

<b>Series:</b> The Book of Proverbs	<b>Reference:</b> Various Proverbs	<b>Title:</b> First-Fruits	<b>Date:</b> 01.15.23
<b>Website Writeup:</b> God is the Creator & Source of all we have & as Christians we honor Him with our “first-fruits” and by using our money in generous ways & avenues of service.			

## Color Changes in text indicate slide changes

### TITLE SLIDE UP FIRST

When we look at the percentages of the worlds wealth in dollars by country, the United States is by far the leader at 31.5%. Coming in 2<sup>nd</sup> is China at 18%. Then we drop to single digit numbers, with Japan at 5.5%. All of North America is at 34%. All of Europe, with a population 200 million larger than North America is at 23%. Asia-Pacific as a whole is at 18%. Latin America, 2.7%. Africa, 1.3%. And so on....

If we measure by the Gross domestic product (GDP), the total market value of all the finished goods & services produced within a country, the United States is at 24%, China at 15%, and Japan at 6%. Clearly we are wealthier by far.

This overwhelming wealth produced the ‘Me’ decade of the 90’s. At that time a bumper sticker emerged which read, “He who dies with the most toys wins.” Then another bumper sticker popped up as a counter to that which read, “He who dies with the most toys still dies.”

I’m sure you saw, we had a brush with the possibility of a quick death when Damar Hamlin, safety for the Buffalo Bills, collapsed on the field Monday night from cardiac arrest at only 25 years old. He’s in recovery, but it did remind us all of how precious life is, and how quickly it might be taken from us. A strong fit young man, who has it all, living the dream of many American males, collapses in an instant - in that moment, no one knew if he’d recover.

It doesn’t matter how much or how little money you make, or how great your life is - eventually, we all die. And when you’re gone, so’s the money you spent your life trying to obtain. Many verses in Proverbs deal with money.

One of which is Proverbs 16:16...*How much better to get wisdom than gold, to get insight rather than silver!* So...here’s the question, what’s your life goal? Better to get wisdom than gold...would you agree?

If Jesus appeared before you with a billion dollar lottery ticket in one hand, and all the wisdom of God in the other, which would you choose? Many would grab the lottery ticket, walk away & never look back. Obviously, Jesus isn’t going to present that choice. But wisdom dictates wealth & poverty bring unique challenges & temptations.

Can you be wealthy & still have wisdom? Of course, Solomon & David did, as well as many others. It's just a matter of what you desire more. What captures you, to what your heart's drawn. But in this world of constant temptation & deception, we need reminders. And Proverbs 11:4 reminds us, saying... *Wealth is worthless in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivers from death.* You can't buy yourself out of that scenario.

In Survivor the contestants are put on a remote island & given only rice to eat. If they want something else they have to forage or fish for it. The game lasts 39 days, so people are hungry. Sometimes, Jeff, the host, gives them \$500 each & holds an auction largely consisting of food. For those starving contestants, it's overwhelming. They get so excited trying to outbid each other for a steak & a beer, or fried chicken & iced tea, or some other yummy dish. But..they know Jeff will usually auction off a clue to a hidden immunity idol, something they can use at the next tribal council when they might otherwise be voted off by the other contestants.

In season 28, Tony's starving. At the auction everyone's bidding like crazy on food, but he just sits quietly. Everyone's saying, "Tony, what's wrong!? Get in on this!" But, he'd already told us in a sidebar interview he doesn't care about the short term benefit of a meal, he's going to hold out for the clue. He's looking to the end of the game. That the clue's worth more than the immediate gratification of satisfying his hunger... Due to his willingness to make such difficult decisions, Tony won the game & million dollars.

The wise know, he who dies with the most toys still dies & faces judgment. Immediate gratification isn't worth eternity. This life's only a small glimpse of eternity; a drop in an infinite ocean. To just pursue wealth in the temporary, is to sacrifice eternal joy & everlasting peace. Wealth rots, burns up, disintegrates, rusts, is spent, or taken from you.

The ancient Egyptians would bury pharaohs with treasures in the belief they could enjoy them in the afterlife. But all those things have been pilfered by grave robbers & archeologists over the years - the truth is when you're dead, none of that's of any use.

You've all bought a new car that looks so good. You're so proud of that car the day you bring it home. But as the miles add up, wear & tear, scratches & dents accumulate, money's spent on maintenance, that precious car, once your pride & joy, loses its luster, and will just be replaced with the next thing.

My kids are better than me with money, thank God! My son, Aidan, for example, buys the absolute cheapest car possible, refuses to put money into it, and then either runs it into the ground & sells it for scrap, or miraculously sells the thing for what he paid! He's ever paid more than \$500 for a car!

Wisdom doesn't trust in wealth which comes & goes, and is useless at death. It knows only righteousness takes us beyond the grave. **The pursuit of justification (salvation) & sanctification (transformation) in Christ is the only route to attain the righteousness which brings everlasting life. Wisdom looks to the end game, knowing righteousness**

can't be obtained in any other way than through Jesus. His righteousness covers us & now when God the Father looks upon us - He sees the perfect righteous record of Jesus which conquers sin & death in us.

Proverbs reveals, being wise with our money means we value hard work as seen in Proverbs 6:6-8...*Go to the ant, you sluggard; consider its ways & be wise! <sup>7</sup>It has no commander, no overseer or ruler, <sup>8</sup>yet it stores its provisions in summer & gathers its food at harvest.*

The wise don't have to be cajoled into work, they enjoy productive activity. We're created in the image of God. Part of being made in His image means we are, in turn, creators, workers, makers. And whether we're recreating the same thing over & over on an assembly line, creating a fresh lawn by mowing, or creating solutions in an IT environment, when we work, we reflect the divine nature of Christ into the world. There's great dignity in work, whatever it work may be. The wisdom in Proverbs teaches, it's better to be wise than rich, and it's important to work for money received.

Proverbs also teaches the blessings we receive, in whatever form, aren't meant to be hoarded away for our own private enjoyment as Proverbs 11:24-25 says...*One person gives freely, yet gains even more; another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty. <sup>25</sup>A generous person will prosper; whoever refreshes others will be refreshed.*

I remember walking into the humble homes of Indonesians, sitting on a mat covering a dirt or cement floor. The wife would magically appear with finger foods, coffee & tea - only the best for her guests. I knew they didn't have much, but they were rich in relationships. I quickly learned it was customary to bring something to contribute when you visited to replenish what you've eaten. As I grew familiar with a certain village I also noticed that those who freely shared with others, showing care in generosity, had that reciprocated from others to a great degree - at harvest time they had help, and people spoke highly of them. When one passed, the village emerged to take on all the financial & logistical burdens for their family.

When we show we're generous with what God's provided, we're witness to the truth of the words in Proverbs 11. Parents often have to deal with children who won't share. The result is sibling rivalry & parents tired of constantly scolding. But when children share their toys, then they show a healthy relationship with others & with their possessions, then peace is found in the house!

Our ability to share our money is a measure of godly wisdom accumulated. We find the wisdom found in Scripture to be practical & have profound applications to relationships! People actually get along better when they don't hoard, when they're generous & have a sharing attitude.

One way we can think about our money relates to how we treat workers & how we hold companies accountable in their treatment. Instead of greed, we should uphold human

**dignity.** Abigail Disney is the great-niece of Walt Disney. Her grandfather was Roy Disney, older brother to Walt & cofounder of the Company.

In a TED talk she speaks about principles her grandfather taught her. About his warning when she went to Disneyland as a kid. She was not to sass employees just because she was his granddaughter. He said, “These people work really hard, harder than you can imagine, they deserve your respect.” She also remembers his willingness to pick up litter, always adding, “No one’s too good to pick up a piece of garbage.” Within the same ethos was a company which paid a decent wage, enabling workers to provide for their families, own a home, have healthcare & retire with security.

Rather than hoarding wealth, at that time the company treated workers ethically, something Abigail argues has now changed. She says, “There’s so much to learn from the simple integrity of how my grandfather saw his job as CEO. Behind every theme park & every stuffed animal, a handful of principles governed everything: Every single person deserves respect & dignity. No one’s too good to pick up a piece of garbage.”<sup>1</sup>

However, the system’s changed. My father worked for J&J for 40 years working from the bottom to being CFO of the consumer companies. He was loyal to that company & they to him. He worked hard, they worked hard for him as well.

Many companies now put transaction above interaction, partly because checks & balances have changed, and partly because the workforce has changed - everyone’s culpable, employee & employer alike, not any one person, CEO or Dishwasher, is either totally guilty, or totally innocent. Many now treat others with a disregard to their humanity. But Christians can make a difference with a healthy witness in the workplace displayed in our attitudes & actions towards others.

We can’t take our money with us, but we can leave a legacy of respect & care for others. Like Roy Disney, we can own our moral obligation to others with whom we work. We can value interaction over transaction, person over profit.

A wise approach to money recognizes how important it is to put God first in our sharing. Proverbs 3:9 states...*Honor the Lord with your wealth, with the first-fruits of all your crops.*

We honor Him first, not last, with what we’ve been given by Him! The result impacts the kingdom echoing into eternity. ‘First-fruits’ is a biblical term referring to the first yield of a crop. We don’t live in an agrarian society, yet it still applies. God deserves the first-fruits of our income. Sacrificing something given by God; to Him first, not last, or as an afterthought, or even begrudgingly.

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<sup>1</sup> “Abigail Disney: How Can Corporations Treat Their Lowest Paid Employees Better?,” *TED Radio Hour*, December 11, 2020, <https://www.npr.org/2020/12/11/945105389/abigail-disney-how-can-corporations-treat-their-lowest-paid-employees-better>

For some, this means giving God a tithe of ten, or some other percent, off the top of their income. For others, that might mean starting with a smaller percentage then growing it over time. The point isn't legalism, but a reminder of where our money & possessions come from & putting God first as we grow in giving.

Outside of these proverbs, the New Testament speaks on the issue more than any other identifying its importance. Matthew 6 is a great reminder to us of how we should regard money in relation to God & others. It speaks of our care for the needy, of not drawing attention to ourselves in our giving, or in public prayer. We could spend a day talking through that chapter. **But vv19-24 have a poignant message from Jesus in regards to where we find our treasure...***“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths & vermin destroy, and where thieves break in & steal. <sup>20</sup>But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths & vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in & steal.”*

Think about that precious car, home, or that wonderful Christmas present you got. Think about how much you desire certain things. Where's your desire placed, in pursuit of Christ's righteousness & wisdom, or in things which are subject to disintegration. Wisdom dictates the former is the only choice worth making - the end game....why? Well, Jesus tells us in v21...<sup>21</sup>*“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”*

Is your heart in disintegration or reintegration. Devolving away from wisdom & righteousness, or being integrated into the character of Christ through wise giving & the pursuit of Him?...

Jesus continues in v22...<sup>22</sup>*“The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light. <sup>23</sup>But if your eyes are unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!”*

He's speaking of where you place your gaze, what captures your eye. Are we looking at life in a healthy way, desirous of the things which bring life, valuing others as Christ does? Do we look at people as transactions instead of valuing the interactions with them? Are your eyes focused on the earth, or on heaven & its eternal nature?

There's a reason we're admonished to look up over & over in Scripture, its because the things which capture your eyes down here capture your heart. But when our gaze is on Jesus, the author & perfecter of faith, we gain the right focus on the world below our feet. Because, Jesus finishes this section in v24...*“No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one & love the other, or you will be devoted to the one & despise the other. You cannot serve both God & money.”*

The love of money is truly the root of all kinds of evil. The Gospel never leaves us room to split our affinities. It's all or nothing with Jesus. Love, character, righteousness, faith & wisdom can't walk hand-in-hand with the sin of greed; it's the fly in the ointment.

I had a friend. He & his wife made a good salary. Never bought expensive cars. Only did house repairs when absolutely necessary. The township even forced them to do some due to a safety hazard. They had plenty of money. But every time we went out, he'd conveniently leave his wallet at home, and wouldn't tell you until the check came. If he needed the money, I'd have gladly given it, but he didn't. As a result people disliked him. No one helped him. His friendships dwindled over the years. Sad. Don't be that guy!

Wisdom calls out in the streets, to anyone willing to hear, "Make Christ's righteousness your life's goal! Value godly wisdom above worldly wealth! Generosity benefits you! Refresh others! Have a healthy attitude towards money, give God the first-fruits of your labor! Don't try to serve two masters! Look up to Jesus, not down at the ground!"

Do something this week. Take a new step. Give something to someone who needs it. Pay for someone's groceries in the checkout line. Drop a check in the mail, just because. Pay someone's dinner bill at the next table. Prayerfully evaluate your tithing, ask God what percentage you should be at, then stretch yourself & do it. Be a blessing. Don't just take. Give back. Be generous!