

11.21.21 The Real Measure of Wealth Proverbs 3.9-10; 11.24-26, 28; 28.6

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Do you recognize this saying? “In advance of committing yourself to a course of action, consider your circumstances and options.” How about now - *“Look before you leap.”*

Here’s another: “There are certain corrective measures for minor problems that, when taken early on in a course of action, forestall major problems from arising.”

“A stitch in time saves nine.”

How about this – “The winged creature that arises before the sun is well into the sky, statistically speaking, has less competition for sustenance.”

The early bird catches the worm.

The great Spanish writer Miguel de Cervantes (1547-1616) said, **“A proverb is a short sentence founded upon long experience containing a truth.”** I’ve told you before about a proverb that’s meaningful to my family that was emphasized by my grandfather and father, *“Do good & forget it.”* My sisters and I heard that all the time and it meant we were to do good because it was the right thing to do and not for any other reason, reward, or expectation. It’s such a part of our family that it’s on my grandparent’s gravestone in Maine. It says on the front *“SCALISE, ‘I have learned in whatever state I am to be content. Philippians 4.11. Do good and forget it.’”* After hearing this for 20 plus years my sister Carolyn got engaged to a man from Italy named Sal. One night at dinner the family proverb was brought up and Sal said, *“Sure that’s an old Italian saying, but it’s only half of it. The saying is, ‘Do good & forget it, do bad and never forget it,’* and it means you are to do good but if someone does something bad to you, you never forget.” Our family had never heard that, but we were touched by the fact that my grandfather had only passed on the more Christ-like half of the proverb.

Most of us are familiar with at least some proverbs; they’re usually brief, imagistic, and memorable like two of the first I taught our sons Nathan and Greg when they were young, and I wanted to get them interested in the Bible. **Proverbs 26:11**, “As

*a dog returns to its vomit, so fools repeat their folly.” Or another favorite **Proverbs 26:14**, “As a door turns on its hinges, so does a lazy person in bed.”*

Proverbs is one of the most practical and easiest to understand books in the Bible. Proverbs challenges you to pursue God and wisdom in each area of your life. According to Proverbs, **the wise person** seeks knowledge, wisdom, truth, and insight and applies them to life’s situations and circumstances. The wise are known for their love for God, self-control, well-chosen words and deeds, their generosity, and concern for and service to others, especially the poor.

The fool in Proverbs has no desire to learn, no desire to change, and no desire for a relationship with God. Fools tend to create problems and to make situations worse rather than better. The foolish lack ethics and integrity. They’re often quick to anger and fail to practice self-control and self-discipline.

All proverbs are based on experience, but **it’s far wiser to learn from the experience of others, both positively and negatively**, than to have to experience everything yourself. That’s one of the benefits of reading a Book like Proverbs, to learn from the experience of others. Among the many topics touched upon in Proverbs is your attitude toward generosity, wealth, possessions, giving, and the poor and those in need.

Listen to Proverbs 3:9-10; 11:24-26, 28; 28:6

“Honor the LORD with your substance and with the first fruits of all your produce; 10 then your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will be bursting with wine.

*24 Some give freely, yet grow all the richer; others withhold what is due, and only suffer want. 25 **A generous person will be enriched**, and one who gives water will get water.*

26 The people curse those who hold back grain, but a blessing is on the head of those who sell it. 28 Those who trust in their riches will wither, but the righteous will flourish like green leaves. Better to be poor and walk in integrity than to be crooked in one’s ways even though rich.”

The real measure of wealth is not how much you have, but how generously you live. There are people with millions and even billions of dollars and if you put their

life up against the standard of the book of Proverbs, the verdict of Proverbs would be that many of those people are fools who are spiritually poor and morally bankrupt. There are other people who are quite poor materially, who have little or almost no money at all, and yet they live with an attitude of generosity, faith, and even thankfulness that Proverbs would recognize as wisdom. They are wealthy in what matters most.

When we talked about Solomon back on September 19th (<https://brewsterbaptistchurch.org/what-does-wise-living-look-like/>), I mentioned how **Wisdom is the ability to make godly choices in life**. Wisdom is skill in the art of living with each aspect of our life under God's guidance and direction that includes time, money, and possessions.

How would you feel if you were seated in a pew at a worship service and as the offering was being received the preacher came down and walked beside one of the ushers as he went from pew to pew; watching every bill given by his parishioners. That's what well-known 19th century American preacher John Broadus (1827-1895) did one Sunday morning. Some of those in attendance were angered at this action. Some were confused and ashamed. Others were amazed. All were surprised. After the offering was completed, Broadus went to the pulpit to begin his sermon, based on the story of the widow who placed the tiny amount she had into the offering as Jesus watched the people give their offerings. Broadus concluded his sermon by saying, *"If you take to heart that I have seen your offerings this day and know just what sacrifice you have made - and what sacrifice you have not made – remember that your Savior goes up and down these aisles with every usher every Sunday and sees every cent contributed by his people. He **knows more than what we give; he sees through to the heart**. He also knows exactly what remains in our wallet or purse – the amount we keep for ourselves."*

(W. Graham Scroggie), *"There are two ways in which a Christian may view money: **"How much of my money shall I use for God? How much of God's money shall I use for myself?"*** If you follow Jesus, you're expected to live wisely, faithfully, and generously before God in all aspects of your life. God knows that people who live generously are more joyful and more content. God wants you to be joyful and content

and that results from being generous and having money and material things in their proper place. You need to give and share money, time, and spiritual gifts for your own spiritual development, not because the church needs to receive. That's why you shouldn't substitute giving of one kind for another, because you deny yourself the joy and the spiritual growth that comes from giving of yourself and your resources in diverse ways. It's amazing how many volunteer hours are given by the people of this church, the varieties of volunteer service that you all do, and the amount of money that is contributed and given away. It's incredible what God does through the combined efforts of the people of BBC as we seek to love, grow, and share as the people of God. We're blessed to be part of a very giving church.

Jesus wants us to give generously as an act of discipleship; an act of trust, an act of obedience, an act of love, a wise act of gratitude which grows our soul. Jesus says in Matthew 23 that we should pay attention to the weightier issues of justice, mercy, and faith without neglecting smaller matters like tithing. To Jesus tithing, giving 10% of what God has blessed you with to the Lord's work, was a smaller matter, a given. Jesus says the tithe is important to the worship of God because it is a step toward the wealth that comes from living generously. Giving helps us live wisely and more simply by keeping material things in their proper place.

Paul wrote in **1 Timothy 6.6-10**, *"6 Of course, there is great gain in godliness combined with contentment; 7 for we brought nothing into the world, so that we can take nothing out of it; 8 but if we have food and clothing, we will be content with these. 9 But those who want to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. 10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains."*

This past Monday I drove up to Boston to do the committal service for Arlene Love, a long-time BBC member. As I waited at a streetlight near the cemetery, I remembered a story about a funeral procession that was crossing a busy city intersection just as an armored truck pulled up from a side street. Not realizing the line of cars was a funeral procession, the driver of the armored car joined it. An onlooker,

impressed by the spectacle of the armored truck at the center of the funeral procession, said to a friend, *“What do you know; you can take it with you.”*

Whether you're materially rich or poor, as a follower of Christ it's important for you to be capable of having money and possessions without being possessed by them. If you have money or an abundance of things, you need not love them, trust them, or serve them. Whatever your financial situation you are to use money and possessions in ways that reflect God's generosity to you and that encourage and help others. We heard that repeatedly in the Proverbs in worship today. Jesus says money is not merely a means of exchange. Money is like a god - it offers security, can induce guilt, gives freedom and power, it entices us and seems all powerful. Like a god, money is out to gain our allegiance and our devotion.

Giving frees us from the tyranny of money. That is why we encourage people to live generously and to strive to move over time toward giving 10% of what God has blessed you with to the Lord's work. A small church was in its financial stewardship time of the year when a man needed surgery. The pastor promised him that she would be in the recovery room when he came out of the anesthesia following surgery. She was. As the man awakened through the foggy shroud of medication, he looked wildly about and said, *“Where am I? Who are you?”* The pastor took his hand and said, *“Everything's all right. I'm your pastor.”* *“Oh, yes,”* said the patient, with a deep sigh, *“just put me down for the same thing as last year.”*

In the Gospel of Luke 8.1-3, we learn of women like Susanna who gave generously to support the ministry and needs of Jesus and the apostles. In the New Testament Book of Acts we learn of Barnabas and others who sold land and gave the proceeds to the apostles for the ministry of the church. There are countless others through the centuries who regardless of how much or how little they had, have provided prayers, encouragement, service, hospitality, food, lodging, and other resources so the message about God's love in Christ could transform lives. All these people trusted God, lived generously, and used money, time, position, and influence wisely and for the glory of God and the good of others and by doing so they grew closer to God.

A great preacher (J. H. Jowett) once said. ***"The real measure of our wealth is how much we'd be worth if we lost all our money."*** The real measure of wealth is not how much you have, but how generously you live.

Questions for Discussion or Reflection

1. Do you have any favorite proverbs either from the Book of Proverbs or from life in general? What is it and why is it meaningful for you?
2. According to Proverbs, the wise person seeks knowledge, wisdom, truth, and insight and applies what they to life's situations. The wise are known for their love for God, self-control, well-chosen words and deeds, and their generous concern for and service to others. Which of these is a strength for you? Which of these qualities would you like to become wiser and more proficient at?
3. Is there someone you know or admire for her or his wise living? What is it that makes you think she or he is wise?
4. What do you think makes a person wealthy? How might a Christian's definition of being wealthy be different from a person without faith?
5. In Proverbs, as in the Bible as a whole, the real measure of wealth is not how much one has materially, but in our identity as a child of God and in living generously and sharing what we have with those in need. What steps can you take to live more generously with your time, spiritual gifts, and resources to honor God and bless others?
6. Read 1 Timothy 6.6-10 and discuss or reflect on those verses. Do you think Paul is right? If he is, what are the implications for your life?
7. Discuss or reflect on this statement by the great preacher J. H. Jowett, *"The real measure of our wealth is how much we'd be worth if we lost all our money."* What do you think he means?