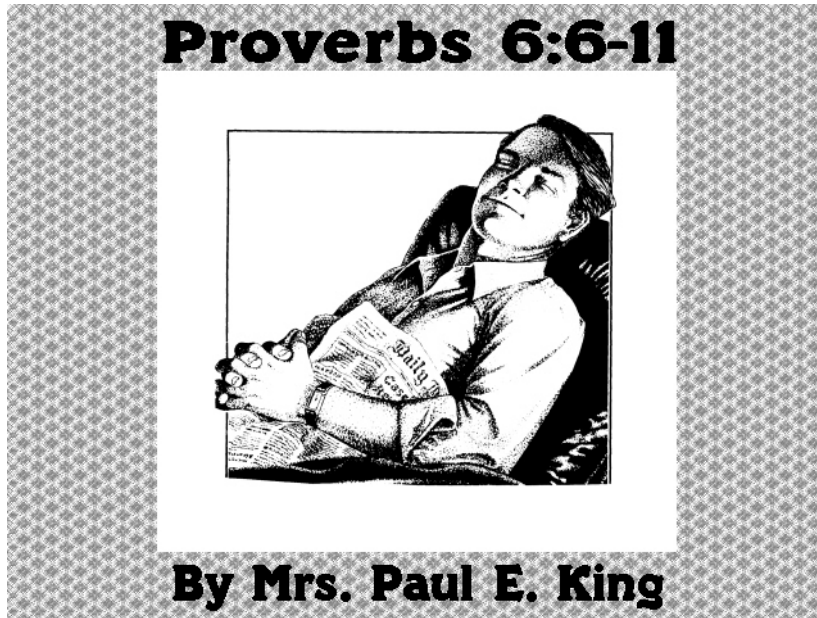
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The Sunday School Beacon
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PROVERBS 6:6-11
By Mrs. Paul E. King

Cassie finished drying the last dish and pot and pan and placed each away inside the well-arranged and neatly-kept cupboard; then she checked on the children who were playing in the back yard. Kyle was busy as usual, trying his best to get to the top of the strong chain link fence which served as a barrier to the paved alley just outside the fence. For some strange reason, the alley appealed to Kyle; it seemed to charm him to beckon him to see

what walking on its asphalt surface felt like. Thankfully, he couldn't dig the shoes of his tiny feet into a safe "landing" position inside any of the links to get him far up on the fence. Still, he tried. How he tried!

Cassie smiled, watching the effort her youngest exerted and the energy he expended with each noble attempt. Then she called softly to him, saying, "No, no, Kyle. Come back to the sandbox, honey, and play with Kendra and Kurt. They're building sandcastles. . . ."

Chubby legs flying, the two-year-old hurried away from the fence and was soon seated inside the big sandbox with his older brother and sister, prattling away happily and laughing musically as he shoveled sand over his head and into his shoes.

Cassie hung the dish towel up to dry; then she started for the laundry room to fold the towels and bedding and washcloths which she'd removed from the dryer before supper. Passing the living room, she saw Ken. Something seemed to crush inside her. She had thought he had gone to mow the church lawn. Tears stung her eyes. She sighed heavily. The old pattern was being repeated, she feared.

"Ken," she called sweetly. "Ken, the church lawn needs to be mowed. Ken. . . ."

Her husband didn't move; not even an eyelid. He was the picture of complete and total relaxation -- hands folded across the Daily Times newspaper, eyes shut in sleep and the reclining chair in an almost lying-down position.

Cassie felt trapped. What should she do? she wondered helplessly. Ken was her husband; he was the head of the home. And he was also the pastor of Brookside Holiness Church. As pastor, he was being paid an extra \$25.00 each week to keep the lawn mowed and in neat order. Brookside was known for its spiritual services and for its well-kept lawn, so several of the prominent members of the church had informed Ken and her their first week there as pastor and wife.

The lawn was beautiful, to be sure, all four acres of it. Not far from the church, a small brook meandered through the lawn, furnishing the name for the church as well as some beautiful and unusual ideas for the professional

landscaper who was a member of the church and whose landscaping skills and expertise were evident all over the weedless lawn and around the church itself. Beauty abounded in all four acres of the church property. Cassie loved it.

Cassie looked at her husband now and groaned within herself. What could she do? What, indeed! She loved Ken; loved him with all her wifely heart. But he was dilatory. So very dilatory. In their last pastorate, the board members, in a sweet but firm way, had confronted him about his dreadful habit and his glaring fault -- dilatoriness. She had hoped it had taught him the much needed lesson. But. . . .

Cassie felt tears running down her cheeks. Over and over, Ken's carelessness about God's business and the King's work had driven her to her knees. There, she had implored the Lord to help her husband; to make him diligent in place of being dilatory, and, more than once, her mother's words of wisdom echoed back to her from her own years of diligent and careful childhood training, how "The Lord helps those who help themselves." She knew the truth of the statement; knew, too, that until Ken "shook" himself and faced up to his problem squarely, he would never change.

If it had been a matter of health or of not being well, she could have understood. But such was not the case: Ken was hale and hearty, according to doctors' examinations and all medical records. Ken's problem stemmed from his childhood's upbringing and way of living -- a "why-bother-doing-it-today-when-you-can-do-it-tomorrow" philosophy. The habit "grooved" its way into his mentality and became adamantly stuck there. Period! Only she hadn't realized it until after they were married and had settled into their first pastorate.

Cassie sighed, recalling that short-lived first pastorate. The people were wonderful. She loved them and they loved her. But after only eight months Ken's dilatoriness reached the ears of the District leader. Ken was "called on the carpet" by his board members, in the presence of the District leader, and asked to "please shape up and change the laziness or else. . . ."

Laziness! Each time she thought about the word, Cassie winced. Dilatory was bad enough; but lazy . . .! Sometimes she felt like she was going to have a nervous breakdown unless things changed; other times she felt numb with grief over his set pattern and way of living. For anybody,

dilatoriness spelled trouble. For a pastor, especially so. Yes, especially so for a pastor. Any pastor.

"Ken, please get up and mow the church lawn," she said kindly, going to him and shaking him gently.

"Later," came the much-used, oft-repeated promise.

"You're being paid for it," Cassie reminded him softly. "It needs it badly, Ken. All the rain we've had. . . ."

Frowning, he said, "Later, I said." Cassie knew that tone of voice; knew what it meant: the subject was closed. Solidly so.

She wept and prayed as she folded the towels and bedding and washcloths. Wept and prayed and prayed and wept. The lawn must be taken care of; especially so since Eleanor Spade's wedding was tomorrow evening and Ken's "later" was long in coming. And besides all that, her husband hadn't even gotten around to mowing the lawn last week.

She felt her cheeks burn hot with shame and embarrassment. Ken had kept and spent the \$25.00 check which was given for mowing the grass even though he hadn't mowed it. To her, this was gross dishonesty.

Quickly, she put the folded laundry on shelves inside the lovely bathroom closet; then she made a quick call to one of the teens in her Sunday school class and within a short time the three children were playing happily in the home of Julie Langdon.

Cassie worked fast. The feel of the evening breeze on her face and in her hair as she maneuvered the expensive riding lawn tractor over the four acres of beautifully landscaped lawn lifted her spirits. She prayed all the while she worked, making sure she was being careful and doing everything the way their parishioners would have done it and wanted it. It was wonderful to be able to work, she thought. It gave one the feeling of fulfillment and accomplishment, which was reward enough in itself. No amount of pay -- or money -- could do what the feeling did, she mused, feeling thankful to God for the privilege of working.

She finished the job just as the sun's nose disappeared into the golden west, feeling wonderfully alive and joyously happy in her soul. The Lord and she had had blissful communion and fellowship together while she worked.

She locked the door of the shed housing the lawn tractor and stood outside admiring the beautiful property which the Lord had given to the congregation whom her husband and she pastored, when she heard the voice of their Sunday school superintendent.

"Beautifully done, Mrs. Rasher. Yes, very beautifully done," he stated emphatically. "So, since it is Mrs. Rasher who has done the mowing, it is Mrs. Rasher who gets the money. Here," he said, holding the check out to her.

"Thank you, Brother Croucher," Cassie said. "But I cannot accept it."

"But you must."

"No. Thank you kindly. You see, my husband was paid last week for a job that didn't get done. This will take care of that."

"We know about last week, Mrs. Rasher, and we will take care of that. This is yours. You earned it. You must take it. We appreciate what you have done. You are a good woman, Sister Rasher; a hard working and conscientious woman. You are a saint. All of us respect you. And, oh yes, inside this envelope there is a note for Brother Rasher. A very short note. But concise and to the point. Give it to him, please, and thank you. We'll see you at the wedding tomorrow evening, the Lord willing."

"The Lord willing, yes. And thank you, Brother Croucher."

Cassie hurried away after the children and as soon as she had paid Julie for caring for the three, she drove home.

Ken was still asleep in the chair, looking exactly as he had looked when she asked him to please mow the lawn.

She bathed the children and dressed them for bed, then read to them for more than forty-five minutes before praying with them and tucking them in for the night. Then, tired and weary herself but happy inside, she bathed, got

dressed for bed and settled down in the rocker in the bedroom and began reading her Bible where she had left off earlier in the morning.

She must have dozed, for after what seemed like she'd been reading for a long time, she heard Ken's voice.

"Hey, why all the fuss? I mean, what's the meaning of the note you stuck on my mug? Who gave it to you? Where'd it come from?" he was all questions.

Cassie stretched, and yawned. "It's self-explanatory, I believe; isn't it, Ken! Did you read the scripture references, dear?" she asked, getting to her feet and facing him.

"No, I didn't. But I think I may know. . . ."

"It says simply, 'Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways and be wise:

"Which having no guide, overseer, or ruler,

"Provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest.

"How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard? when wilt thou arise out of thy sleep?

"Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hand to sleep:

"So shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth, and thy want as an armed man.' That's what Proverbs 6:6-11 says. Oh, Ken, I'll never nag you. You know I won't. But you are tearing me to pieces with your dilatoriness and your sloth. God will help you as you help yourself. But He will never help you unless and until you are willing to help yourself and come face to face with the thing that is pulling you down. And Ken, about last week's lawn mowing money. . . ."

"I know, Cass. I know. I meant to mow the lawn on Saturday. I really did. But . . . well. . . ."

Cassie felt tears trickle down her cheeks. "You . . . spent . . . the . . . money, Ken."

"And I plan to not take any for the next mowing job, Cassie. Now go to bed. I'm going over to the church for awhile. . . ."

Cassie heard him slip out the back door and lock it behind him. Then she dropped to her knees beside the bed. "Please, Dear Father, please, for Jesus' sake, help Ken to settle this once and for all. May he become a living testimony to all who meet him and know him. . . ."

It was late when she slipped beneath the freshly laundered sheets and fell asleep to the strains of "O Victory in Jesus" playing itself back and forth in her happy soul.