Today we continue the sermon series for this Summer, “Life Lessons from Proverbs through Disney’s Magic.” These messages leverage inspiring moments from Disney movies to bring life-giving lessons from the Book of Proverbs, such as wisdom, justice, and friendship, among others, into sharper focus. So far, we have covered the themes of wisdom, righteousness, speech, trust, and friendship using movies such as Lion King, Mulan, Bambi, Raya and the Last Dragon, and Toy Story. Today’s message is The Value of Diligence using the movie “Ratatouille.”

Diligence is an incredibly important value and practice in our lives. I tell my sons, “If you want to learn anything, you must invest the time and effort. You don’t have to be the most talented, just the most hardworking. Never show up unprepared; always be ready to the best of your abilities and with the right mindset.” They are very smart and talented, but no talent or intelligence is worth much or accomplishes anything without intentional development. So I also tell them, “If you want to see something happening, you have to work for it and overcome the struggle.”

Why do I do this, talk to my sons like that? Because I love them, of course, but also because I have learned that we are naturally not inclined to diligence; it has to be taught and encouraged. Children or anyone else would not see their potential and develop their full capacities without someone guiding and encouraging them.

So, have you been diligent in your life, working toward your goals and developing your skills? Perhaps your answer is: Yes, as much as I can, but not as much as I want or need to. Well, let’s talk about it.

Today’s Scripture is Proverbs 12:24, “The hand of the diligent will rule, while the lazy will be put to forced labor.”

Like most of the book, this Proverb offers practical wisdom for everyday life. The key theme of this particular verse is diligence versus laziness. The “hand of the diligent” refers to those who are hardworking, dedicated, and persistent in their work. The Proverb indicates that these diligent people will “rule,” which means they will achieve success, influence, or authority.

On the other hand, “the lazy” refers to those who avoid work or exertion to take the easy way out. These are those who tread slowly through tasks, resent pressure, and shy away from challenges. The Proverb warns that these individuals may find themselves at the mercy of others’ control or circumstances, often undertaking tasks they might not have chosen.

Two important observations: (1) diligence does not guarantee accomplishing all the success one wants. Success isn’t always a direct result of hard work. Some people may suggest that one person’s struggle is due to a lack of a hard work ethic when in fact, it could be due to unfair circumstances beyond their power that even if they are the most dedicated people, their struggle could be lasting. And (2) diligence is not about pushing ourselves to exhaustion or perfection. It is about consistent effort while also maintaining balance. Just as God rested on the seventh day after creation, we should weave rest and grace into our diligent pursuits, ensuring our journey remains purposeful and fulfilling rather than burdensome.

Nevertheless, this should not be an excuse to give up, that is, “It is too hard or unfair, or it must be perfect otherwise, it is worthless.” Many people use unfairness and burdensome as excuses to not even try, which is a hopeless choice. Not trying at all is the only sure way to failure. If anything, the value of diligence extends beyond mere success or the illusion of perfection. Instead, it builds character, resilience, and a sense of personal fulfillment.

So, what is diligence, then? To answer this question, we are looking at Ratatouille, a Disney movie that tells the tale of Remy, a rat with a passion for cooking. He dreamed of becoming a renowned chef, a pursuit many consider ludicrous given his status as a rodent. He faced numerous challenges along the way, including skepticism from his own family. However, Remy’s story is one of overcoming great obstacles and discouraging voices to pursue his dream. He worked tirelessly to hone his culinary skills. His determination culminates in creating a spectacular dish that impresses a ruthless critic, proving that diligence and hard work can help overcome even the most daunting obstacles.

Here is a video of a key moment in the movie when Remy and Linguini (a new-found friend) worked together to create a new dish upon a sudden request: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1DmPd3or1EM&feature=youtu.be>

This was a pivotal moment for Remy and Linguini. They have to create something new and impressive, and they have to do it quickly. As Remy directs every Linguini’s move, they experiment and adjust the dish until it is perfect. This scene is a testament to their diligence. Under high pressure, they persistently and meticulously work on the dish. They collaborate, experiment, taste, adjust, and rework until they get it right. This scene clearly illustrates how their diligence pays off when they serve a new, delicious dish that satisfies and amazes the customer.

But the main story in this movie is how Remy, someone who was worthless in the eyes of pretty much everyone and, against all odds, proved himself to be worthy and capable of his dreams. I am not suggesting inviting rats into your house to make you dinner—remember, this is a movie—but the idea that working hard for your dreams can pay off eventually.

What does this mean? That diligence is a choice and one that is accessible to all. Not everyone shares the same talents and privileges, but everyone can be diligent. Diligence is intense and persistent effort; it is hard work. It does not require ability, intelligence, education, or skill. It only requires focused attention, maximum effort, and patient persistence. Talent and training leverage diligence, but talent and training can’t replace diligence.

Athletes use this wisdom daily: “If I put in one more lap or one more set of exercises than anyone else, I will eventually win.” Athletes live by this wisdom, pushing themselves for that extra lap or set of exercises, knowing their hard work will yield results. They understand that while they cannot alter their inherent abilities, they can outdo their competition through hard work. They know that diligence can indeed overcome talent and opposition.

However, still, some people confuse diligence with luck. If you get up early and are never late to work that allows you to take on more responsibilities and privileges, that is diligence, not luck; if you learn new skills that set you up for a promotion, that is diligence, not luck; if you take the initiative to be creative, helpful, and responsible in everything you do that, in turn, opens new doors that lead to success, that is diligence, not luck; if you keep a positive mindset that helps you turn challenges into opportunities for growth, that is diligence, not luck. What people call luck is, in fact, the product of decisions consistently taken over time.

The opposite is true too. If you are always late to work… If you are unwilling to learn and change… If you expect others to do things for you… If you have a negative mindset… and never get ahead or see good things happening in your life, well, that is laziness, not bad luck.

Why does this matter? Because diligence is essential for success in all facets of life, from your relationships with your family and friends to your work or education, your spiritual journey, and even the stewardship of your soul. How diligent are you with your life, and what matters to you? Can you recall a time when your diligence paid off? How did it make you feel?

To further the point and conclude, here are some other examples from Bible about the blessing of being diligent:

Consider the virtuous woman in Proverbs 31, who can be defined by one word: diligence,

“She looks well to the ways of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness.” (v. 27)

Recall Pharaoh’s wisdom in Genesis 47:6, when he entrusted his livestock to capable men,

“The land of Egypt is before you; settle your father and your brothers in the best part of the land; let them live in the land of Goshen; and if you know that there are capable men among them, put them in charge of my livestock.” (Genesis 47:6)

Or, remember Solomon’s recognition of industrious Jeroboam in 1 Kings 11:28,

“The man Jeroboam was very able, and when Solomon saw that the young man was industrious, he gave him charge over all the forced labor of the house of Joseph.” (1 Kings 11:28)

Even Paul, in 1 Corinthians 15:10, confesses that he worked harder than any other apostle, attributing his efforts to God’s grace,

“But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me has not been in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I but the grace of God that is with me.” (1 Corinthians 15:10)

And we cannot forget Jesus’ parable of the talents, urging us to perform our duties diligently,

“Well done, good and trustworthy servant; you have been trustworthy in a few things; I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master” (Matthew 25:14-30).

The essence of these narratives is clear: diligence works, bears fruit, and is a godly virtue.

Whether in Proverbs, the stories of Pharaoh, Solomon, and Paul, or even in the story of a rat chef named Remy, we see the transformative power of diligence. We see that it is not only about our talents but the effort and dedication we put into nurturing them. We see that diligence is a choice to work hard, persevere, and be patient in the face of trials. And this is particularly important for young people who are starting in life: You have no choice but diligence.

So, here is the invitation and goodness: Embrace diligence in your own lives, not just for your sake, but for your family, your community, and most importantly, your spiritual journey. Let the story of Remy inspire you, let the wisdom of the Proverbs guide you, and let God be your constant source of strength as you navigate this path.

And remember, you can find the strength and encouragement you need by knowing you are not alone, that God is with you and all the people who care about you.

As we enter the coming week, let us carry this mantra: Be diligent. Be patient. Be persistent. For in this, we find the pathway to true success and fulfillment. God bless you all.