**The sluggard is wiser in his own eyes   
than seven who can answer sensibly -- Proverbs 26:16  
A Proverbial Story   
By Ted Hildebrandt and Chatgpt**

In the sun-scorched hills of Embervale, where fields baked under golden skies and farmers rose with the dawn, there lived a man named Sleepy Joe Bram. He was known across the valley not for his toil or work ethic, but for his patterns of perpetual sleep and words—endless, boastful words.

Sleepy Joe was a sluggard and proud of it. While others bent their backs planting, weeding, and reaping, Sleepy Joe, smug in his laziness, sat on a stump watching idly as others worked, explaining to anyone unfortunate enough to pass by why his lazy way was best.

“You waste your strength,” he’d declare, waving his cup majestically as if at a wine tasting. “Nature knows what it’s doing. If the ground wants to grow wheat, it will. If not, why should I break my back digging dirt?”

The villagers rolled their eyes but seldom argued. It was pointless since the young sluggard had an answer for everything, especially things he knew nothing about. He cavalierly and haughtily dismissed any opposing viewpoints as misguided.

One year, a drought struck. The river shrank to a mere ribbon, and the soil cracked like old concrete. Farmers gathered beneath the old sycamore to discuss what could be done. Bill and seven of the wisest among them—aged, weathered, and full of quiet wisdom—shared plans: digging deeper wells, damming up the stream, and re-dredging the irrigation ditches.

As they spoke, Sleepy Joe sauntered up. “You guys are overlooking the obvious,” he chided them. “No need to panic. Droughts pass. Just wait. The rain will return, as it always does. Let the land rest. That’s what I’m going to do. Why waste all that energy on a losing season?” the town sluggard arrogantly asked rhetorically.

One of the elders, a man named Bill, looked up from his notes. “And what will you eat if the rain does not come?” In the meantime, the townspeople tirelessly and with great effort re-dredged the irrigation ditches and dug deeper their wells.

Sleepy Joe defiantly boasted. “The land provides. It always has. My garden will be fine.”

But his garden wasn’t fine. By mid-summer, his crops had withered. His food supply had simply dried up. And when he looked to the surrounding fields, the sight made him uneasy. While his garden plot lay parched and brown, his neighbors’ plots were small but still green. Their irrigation ditches glistened faintly in the sun.

Humbled, Sleepy Joe crept to the well by the sycamore tree. There, Bill ladled him a drink and met his eyes with no judgment, only weariness after his work of deepening the well by the tree.

“We planned and we worked the plan,” he said simply. “We didn’t wait for miracles or trust in idle talk.”

That winter, Sleepy Joe lived on the charity of those he had mocked. He spoke less, listened more. And when spring arrived, at sunrise, he was the first to the fields, rake and shovel in hand.

The townspeople remembered, of course—they always did—but they welcomed him all the same. For Embervale was a place that prized wisdom, and wisdom sometimes comes not from claims of knowing everything, but from good plans followed by hard work.

So, Sleepy Joe finally learned from the old proverb: The sluggard is wiser in his own eyes than seven men who can answer sensibly -- Proverbs 26:16.