

WEALTH AND POVERTY!

“Blessed to be a Blessing!”

The Proverbs has plenty to say about wealth and poverty. Here are some general points:

- Wealth and prosperity are not wrong – they come from God, wisdom, careful planning, hard work, and good living
- Neither is poverty a bad thing – it too comes from God the Maker, who is their defender, and there is no shame in it, although it is painful
- Sometimes, however, poverty is self-inflicted – by laziness, corruption (ill-gotten), and lack of self-control/frugality
- What matters in life, much more than wealth and prosperity, are a good name, contentment with what we have, and generosity and justice for the poor
- The opposites to a good name, contentment, generosity and justice are robbery, corruption, dishonesty, and cruelty; the end is destruction
- Bottomline, then, is to thank God for what he has given us, be content in life, do justice for the oppressed, and help the needy.

1. Wealth and prosperity are not wrong – they come from God, wisdom, careful planning, hard work, and good living

a. From God

- “Honor the Lord with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops; then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine” (3:9–10)
- “The Lord does not let the righteous go hungry” (10:3)

b. From wisdom

- “With me are riches and honor, enduring wealth and prosperity” (8:18)
- “The wealth of the wise is their crown” (14:24)
- “The one who cherishes understanding will soon prosper” (19:8b)

c. From careful planning

- “The plans of the diligent leads to profit as surely as haste leads to poverty” (21:5)

d. From hard work

- “All hard work brings a profit but mere talk leads only to poverty (14:23)
- Industrious women in Proverbs 31

- e. From good living
- “My son and daughter, do not forget my teaching, but keep my commandments in your heart, for they will prolong your life many years and bring you peace and prosperity” (3:1–2)
 - “The house of the righteous contains great treasure, but the income of the wicked bring ruin” (15:6)
 - “Whoever pursues righteousness and love finds life, prosperity, and honor” (21:21)
 - “Humility is the fear of the Lord; its wages are riches and honor and life” (22:4)
 - “A faithful person will be richly blessed” (28:20a)

2. Neither is poverty a bad thing – it too comes from God the Maker, who is their defender, and there is no shame in it, although it is painful

- a. God is their Maker
- “Whoever mocks the poor shows contempt for their Maker” (17:5)
 - “Rich and poor have this in common: the Lord is the Maker of them all” (22:2)
 - “The poor and the oppressor have this in common: the Lord gives sight to the eyes of both” (29:13)
- b. God is their defender
- “Do not exploit the poor because they are poor and do not crush the needy in court; for the Lord will take up their case and will exact life for life” (22:22–23)
 - “Do not move an ancient boundary stone or encroach on the fields of the fatherless, for their Defender is strong; he will take up their case against you” (23:10–11)
- c. There is no shame in it
- “Better the poor whose walk is blameless than a fool whose lips are perverse” (19:1)
 - “Better to be poor than a liar” (19:22b)
 - “Let beer be for those who are perishing, wine for those who are in anguish! Let them drink and forget their poverty and remember their misery no more” (31:6–7)
- d. It is painful
- “A person’s riches may redeem their live, but the poor cannot respond to threatening rebukes” (13:8)
 - “Wealth attracts many friends, but even the closest friend of the poor person deserts them” (19:4)
 - “The poor are shunned by all their relatives — how much more do their friends avoid them!” (19:7)
 - “The rich rule over the poor, and the borrower is slave to the lender” (22:7)

3. Sometimes, however, poverty is self-inflicted – by laziness, corruption (ill-gotten), and lack of self-control/frugality

a. Laziness

- “A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest – and poverty will come on you like a thief and scarcity like an armed man” (6:10–11; 24:33–34)
- “Do not love sleep or you will grow poor; stay awake and you will have food to spare” (20:13)
- “I went past the field of a sluggard, past the vineyard of someone who has no sense; thorns had come up everywhere, the ground was covered with weeds and the stone wall was in ruins” (24:30–31)
- “Those who work their land will have abundant food, but those who chase fantasies will have their fill of poverty” (28:19)

b. Corruption (ill-gotten)

- When people make “ill-gotten gain,” it will take away their life (1:19)
- “Ill-gotten treasures have no lasting value” (10:2)
- “Dishonest money dwindles away, but whoever gathers money little by little makes it grow” (13:11)
- “Food gained by fraud tastes sweet, but one ends up with a mouth full of gravel” (20:17)
- “A fortune made by a lying tongue is a fleeting vapor and a deadly snare” (21:6)

c. Lack of self-control/frugality

- “Whoever disregards discipline comes to poverty and shame” (13:18)
- “Whoever loves pleasure will become poor; whoever loves wine and olive oil will never be rich” (21:17)
- “The wise store up choice food and olive oil, but fools gulp theirs down” (21:20)
- “Do not join those who drink too much wine or gorge themselves on meat, for drunkards and gluttons become poor, and drowsiness clothes them in rags” (23:21)

4. What matters in life, much more than wealth and prosperity, are a good name, contentment with what we have, and generosity and justice for the poor

a. A good name

- “A good name is more desirable than great riches; to be esteemed is better than silver or gold” (22:1)

b. Contentment with what we have

- “Better a little with the fear of the Lord than great wealth with turmoil; Better a small serving of vegetables with love than a fattening calf with hatred” (15:16–17)

- “The greedy bring ruin to their households, but the one who hates bribes will live” (15:27)
- “Better a little with righteousness than much gain with injustice” (16:8)
- “Better a dry crust with peace and quiet than a house full of feasting, with strife” (17:1)
- “Do not wear yourself out to get rich; do not trust your own cleverness” (23:4)
- “Cast but a glance at riches, and they are gone, for they will surely sprout wings and fly off to the sky like an eagle” (23:5)
- “Riches do not endure forever, and a crown is not secure for all generations” (27:24)
- “Better the poor whose walk is blameless than the rich whose ways are perverse” (28:6)
- “One who [is] eager to get rich will not go unpunished” (28:20b)

c. Generosity and justice for the poor

- “When the righteous prosper, the city rejoices” (11:10)
- “A generous person will prosper; whoever refreshes others will be refreshed” (11:25)
- “People curse the one who hoards grain, but they pray God’s blessing on the one who is willing to sell” (11:26)
- “Whoever oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker, but whoever is kind to the needy honors God” (14:31)
- “Everyone is the friend of one who gives gifts” (19:6b)
- “Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and he will reward them for what they have done” (19:17)
- “Whoever shuts their ears to the cry of the poor will also cry out and not be answered” (21:13)
- “The generous will themselves be blessed, for they share their food with the poor” (22:9)
- “If your enemy is hungry, give him/her food to eat; if he/she is thirsty, give him/her water to drink. In doing this, you will heal burning coals on his/her head, and the Lord will reward you” (25:21–22)
- “The stingy are eager to get rich and are unaware that poverty awaits them” (28:22)
- “Those who give to the poor will lack nothing, but those who close their eyes to them receive many curses” (28:27)
- “The righteous care about justice for the poor, but the wicked have no such concern” (29:7)
- “If a king judges the poor with fairness, his throne will be established forever” (29:14)
- “Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy” (31:9)

5. The opposites to a good name, contentment, generosity and justice are robbery, corruption, dishonesty, and cruelty; the end is destruction

- a. Robbery
 - “Sinful men will say “Come along with us. . . . we will get all sorts of valuable things and fill our houses with plunder . . . we will all share the loot” (1:10–16)

- b. Corruption
 - “The Lord detests dishonest scales, but accurate weights find favor with him” (11:1)
 - “Different weights and different measures – the Lord detest them both” (20:10; 20:23)

- c. Dishonesty
 - “The wicked accept bribes in secret to pervert the course of justice” (17:23)

- d. Cruelty
 - “The poor plead for mercy, but the rich answer harshly” (18:23)

- e. Destruction
 - “Wealth is worthless in the day of wrath” (11:4)
 - “Ruthless men gain only wealth” but no honor (11:16)
 - “Those who trust in their riches will fall” (11:28)
 - “A bribe is seen as a charm by the one who gives it; they think success will come at every turn” but it will not (17:8)
 - “One who oppresses the poor to increase his/her wealth . . . [will] come to poverty” (22:16)
 - “Like clouds and wind without rain is one who boasts of gifts never given” (25:14)
 - “Whoever increases wealth by taking interest or profit from the poor accumulates it for another, who will be kind to the poor” (28:8)

Conclusion:

Bottomline, then, is to thank God for what he has given us, be content in life, do justice for the oppressed, and help the needy.

“Two things I ask of you, Lord; do not refuse me before I die: Keep falsehood and lies far from me; **give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread.** Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, ‘Who is the Lord?’ Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God” (30:7–9)