

## Romans 12:11

### 11 not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord;

We are going to cover the first two phrases of this verse this morning with the emphasis being on the first phrase. But there is something we need to look at before we delve in. I think the **third** phrase gives us the perspective on how to accomplish the **first two things**. I think our reason for our not lagging and for our fervency is based on **WHO** we are doing all this for and **why** we are doing it. It ties us back to verses 1 and 2 again. And that must constantly happen or we would soon be giving self-help seminars on all these concepts instead of seeing them as natural outcroppings of our new identity.

Now let's look at the words in the first phrase.

**Not lagging**- This is made up of two words- **not** which means what our word **not** means and lagging. **Lagging** means sluggish, slothful, backward.

**Diligence** – this means haste, earnestness, diligence. It basically means earnestness in accomplishing, promoting, or striving after anything.

So let's paraphrase.

Do not lag in your earnestness at accomplishing the things you are to do.

When I started studying this I instantly began to understand how serious this is.

All I had to do is think about my kids. If you are a parent and you have spent any time at all thinking about this, you will know that **your kids pay for your failures**.

If we are undisciplined, they are likely to be. If we don't rely on the Bible for our answers, they are unlikely to. If we don't restrain our anger, they are not likely to.

If we will not reign in our fears, they are likely to be fearful. If we react

irrationally, they are likely to. If we ignore their **dishonesty** or their **laziness** or

their **rebellion**, we don't need to doubt what will happen. Now this does not

relieve them of their responsibility to overcome those same things. But we have disadvantaged them.

In fact it is very easy for us as parents to, early on, start treating them as if these things have happened to them mysteriously. Like- I can't believe little Billy is

telling lies. When little Billy has told us lie after lie but we didn't want to see it so we ignored it. We knew it would **create more work for us** to admit it. We knew it

would **make our lives more difficult** so we came up with an excuse for it. And

when we look back we see the fruit of our..... sloth. We failed to carry out our

duties. That is the essence of sloth. Many, not all, but many of the **character**

**flaws** of our children, or **the weaknesses** of our children are based on **our** sloth,

our failure to involve ourselves in their lives in such a way to raise them up in a way they could follow.

The same is true in the church. I don't know about you but I have a lot of regrets. And most of them are not based on things I **did**. They are based on things I **failed to do**. They are based on places I knew **there might be** a need but did nothing to intrude. Places where I saw hurt but did not offer comfort. Places where I saw relationships distancing themselves but I did nothing to stop the process. If we are honest, we must blame it on our own sloth. Oh, it is much easier to blame it on everyone else, but if we tell all the truth we know better.

Romans tells us to have no debt outstanding other than the debt to love each other. You know what that implies? **We are never done loving**. We have never loved each other enough. There is always more to do.

I say all this to make the point that sloth is a big deal. And the devil loves sloth. Because he knows how effective it is. What does it take to allow false doctrine into the fold? Sloth. What does it take to allow sinful behavior to establish itself inside the church? Sloth. What does it take to allow needs go unmet? Sloth. Ever since the curse that God pronounced in the garden of Eden, the consequences of laziness have been predictable. Stuff falls apart.

I took a walk around our property and looked at all the limbs that were down and all the gravel that needs raked off the grass. None of that stuff will take care of itself. It will require diligence. But that is nothing compared to what grows in our hearts and the hearts of our brothers and sisters if we do nothing. Laziness is deadly. And the problem with laziness is that it doesn't appear to be doing anything wrong. It is just NOT DOING one's duty. It may be doing lots of other things. It just refuses to carry out those things that people most need.

We often speak about this but it bears repeating. Our lives are made up of minutes. That is all we have. They are finite. And they are for a purpose. We have a duty to carry out in those minutes. And we cannot carry out that duty when we are using those minutes for things other than what they are intended for.

Spiritual laziness is one of the great causes of spiritual defeat. **It takes time** to think right. **It takes time** to know what God wants of us. Yet look at our lives. Most of us spend more time bathing than reading scripture and praying. I would venture to guess that most of us spend way more time being entertained than being spiritually informed. We spend so much time planting worthless seed and we are so surprised when nothing of value springs up in our lives. How different our lives would be if we would tithe our time like we tithe our money. We have

16 waking hours in a day. What would happen if we were to spend an hour and a half intentionally doing those things that are most central to God's heart? I would suggest to you that we would see dramatically different fruit in our lives. It is pretty simple. We all reap what we sow.

So being busy does not mean you are not slothful. If you are busy carrying out **your duty**, **THEN** you are not being slothful. I think all of our lives could show that we are not slack in our choice of entertainment. We are quick to find ways of amusing ourselves and wasting our time. And while it **looks** very busy, it is just a cover for our spiritual laziness. Have you completed what is on your "ought" list? Have you done the things the Holy Spirit has laid on your heart to do? Have you done all you know to do to meet the needs of your brothers and sisters. Have you done those things **you feel you should** to reach out to unbelievers? If you are not doing your duty, you are being lazy.

If you ever want to be inspired, read the biography of John Wesley. That man was a work horse of a man. So was the apostle Paul. So was Jonathan Edwards. So was Mike Friend. There is no person who accomplished great things for the kingdom who had not won the battle with sloth. Laziness will rob you from completing the next project. It will rob you from getting or keeping a good job. It will steal away any respect that people have for you. It will make you a liar because you will never deliver on your promises. Soon people will know that they don't have to take you seriously. Your words mean little. Good intentions but no ability to deliver.

If not for laziness **our spiritual walks** would be better, **our families** would function better, **our relationships with each** other would be stronger, **more needs would be met**, **our church** would be stronger, and **more people** would be challenged with their need for Christ.

Do you get what I am saying? We might evaluate ourselves and say, I am doing pretty good. I am not committing the same sin I was doing last week. I am overcoming the sin that so easily besets me. I am not cheating on my wife or husband. I am not stealing anyone's money. I have not yelled at the kids as much this week as last. But we have failed to ask the question- **Am I doing my duty?**

I would venture to guess that more harm is done by us failing to do our duty than is done by any other sin. That is why love is such a big deal. Think about that. Now, how does sloth work? I would guess that most of us could give a course on that.

Mike used to tell a joke about laziness. There were 3 guys betting in a bunkhouse about who was the laziest. I don't remember the stories of the first two guys but

they were pretty lazy. The third guy just laid in his bed and said “how about you guys roll me over and put that money in my pocket.” He won. Now that is lazy. I have always found this passage in Proverbs amusing.

**Proverbs 26:13-15 (NKJV)**

**13 The lazy man says, "There is a lion in the road! A fierce lion is in the streets!"**

**14 As a door turns on its hinges, So does the lazy man on his bed.**

**15 The lazy man buries his hand in the bowl; It wearies him to bring it back to his mouth.**

Now that is lazy. But look at what is revealed here in this scripture.

Laziness always finds a reason not to do ones duty. In the first verse the man says- it is too dangerous for me to do my duty. Usually that is not our reasoning. We usually seem to come up with a different reason for why we can't do our duty.

It often works like this.

I know this thing needs done. Maybe it is getting up to read scripture. Maybe it is going for a walk. Maybe it is going to visit someone. Maybe it is dealing with something in our kids. Maybe it is something like making supper or fixing something at the house.

But we say:

I am just so worn out. I have had a bad day. I do not feel like doing my duty. I hope I will feel better tomorrow. I will do my duty tomorrow. So we do not do our duty today. We feel perfectly justified with that. And do you know what? We won't tend to feel like it tomorrow either. And so it goes. And soon those who depend upon us learn **not to** depend upon us. Which just fosters more laziness because now we know we can get away with it. And if we can put a label on it that justifies it, now we have won the **laziness retirement fund**. What we need to understand is that when this happens the devil throws a party. Because he has just introduced a world of evil but few will have the courage or the wisdom to call it what it is. And we have positioned ourselves to respond like a victim of some illness. We can now act like we are the poor unfortunate soul who is unable to do our duty. The devil isn't stupid. He covers all the angles.

So, when we see that starting to happen to us, how do we get back to diligence in our responsibilities? How can we obey what scripture is telling us here?

**2 Timothy 1:6-7 (NKJV)**

**6 Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands.**

**7 For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.**

**Starting the exercise** is always where you start. Calling the devil's bluff and having faith in God's word is where you start. It is just like your physical body. When you don't exercise, it is harder to exercise. So the less you feel like it and the less you do. And those parts that at first are just **worthless** soon become **diseased**. So how do you change that? You do the exercise **you can** do. And soon you will find that you can do more and more.

I read a story once about a man who was tired of living. He was very much overweight. And one day he decided to kill himself. But he wanted to do it in a way that would not look like suicide. So he decided to go running. He figured that would kill him for sure. Well the first time he went he simply didn't have much energy to go very far. He was very surprised that the little bit that he ran didn't kill him. So he decided he would try harder the next day. But no luck. You can probably guess the end of the story. He got himself in shape and found a new lease on life.

That is how exercise and activity work, both spiritually and physically. We will find that if we will just carry out our duty because God is worth it, it won't be long before we are enjoying our duty and have the capacity to do even more.

I used to fear making phone calls. I would want to hide in a closet before calling someone I didn't know. But my job required me to do it. And my family required food. So I did it. And I got to the place where I am no longer intimidated to make a phone call. I still don't like it. But I have the capability to do it.

That is how it works. Paul is telling us this morning, as we are carrying out our gifts for each others benefit, don't allow your self-talk and desire for ease and comfort to waylay you. Don't believe the lies **your self tells your self** to get you to stop doing your duty. Anything you think to relieve you of doing your known duty is not from God. You can depend upon it. So resist it. And do your duty with diligence. Don't let any thought stop you. Sometimes a higher duty may stop you from doing a lesser one, but don't let yourself be deceived into not doing your duty, whatever it is.

The Timothy verse tells us to stir up the gift of God. I think this helps us. Several places in scripture the imagery of a fire is used for the life we have in God.

We cannot create the fire. But we can work with it or against it. We can quench the Holy Spirit. We can say no over and over again. Or we can rake the coals.

Any of you that have a coal or wood stove know how that works. You come home. The house is cold. You hope there is some fire in the fire box. You look in and you see a little red. So you get the poker and you poke around to free the coals from the ash. Soon you have a glow. You throw some paper in there and walaah.... A flame.

That is how it is we are to live. When we get cold, we stir things up. We read God's word. We find encouragement from it. We decide to believe it. We talk to those close to us in order to get challenged and directed. We pray, we read Christian biographies, we hang out with people who are on fire for God. And soon that ember begins to ignite. We don't get any credit for the flame. We didn't create it. But we did foster it. We did exert our wills in the way that God tells us to exert them.

At the end of the day, when we are tempted to not carry the duties that God has given to us, whatever they may be, we must do business with our thoughts. We must know ourselves to know **how tricky we can be**, to know **what a liar** we can be. And we must let God's word be true and all our perceptions and arguments and emotions to the contrary be seen what they are. They are all liars.

So we are not to be lazy about being diligent. We must apply ourselves to our work. We cannot go about it half hearted. We must be all in.

Then Paul says:

**fervent in spirit, serving the Lord;**

**Fervent**- to boil with heat. To be hot

I don't think it is a coincidence that this verbal imagery resembles what was being said in the last phrase.

Again, the Holy Spirit is the source for our spiritual heat. There is some argument here as to whether the s should be a small s for **our** spirit or a capital s for the **Holy Spirit**. An argument can be made in either direction. But I think it should be a capital S. Apollos was said to be fervent in spirit. But that was describing a personality trait of Apollos. That was the kind of guy that Apollos was. Not everyone is wired that way. Some people are type a and some are type b. The term "fervent in Spirit" in our text is applying to **all believers**, even the ones that might be a little more laid back in nature. So that leads me to believe that it is the Holy Spirit we are to be fervent in. That isn't conclusive but it is enough for an opinion.

Look at what this is telling us. Do you see any room for complacency or apathy? What do you think of when you think of boiling? Heat. Energy.

You see, it is impossible to be walking by **Faith in God's** word, the word of the Gospel, the word of God's mercies to us, and be **apathetic**. It is impossible to be walking by faith in God's word of the Gospel and be lethargic and complacent. It **IS** possible to **think** we believe God's word but we really don't. We can temporarily lose focus on God's word and be lethargic and complacent. We can have **all kinds of attitudes** when we pull our gaze from Christ and look at the foaming sea like Peter did. But what Paul is laying out to us today is how to live congruent with the truths of the gospel. And the answer to getting the proper attitude is always by coming back to the truth about what God has done for us. Paul says we are to be at the boiling point with the Spirit. What does that look like?

I think we might find it in Acts.

We find Stephen. He was essentially distributing food in the church. He was carrying out his duty. It was said

Acts 6:8 (NKJV)

8 And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and signs among the people.

Stephen is a good example of someone boiling. He didn't have a great position of authority. He had a simple job. But that did not hold back the boiling that was going on inside of him. He simply walked according to the Spirit. He walked by faith. And he did the next thing in front of him.

He soon found himself laying out the gospel to the power elite of Jerusalem. He is a very good example of someone who was boiling in the Spirit.

How about the opposite?

Revelation 3:14-22 (NKJV)

14 "And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write, 'These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God:

15 I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot.

16 So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth.

17 Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'-- and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked--

18 I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see.

19 As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent.  
20 Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.  
21 To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.  
22 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." ' "

Here is the opposite of those who are boiling in the Spirit. Here is the church that is lukewarm and apathetic. Here is the church that has a good opinion of themselves but it is not based on truth. They **think** they believe stuff, but their actions betray them. They say **I am this** and **I am that**, but they are wrong. They have not allowed God's word and his mercies the sway they should have in their hearts and lives. And they find themselves in the position of being in a church, but without Christ's presence. This church has kicked Christ out and needs to invite Him in.

What a sad state of affairs.

It is so vitally important that we get what Paul is saying to us. We must live in belief. We must live as if the truth is true. If we believe it, if we really believe it, we will not **expect** or **demand** much from this life. This life killed our savior. This life hates the truth. This life is temporary and passing.

If we really believe the Gospel, we will understand that only resurrection will bring us what we really want and need. We will understand that our hope will be fulfilled. We really will be resurrected. We really will see Christ. And we will live in an environment of love forever.

This boiling in the Spirit that Paul described is not drummed up by worship bands. It is not manipulated by man's programs. This is a fire that burns in a person who has been saved from their sins. They know that they did nothing to deserve it. They know they did nothing to earn it. But God chose them out of His infinite love and kindness, and now they get to be a part of the greatest celebration that will ever happen in the history of mankind. They will be at the marriage supper of the lamb. We will be sitting at some kind of table in some kind of place celebrating the Glory of Christ that He receives when all of His children are brought into His kingdom.

Isn't that enough to make you boil?

Let's take a hard look at our lives this week. First, what duties are we refusing to do? What duties are falling on others that should really be mine? Or what duties are not being done at all? We need to take these to Christ's feet and submit

ourselves to do these duties. We may need help to **think right** about these things. We may have patterns of thinking that are difficult to overcome. But at the end of the day we cannot be lazy about being diligent.

Second, we need to take our temperature. Are we boiling? Does the Holy Spirit move us to do all kinds of things? Are we open to God's word changing us? Are we open to God's word directing us? Are we willing to follow Christ into whatever He has for us next? How are we doing?

I think that will give us enough to do until next week.