

Bring in the Bling Because God's the King
July 11, 2021
Mark Archibald

As we spend time in Proverbs this summer, I want to encourage you to read the whole book through in a couple of sittings - maybe even one! I encourage you to do this with other books of the Bible, too. We often only go story by story, chapter by chapter, or verse by verse. There is a LOT that you gain from reading a book of the Bible in one sitting. You find things you often miss when you are only focused verse by verse. You see the big picture of the book a lot better when you read the whole book at once (or at least in larger sections).

As you read Proverbs in a sitting or three, you will begin to see what themes and concepts are repeated. There are hundreds of one sentence or one thought quotes in Proverbs. But there's a lot of repetition. Sometimes you'll be certain that the Proverb you are currently reading had already shown up in the book previously!

As I read through Proverbs last month, there was a surprising amount of teaching about money. There were encouragements to be wise with your money. There were encouragements to prepare; to plan. There was a lot of sound financial advice in the book of Proverbs. That includes this "encouragement" from Proverbs 6:6-11.

***Go to the ant, you sluggard;
 consider its ways and be wise!
 It has no commander,
 no overseer or ruler,
 yet it stores its provisions in summer
 and gathers its food at harvest.***

***How long will you lie there, you sluggard?
 When will you get up from your sleep?
 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.***

This is a stern warning! "What's a sluggard?" you ask? Well aside from being a stellar insult, a sluggard is "the idle person who sleeps and dozes and does nothing. This is not someone who has no work, it is someone who simply can't be bothered" (Nick Page). A sluggard is a lazy person that can't be bothered.

At the end of this teaching is a warning that happens on occasion in Proverbs: don't let poverty overcome you.

***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.***

Do whatever you can to avoid poverty!

Based on the teaching on “the sluggard” you may assume that the money wisdom of Proverbs is all about personal and financial responsibility. There certainly are encouragements to save and to be wise with money. But that is not where talk about money ends in the book of Proverbs.

The world says that if you have made money, “Good for you! You deserve it!” The world also assumes that if you are in poverty, you have brought this upon yourself. This is not the wisdom God reveals in Proverbs.

In speaking of wisdom as it relates to personal finances, Proverbs does encourage being responsible. But even more than responsible, Proverbs encourages the reader to be **generous**.

Even though Proverbs warns against poverty, the authors do not look down on those who may be considered poor. In Proverbs we find many statements like . . .

- ***Better the poor whose walk is blameless
than a fool whose lips are perverse.*** (Proverbs 19:1)
- ***Better to be poor than a liar.*** (Proverbs 19:22)

It is far better to be poor, say the Proverbs, than to be lacking in character and integrity. There are certainly worse things to be than poor!

The wisdom of God, as recorded in Proverbs, seems to almost have a preferential attitude towards the poor. It is clear in Proverbs that the poor are seen by God, and therefore must be seen by you! Here are just a few of the Proverbs encouraging generosity toward the poor.

- ***An unplowed field produces food for the poor,
but injustice sweeps it away.*** (Proverbs 13:23)
- ***Whoever oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker,
but whoever is kind to the needy honours God.*** (Proverbs 14:31)
- ***Whoever mocks the poor shows contempt for their Maker;
whoever gloats over disaster will not go unpunished.*** (Proverbs 17:5)
- ***Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the LORD,
and he will reward them for what they have done.*** (Proverbs 19:17)
- ***Whoever shuts their ears to the cry of the poor
will also cry out and not be answered.*** (Proverbs 21:13)
- ***He who gives to the poor will lack nothing,
but he who closes his eyes to them receives many curses.*** (Proverbs 28:27)

Being wise with your money is all well and good in Proverbs. It spares you from a lot of unnecessary trouble.

But being wise in your finances means little if those finances are not a means to care for those in need. A stingy attitude towards money is well outside the boundary of wisdom in Proverbs. Let's look at some of those Proverbs about generosity again.

***An unplowed field produces food for the poor,
but injustice sweeps it away.*** (Proverbs 13:23)

Farmers were encouraged to not collect everything from their fields for their own use. Things were to be left behind in fields and orchards for the refugee, the immigrant and the poor to collect. If you actively prevent the poor from collecting what they need, you are opposed to God's wisdom in Proverbs.

***Whoever oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker,
but whoever is kind to the needy honours God.*** (Proverbs 14:31)

***Whoever mocks the poor shows contempt for their Maker;
whoever gloats over disaster will not go unpunished.*** (Proverbs 17:5)

When we actively mock the poor, those in need, or those who are suffering, according to God's wisdom in Proverbs you are showing disrespect directly to God!

***Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the LORD,
and he will reward them for what they have done.*** (Proverbs 19:17)

When we are kind and generous to the poor, according to the wisdom of God in Proverbs, we are directly kind and generous to God!

***Whoever shuts their ears to the cry of the poor
will also cry out and not be answered.*** (Proverbs 21:13)

***Those who give to the poor will lack nothing,
but those who close their eyes to them receive many curses.*** (Proverbs 28:27)

According to the wisdom of God in Proverbs, the attention that we give to the poor is the attention that God gives to us! It sounds very similar to the Lord's Prayer – "Forgive our sin as we forgive those who have sinned against us." How we treat those in need, how we speak of them, how we pay attention to them is very tightly tied to the connection we have with God.

Does the wisdom of God in Proverbs encourage us to be wise with our money? Absolutely.

Does the wisdom of God in Proverbs encourage us to be generous with what we have? Yes! There is a greater weight placed on being generous than there is on being wise with what we have.

The two ideas – being wise with money and generous with money – are actually inseparable in Proverbs.

We see these inseparable ideas illustrated in the teaching of Paul to the followers of Jesus in the book of Ephesians. Paul encourages the followers of Jesus to change their way of living. Those bad things you

did before you encountered Jesus, stop doing those! Live a new way as you follow Christ instead. Paul writes,

“Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands” (Ephesians 4:28)

Don’t be the sluggard anymore. Stop taking what belongs to others. Do your own work. Do something useful with your hands.

It’s empowering to do good work. Whether it is a job you are hired to do or a meaningful role volunteering, “doing something useful with your own hands” is very empowering. For some of us, doing meaningful work feels like a genuine connection with Jesus.

But Paul doesn’t encourage the followers of Jesus to work just because it’s empowering, or just because it deepens our connection with Jesus. Paul teaches,

“Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need.” (Ephesians 4:28)

When we are wise with money, when we dedicated at our work, when we build on our resources and skills, we cannot do so just for ourselves and just for our families. We are wise with our money, skills and time “that we may have something to share with those in need.”

Too often we feel like we are given two choices. You can A) be good with money. Or you can B) help those in need. But the wisdom of Jesus found in Paul and Proverbs says that we should be wise with our resources “that we may have something to share with those in need.”

The wisdom of God in Proverbs encourages us to be wise with money and to be generous. But we do not do these things just to follow the rules. We do not do these things to earn God’s attention or favour. We CERTAINLY do not do these things to earn the attention of others.

We live in a wise and generous way because God is a wise and generous God. Think about it. God withholds nothing from us. At our deepest point of need, or inability to be connected with God, God offers us Jesus, His Son. At our deepest point of need, Jesus offers himself on our behalf. God is a God of abundance. Time and time again we are convinced that everything is scarce. Yet in Scripture and through the witness of other believers we are reminded – God provides. There is enough to go around.

And because God is generous, because there is abundance, God calls us to be generous, too. The wise and generous ways that we live our lives points the world to Jesus, the one who withholds nothing from us.

Be wise with what you have. Be generous. These are ideas that must be combined in our daily lives. We can be wise and generous with our money and resources because we trust and follow a wise and generous God.