

Two weeks ago we examined the teaching in Proverbs regarding *categories* of “The Fool” contrasted with “The Wise.” This led us to consider James 5:1-6 about *the category* “You Rich” (or “The Rich”). Now let us consider again what Proverbs says about “The Poor” which elicits missing essential character qualities, and their consequences, often contrasted with “The Diligent.” (all Scripture from NKJV)

ok-nayros, G3636

Proverbs

6:6

Go to the ant, you **sluggard!**
Consider her ways and be wise,

6:9

How long will you slumber,
O sluggard?
When will you rise
from your sleep?

6:10

A little sleep,
a little slumber,
A little folding of the hands
to sleep—

6:11

So shall your poverty
come on you like a prowler,
And your need like an armed man.

10:4 **He who has a slack hand**

becomes poor,
But the hand of **the diligent**
makes rich.

10:26 As vinegar to the teeth
and smoke to the eyes,
So is **the lazy man**
to those who send

12:24

The hand of **the diligent** will rule,
But **the lazy man** will be
put to forced labor.

12:27

The lazy man does not roast
what he took in hunting,
But **diligence** is man's
precious possession.

13:4

The soul of **a lazy man** desires,
and has nothing;
But the soul of **the diligent**
shall be made rich.

15:19

The way of **the lazy man**
is like a hedge of thorns,
But the way of **the upright**
is a highway.

18:9

He who is slothful in his work
Is a brother
to him who is **a great destroyer**.

19:24 and 26:15

A lazy man buries his hand
in the bowl, And will not so much
as bring it to his mouth again.

20:4

The lazy man will not plow
because of winter;
He will beg during harvest
and have nothing.

21:17

He who loves pleasure
will be a poor man;
He who loves wine and oil
will not be rich.

ok-nayros, G3636

21:25

The desire of **the lazy man**
kills him,
For his hands refuse to labor.

22:13 and similarly 26:13

The lazy man says,
“There is a lion outside!
I shall be slain in the streets!”

22:29

Do you see **a man who**
excels in his work?
He will stand before kings;
He will not stand before unknown
men.

24:27

Prepare your outside work,
Make it fit for yourself in the field;
And afterward build your house

24:30

I went by the field
of **the lazy man**,
And by the vineyard
of **the man devoid**
of understanding;

24:31 And there it was,
all overgrown with thorns;
Its surface was covered
with nettles;

Its stone wall
was broken down.

24:32 When I saw it,
I considered it well;

I looked on it
and received instruction:

24:33 A little sleep,
a little slumber,
A little folding of the hands
to rest;

24:34 So shall your poverty come
like a prowler,
And your need
like an armed man.

26:14

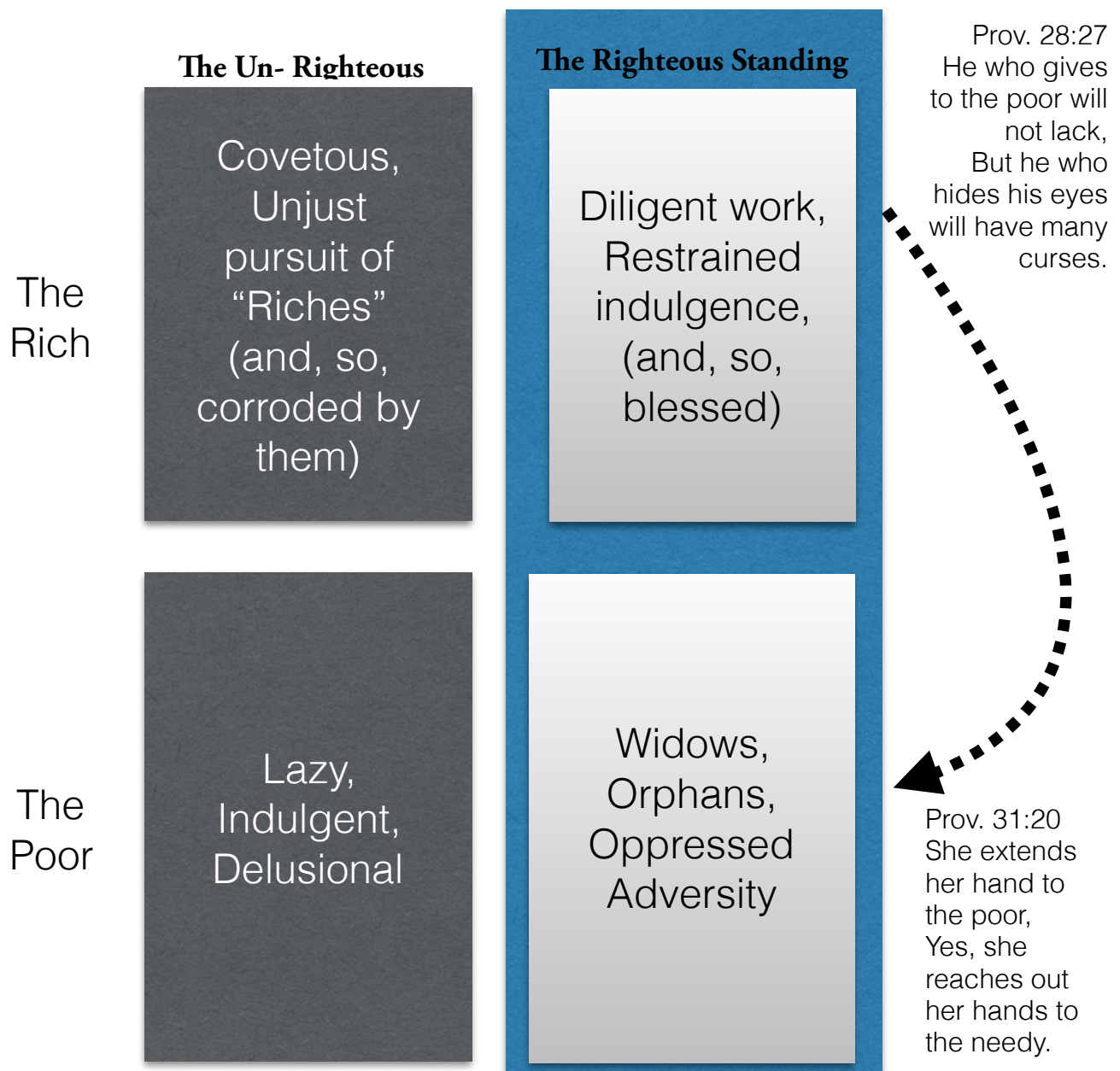
As a door turns on its hinges,
So does **the lazy man** on his bed.

26:16

The lazy man is
wiser in his own eyes
Than seven men
who can answer sensibly.

QUESTION FOR DISCUSSION Consider the Pharisees / Sadducees / Elders / Scribes at the time of the NT. What “**category mistake**” did they make regarding:

1. **The Poor**
2. **The Rich**
3. The blind / deaf / crippled
4. Galileans in general
5. Jesus Himself
6. The Apostles in the Book of Acts



Are such OT passages somehow irrelevant to us who live under the Covenant of Grace in the NT? Consider Matthew 25 and **the Parable of the Talents**, taught by Jesus at the very close of His public ministry, teaching the distinction between “Good” (*agathos*) & “faithful” contrasted with the “Wicked” (*po-nayros*) & “worthless” (*ok-nayros*):

Matt 25:14 “For the kingdom of heaven is like a man traveling to a far country, who called his own servants and delivered his goods to them. 15 And **to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own ability**; and immediately he went on a journey. 16 Then he who had received the five talents went and **traded** [lit., “worked,” *ergazomai*, G2038] with them, and made [i.e., “gained,” G2770] another five talents. 17 And likewise he who had received two gained two more also. 18 But he who had received one went and dug in the ground, and hid his lord’s money. 19 After a long time the lord of those servants came and settled accounts with them.

- 20 “So he who had received **five talents** came and brought **five other** talents, saying, ‘Lord, you delivered to me **five talents**; look, I have **gained five more talents** besides them.’ 21 His lord said to him, ‘**Well done** [G2095], **good** [*agathos*, G18] and **faithful** [G4103] **servant** [*doulos*, G1401]; you were **faithful** over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.’
- 22 He also who had received **two talents** came and said, ‘Lord, you delivered to me **two talents**; look, I have **gained two more talents** besides them.’ 23 His lord said to him, ‘**Well done** [G2095], **good** [*agathos*, G18] and **faithful** [G4103] **servant** [*doulos*, G1401]; you have been **faithful** over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.’
- 24 “Then he who had received the **one talent** came and said, ‘Lord, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed.

25 And I was afraid, and went and hid **your talent** in the ground. Look, there you have what is yours.’ 26 “But his lord answered and said to him, ‘You **wicked** [*po-nayros*, G4190] and **lazy** [*ok-nayros*, G3636] **servant** [*doulos*, G1401], you knew that I reap where I have not sown, and gather where I have not scattered seed. 27 So you ought to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I would have received back my own with interest. 28 Therefore take the talent from him, and give it to him who has ten talents.

29 ‘For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away. 30 And cast the **unprofitable servant** into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

The teaching in Parables is rich with meaning, but what we finally understand the teaching should be tested by other Scripture. Consider:

1 Thes 4:9-12

[context of “busybodies”—2 Thes 3:11 and, also 1 Tim 5:13—and those seeking to eat but unwilling to work, 2 Thes 3:10, 12]

⁹ But concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another; ¹⁰ and indeed you do so toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brethren, that you increase more and more; ¹¹

► **that** you also aspire

- **to lead** a quiet life,
- **to mind** [*prasso*, G4238] your own business, and
- **to work** [*ergozomai* (verb form of *ergon*), G2038] with your own hands,

as we commanded you, ¹²

► **that** you may walk properly toward those who are outside, and

► **that** you may lack nothing.

and 2 Thes 3

6 But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us. 7 For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you; 8 nor did we eat anyone's bread free of charge, but **worked** [*ergozomai* (verb form of *ergon*), G2038] with **labor** [G2873] and **toil** [G344] night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, 9 not because we do not have authority, but to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us. 10 For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not **work** [*ergozomai* (verb form of *ergon*), G2038], neither shall he eat. 11 For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, **not working** [*ergozomai* (verb form of *ergon*), G2038] at all, but are **busybodies** [*peri-ergon*, G4020]. 12 Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they **work** [*ergozomai* (verb form of *ergon*), G2038] in quietness and eat their own bread.

As further Biblical confirmation, let's look for biographical examples. First, Paul himself, here adding the element of working to express the love of giving (generosity):

Acts 20 [Paul leaving Ephesus for the final time]

23 ... that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me. 24 But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, **so that I may finish my race with joy**, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God. ...33 I have coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. 34 Yes, you yourselves know that **these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me**. 35 I have shown you in every way, **by laboring** [from G2873] **like this**, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

Next, Timothy, in Paul's final words:

2 Tim 4:5 [context is the contrast of Timothy's calling compared with those many teachers who do not proclaim "sound doctrine" because they please those with "itching ears"]. Four imperative commands:

4:5 But you

1. **be watchful** in all things,
2. **endure** afflictions,
3. **do** [G4160] **the work** [*ergon*, G2041]
of an evangelist,
4. **fulfill** [i.e., complete / finish]
your ministry.

Finally, Aquila & Priscilla (Prisca):

Acts 18 [in Corinth]

1 After these things Paul departed from Athens and went to Corinth.² And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla (because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome); and he came to them. ³ So, because **he was of the same-trade** [*homo-technos*, G3673 (*homou* G3674 + *techno* G5078)], he **stayed with them and worked** [*ergozomai* (verb form of *ergon*), G2038]; for **by occupation** [*technē*, G5078] **they were tentmakers** [*skēnāyn* “tent” G4633 + “doer” *poieōo* G4160].

Acts 18 [sailing from Corinth to Ephesus]

18 So Paul still remained a good while. Then he took leave of the brethren and sailed for Syria, and Priscilla and Aquila were with him....[in Ephesus]
26 So he [Apollos] began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Aquila and Priscilla heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately.

Romans 16:3 [in Rome]

Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers [*sun-ergos*, G4904] in Christ Jesus, ⁴ who risked their own necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles. ⁵ Likewise greet the church*¹ that is in their house*.

1 Corinthians 16:19 [in Corinth]

The churches of Asia greet you. Aquila and Priscilla greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church*that is in their house*.

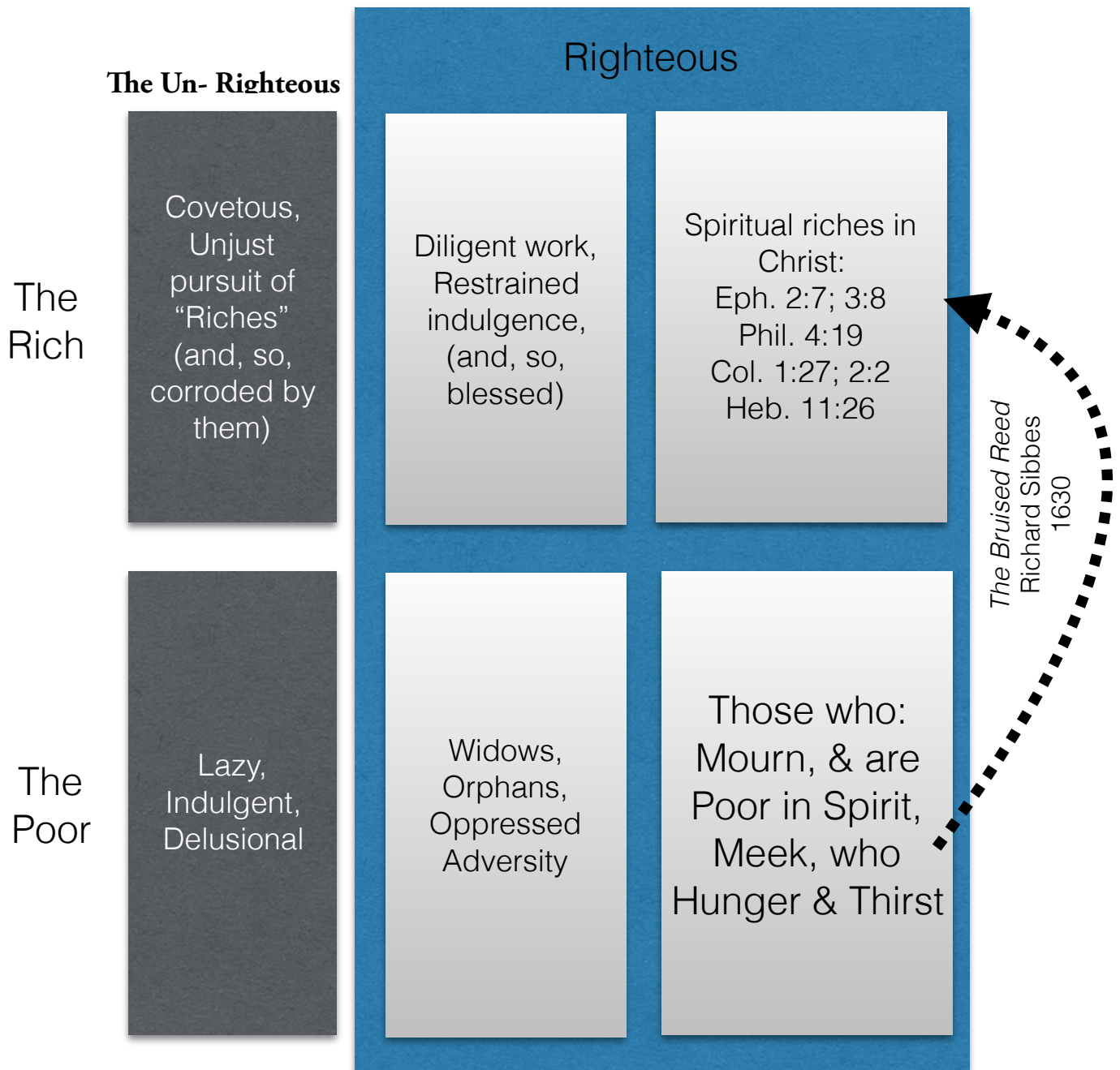
2 Timothy 4:19 [in Ephesus]

Greet Prisca and Aquila, and the household* of Onesiphorus.

¹ We automatically think the gloss “church” means a dedicated building in which people who call themselves “Christian” meet. Of such, there are more than 300,000, perhaps as many as 400,000, in the U.S. alone, more more than there are fast food restaurants (235,000). However, there were no such “churches” in the New Testament period; the first such “church” was probably early in the 4th Century A.D.

Here we need to make essential *category* distinctions:

- Diligence / work / doing from motives of faithfulness, love
- Spiritual riches / prosperity
- God’s purposes and use of our Spiritual poverty (and perhaps material poverty as well)



Glossary of Key Words

| Strong's # | Greek Word | Translation | Citations | | | |
|--------------------------------|----------------------|------------------------|-----------------|--|----------------------|-----------|
| G18 | agathos | a supreme good | Matt. 25:21, 23 | | | |
| G3636 | ok-nayros | lazy, sluggard | Matt. 25:26 | Prov. 6:6, 9; 20:4; 21:25; 22:13; 26:14, 15, 16 | | |
| G4190 | po-nayros | evil, wicked | Matt. 25:26 | | | |
| G4238 | prasso | to do, accomplish | 1 Thes. 4:11 | | | |
| G2038 | ergozomai (ergon) | work | 1 Thes. 4:11 | 2 Thes. 3:7, 10-12 | 2 Tim 4:5 (G2041) | Acts 18:3 |
| G2873 | | labor, struggle | | 2 Thes. 3:8 | Acts 20:35 | |
| G344 | | toil to exhaustion | | 2 Thes. 3:8 | | |
| G4020 | peri-ergon | busybodies | | 2 Thes. 3:11 | | |
| G5078 | techne | trade, occupation | | | | Acts 18:3 |
| G3892 | para-nomia | lazy man, 'spinner' | | Prov. 10:26 | | |
| negative prefix to G2041 | a-ergon (G2041) | <u>not</u> work | | Prov. 13:4; 15:19 At Prov. 18:9 he does 'work' (G2041) but as a destroyer! | | |

G3636 *ok-nayros*: the word is always a pejorative in the Bible, having the root idea of slow, slothful, excessively hesitant, prone to delay, etc., whether through sloth, negligence, fear, or simply from facing inconveniences. For whatever reason, an *ok-nayros* is someone who does not have the resolve to acts, and so when given a responsibility is irresponsible. Though they are with our excuse, the *ok-nayros* have their excuses. The result of a life expressed by the character of an *ok-nayros* is an utter poverty of both material and Spiritual being. (However, *ok-nayros* is not the only cause of either material or Spiritual poverty, so such outcome does not conclusively demonstrate such cause).

Prosperity Preaching: Deceitful and Deadly

by John Piper

When I read about prosperity-preaching churches, my response is: "If I were not on the inside of Christianity, I wouldn't want in." In other words, if this is the message of Jesus, no thank you. Luring people to Christ to get rich is both deceitful and deadly. It's deceitful because when Jesus himself called us, he said things like: "Any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:33). And it's deadly because the desire to be rich plunges "people into ruin and destruction" (1 Timothy 6:9).

So here is my plea to preachers of the gospel.

1. Don't develop a philosophy of ministry that makes it harder for people to get into heaven. Jesus said, "How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!" His disciples were astonished, as many in the "prosperity" movement should be. So Jesus went on to raise their astonishment even higher by saying, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God." They respond in disbelief: "Then who can be saved?" Jesus says, "With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God" (Mark 10:23-27). My question for prosperity preachers is: Why would you want to develop a ministry focus that makes it harder for people to enter heaven?

2. Do not develop a philosophy of ministry that kindles suicidal desires in people. Paul said, "There is great gain in godliness with contentment, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content." But then he warned against the desire to be rich. And by implication, he warned against preachers who stir up the desire to be rich instead of helping people get rid of it. He warned, "Those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs" (1 Timothy 6:6-10). So my question for prosperity preachers is: Why would you want to develop a ministry that encourages people to pierce themselves with many pangs and plunge themselves into ruin and destruction?

3. Do not develop a philosophy of ministry that encourages vulnerability to moth and rust.

Jesus warns against the effort to lay up treasures on earth. That is, he tells us to be givers, not keepers. "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and

steal" (Matthew 6:19). Yes, we all keep something. But given the built-in tendency toward greed in all of us, why would we take the focus off Jesus and turn it upside down?

4. Don't develop a philosophy of ministry that makes hard work a means of amassing wealth. Paul said we should not steal. The alternative was hard work with our own hands. But the main purpose was not merely to hoard or even to have. The purpose was "to have to give." "Let him labor, working with his hands, that he may have to give to him who is in need" (Ephesians 4:28). This is not a justification for being rich in order to give more. It is a call to make more and keep less so you can give more. There is no reason why a person who makes \$200,000 should live any differently from the way a person who makes \$80,000 lives. Find a wartime lifestyle; cap your expenditures; then give the rest away. Why would you want to encourage people to think that they should possess wealth in order to be a lavish giver? Why not encourage them to keep their lives more simple and be an even more lavish giver? Would that not add to their generosity a strong testimony that Christ, and not possessions, is their treasure?

5. Don't develop a philosophy of ministry that promotes less faith in the promises of God to be for us what money can't be. The reason the writer to the Hebrews tells us to be content with what we have is that the opposite implies less faith in the promises of God. He says, "Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.' So we can confidently say, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?'" (Hebrews 13:5-6). If the Bible tells us that being content with what we have honors the promise of God never to forsake us, why would we want to teach people to want to be rich?

6. Don't develop a philosophy of ministry that contributes to your people being choked to death. Jesus warns that the word of God, which is meant to give us life, can be choked off from any effectiveness by riches. He says it is like a seed that grows up among thorns that choke it to death: "They are those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by the . . . riches . . . of life, and their fruit does not mature" (Luke 8:14). Why would we want to encourage people to pursue the very thing that Jesus warns will choke us to death?

7. Don't develop a philosophy of ministry that takes the seasoning out of the salt and puts the light under a basket. What is it about Christians that makes them the salt of the earth and the light of the world? It is not wealth. The desire for wealth and the pursuit of wealth tastes and looks just like the world. It does not offer the world anything different from what it already believes in. The great tragedy of prosperity-

preaching is that a person does not have to be spiritually awakened in order to embrace it; one needs only to be greedy. Getting rich in the name of Jesus is not the salt of the earth or the light of the world. In this, the world simply sees a reflection of itself. And if it works, they will buy it. The context of Jesus' saying shows us what the salt and light are. They are the joyful willingness to suffering for Christ. Here is what Jesus said, "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. You are the salt of the earth. . . . You are the light of the world" (Matthew 5:11-14).

What will make the world taste (the salt) and see (the light) of Christ in us is not that we love wealth the same way they do. Rather, it will be the willingness and the ability of Christians to love others through suffering, all the while rejoicing because their reward is in heaven with Jesus. This is inexplicable on human terms. This is supernatural. But to attract people with promises of prosperity is simply natural. It is not the message of Jesus. It is not what he died to achieve.

Pastor John

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John Piper has written an important book—*Don't Waste Your Life*—one he makes freely available as a pdf (though you can also buy a copy), that considers the essential question of any Christian: should I dedicate my life to exalting God, or is it ok, even a good thing, to pursue my own satisfaction? In other words, how do I reasonably balance two pursuits that appear to be mutually exclusive: namely exalting God versus following my 'heart?' It appears to be a choice between the 'prosperity' of God (in terms of my praise of Him) versus my prosperity / riches in this life.

Piper answers this question, as he answered it for his own life as a young man: there is no conflict; the pursuit of God leads to the deepest satisfactions / riches of life.

On the footnoted website, I've included a link to where you can download the pdf of his book.

How to See Productivity from a Biblical Perspective

Hugh Whelchel

Productivity sometimes seems like a bad thing, or at least a purposeless one. We work and produce more, more more, but to what end? Is there a purpose to all our productivity? From a biblical perspective, there is. So how can Christians see productivity from a biblical perspective? First, by recognizing that productivity isn't morally neutral – in fact, it's just the opposite. Second, by seeing the bigger picture of productivity within God's plan for creation.

See Productivity as a Moral Good

In his *Doing Business and Pleasing God* seminar, theologian Wayne Grudem states the following:

“Increasing the production of goods and services is not morally evil – and it's not morally neutral – rather, it's fundamentally good and pleasing to God. It's part of his purpose in putting human beings on the Earth. When we create something, productivity creates value in the world that didn't exist before. Therefore, productivity imitates God in his creativity...God's wisdom led him to create us with a need and a desire for material things.”

Grudem is right. We were made by God to produce quality goods and services as a product of our work. When we are productive in obedience to the calling that God has given us, our work becomes a rightful source of personal fulfillment and dignity.

See Productivity as a Gospel-Driven Good

In addition to viewing productivity from a moral perspective, we need to see it from a biblical perspective. Matt Perman [formerly associated with John Piper, author of *Don't Waste Your Life*] set out to do just that in his book *What's Best Next*. In the book, Perman lays out a solid, biblical reason for why we should be getting things done by exploring the bigger picture of productivity in God's plan. This idea of gospel-driven productivity calls us to:

“Use all that we have, in all areas of life, for the good of others, to the glory of God...to be on the lookout to do good for others to the glory of God, in all areas of life, and to do this with creativity and competence.”

How does this new view of productivity translate into practical results? Perman writes that gospel-driven productivity

“Also means actually knowing how to get things done, so that we can serve others in a way that really helps, in all areas of life, without making ourselves miserable in the process through overload, overwhelm, and hard-to-keep up productivity systems.”

This new perspective makes it clear that we as Christians are called “to put productivity practices and tools in the service of God's purposes.” From a biblical perspective, productivity isn't just about getting more things done; it's about getting the right things done.

Hugh Whelchel is Executive Director of the Institute for Faith, Work & Economics and author of *How Then Should We Work?: Rediscovering the Biblical Doctrine of Work*.

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