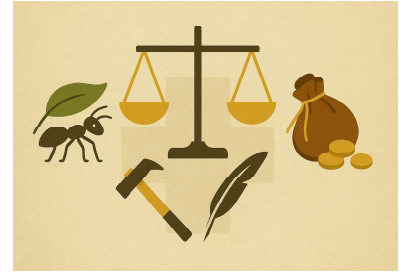


# Lesson 7: Work, Wealth, and Wisdom in the World



Work fills the majority of our waking lives. We rise to earn, to build, to solve, to serve. Some work with their hands, others with their words or minds. Men work to *provide* for their families; women work to *serve* their families and raise their children. But all are laborers in some field. And whether rich or poor, content or discontent, our hearts are shaped by how we understand work, wealth, and the world in which both unfold. Proverbs speaks into this daily drama with divine clarity.

Our age treats work as self-expression or a necessary evil, and wealth as either liberation or oppression. But Scripture offers a different perspective: the path of wisdom, which *neither* romanticizes *nor* rejects these things, but orders them under the fear of the LORD. Proverbs trains us to see both perseverance and philanthropy, poverty and prosperity, not as ends in themselves but as circumstances in which the wise glorify God.

This lesson explores how Proverbs forms a theology of work and wealth that is morally grounded, socially conscious, and eschatologically aware. But above all, we will see how all these threads converge in Christ, *“who though He was rich, yet for your sake became poor”* (2 Corinthians 8:9), and in whom are both true wisdom and true wealth.

## The Nature and Value of Work

*“Go to the ant, O sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise.”* (Proverbs 6:6, ESV)

Work is not a punishment, a necessary evil, or the result of sin. God ordained it in Eden placing Adam in the garden *“to work it and keep it.”* (Genesis 2:15) This was a priestly vocation to cultivate beauty, bring order, and reflect God’s own creative purpose in the garden-temple He made. Sin did not invent labor. *Work* is from creation; *toil* is from the Fall. (Genesis 3:17-19) Work itself *was* and *is* good.

Proverbs reflects this by exalting diligence and exposing sloth. *“The soul of the sluggard craves and gets nothing, while the soul of the diligent is richly supplied.”* (Proverbs 13:4) Diligence is wisdom in motion. It is foresight, faithfulness, and focused energy directed toward God-given tasks, driven not by greed or anxiety but reverence. *“In all toil there is profit, but mere talk tends only to poverty.”* (Proverbs 14:23) Work participates in the divine pattern of wise ordering, even in a fallen world.

The sluggard is self-deceived, avoiding effort with clever excuses (Proverbs 22:13), resisting correction (Proverbs 26:16), and living in a world of fantasy and entitlement. *“The desire of the sluggard kills him, for his hands refuse to labor.”* (Proverbs 21:25) He wants the *outcome* without the *input*. He reaps poverty, not just *materially* but *morally*.

Yet work is not ultimate. All human labor is bounded by mortality: *“Do not toil to acquire wealth; be discerning enough to desist.”* (Proverbs 23:4) The wise recognize their limits and the providence of God.

In a world that separates the sacred from the secular, Proverbs reunites them under the fear of the LORD. The kitchen, the classroom, the desk, and the changing table are all arenas in which the wise demonstrate that they understand the world God has made and submit to His Law in it.

The New Testament confirms this vision. Paul writes, *“Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men.”* (Colossians 3:23) In Christ, work is redeemed. He sanctified labor by working. And by His work, He made ours meaningful. We labor not to justify ourselves but glorify our Redeemer.

Wisdom asks not “What job will make me successful?” but “How can I fear the LORD in my labor?” Proverbs answers not with a career strategy, but with a call to faithfulness. In every field, the wise work diligently, honestly, and with gratitude, not because work defines them, but because wisdom delights to do the will of God.

# Wealth, Poverty, and the Moral Order

*“Rich and poor meet together; the LORD is the maker of them all.” (Proverbs 22:2)*

Proverbs treats wealth and poverty within a moral order shaped by the fear of the LORD. The key points are righteousness, justice, and steadfast love. Within that frame, money is *neither* ultimate *nor* trivial. It is moral, because it is handled by image-bearers who either honor or reject God. Wealth and poverty are therefore *not simple verdicts* on character, yet they are never ethically neutral conditions. They are *situations* where wisdom or folly becomes visible.

## Wealth: Gift to Steward, Power to Test

Proverbs can speak of wealth as a blessing: *“The blessing of the LORD makes rich, and he adds no sorrow with it” (Proverbs 10:22); “Honor the LORD with your wealth... then your barns will be filled” (Proverbs 3:9-10)*. Wealth, then, is received, not self-generated; it is to be used for God’s purposes. Hence the wiser question is not “How much may I keep?” but “How may I honor the LORD with what I’ve been given?”

Yet wealth is also a spiritual hazard when treated as security or savior. *“Riches do not profit in the day of wrath” (Proverbs 11:4); “Whoever trusts in his riches will fall” (Proverbs 11:28)*. Proverbs punctures the illusion of permanence: *“Do not toil to acquire wealth... when your eyes light on it, it is gone, for suddenly it sprouts wings” (Proverbs 23:4-5)*. The wise therefore prize *integrity* over *income*: *“Better is a little with the fear of the LORD than great treasure and trouble with it” (Proverbs 15:16); “Better is a little with righteousness than great revenues with injustice” (Proverbs 16:8)*.

## Poverty: Complex Causes, Sacred Persons

Proverbs refuses a simplistic calculus that equates poverty with vice. It does warn that sloth tends toward lack (*Proverbs 6:9-11; 10:4; 20:13*). But it also names injustice and systemic crookedness among the causes of deprivation: *“The fallow ground of the poor would yield much food, but it is swept away through injustice” (Proverbs 13:23)*. God condemns predation upon the vulnerable: *“Do not rob the poor... for the LORD will plead their cause” (Proverbs 22:22-23)*.

Crucially, the poor are not a problem to be solved so much as neighbors to be honored, bearers of the divine image: *“Whoever mocks the poor insults his Maker” (Proverbs 17:5); “Whoever oppresses a poor man insults his Maker, but he who is generous to the needy honors him” (Proverbs 14:31)*. The righteous know the rights of the poor (*Proverbs 29:7*); they do not look away (*Proverbs 21:13; 28:27*).

With wealth and poverty located inside God’s moral order, we now turn to what justice and generosity look like in practice under the fear of the LORD.

# Justice, Generosity, and the Fear of the LORD

*“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom.” (Proverbs 9:10)*

*“To do righteousness and justice is more acceptable to the LORD than sacrifice.” (Proverbs 21:3)*

Proverbs roots social ethics—justice, righteousness, and generous mercy—in a worshipful posture: the fear of the LORD. This fear is not *cringing terror* but *covenantal awe*: a Godward orientation that hates evil (*Proverbs 8:13*), turns from it (*Proverbs 16:6*), and orders life under Yahweh’s rule (*Proverbs 14:26-27; 15:33*). From this fountain flow two visible streams in public and private life: justice (what we owe our neighbor by right) and generosity (the open-handedness fitting those who know God).

## Justice: The Shape of Love in the Public Square

Proverbs presents justice as normed equity in judgments, markets, and governance. *“Unequal weights are an abomination to the LORD.” (Proverbs 11:1; cf. 16:11; 20:10,23)* Fraudulent measures are liturgical offenses, false worship with scales.

The Bible as a whole, and Proverbs specifically, teaches protection of the vulnerable. *“Do not rob the poor... for the LORD will plead their cause.” (Proverbs 22:22-23)* *“A righteous man knows the rights of the poor; a wicked man does not understand such knowledge.” (Proverbs 29:7)* In addition to this, leaders (yes, even secular political ones) are called to a standard of righteousness, which is responsible authority. *“By justice a king builds up the land.” (Proverbs 29:4)* Leaders who monetize power “tear it down”.

## Generosity: The Open Hand of Wisdom

Generosity is not optional charity but wise participation in God’s economy. In the Gospel economy, we cannot out-give God. *“One gives freely, yet grows all the richer... whoever brings blessing will be enriched.” (Proverbs 11:24-25)* This is not merely a math equation or a quid pro quo, so the Prosperity Gospel teaching of “seed money” that will come back as financial gain is an abomination to God. Yet, the Bible is very clear that those who give generously will be rewarded. Not might be rewarded; will be rewarded. Perhaps it will be financial, so he can be yet more generous. Or perhaps it will bring the best reward of all: spiritual growth and righteousness. How do we do this?

- **Prompt action:** *“Do not withhold good... when it is in your power to do it.” (Proverbs 3:27-28).* Wisdom rejects delay as a form of quiet cruelty.
- **Divine loan:** *“Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the LORD.” (Proverbs 19:17).* God pledges Himself as guarantor.
- **Community posture:** *“Whoever closes his ear to the cry of the poor will himself call out and not be answered.” (Proverbs 21:13)* Withholding mercy imperils prayer.

## Christ the Wisdom of God: Fulfillment and Formation

Jesus embodies and intensifies the Proverbial vision:

- **Justice with mercy:** He indicts Pharisees who tithe scrupulously and *“neglect the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness.” (Matthew 23:23)*
- **Cruciform generosity:** He commands secret almsgiving (Matthew 6:1-4) and teaches enemy-love generosity (Proverbs 25:21-22 echoed in Romans 12:20).
- **Community ethic:** The early church shared materially (Acts 2:44-45). Paul frames giving as cheerful sowing unto all sufficiency (2 Corinthians 9:6-11). James defines pure religion as visiting orphans and widows (James 1:27) and rebukes partiality (James 2:1-9).

*Gospel logic: In Christ, we do not give to get or to earn favor; we give because favor has found us. The cross creates justified people who pursue justice, and enriched beggars who practice generosity.*

## Christ and Eternal Wealth

*“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth... but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven... For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” (Matthew 6:19-21)*

Proverbs has schooled us in diligence, honesty, and generosity under the fear of the LORD. Jesus, Who is Wisdom incarnate, brings the curriculum to its climax. In Him, true wealth is revealed, the heart is re-trained, and money is repurposed for eternal ends.

## Christ, the Wisdom of God, and Wealth Re-Valued

Christ is the fulfillment of Lady Wisdom. Again, where Lady Wisdom is idealized wisdom, Christ is incarnated wisdom. *“Christ... the wisdom of God” (1 Corinthians 1:24,30)* and the One *“in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Colossians 2:3)*. Therefore, we read Proverbs typologically, but we don’t confuse Lady Wisdom with Christ, even though there are strong ties between them as type and fulfillment, shadow and substance.

The personified Wisdom of Proverbs 8 is poetic instruction; Christ fulfills its pattern without reducing the poem to a bare christological label. However, since we have subsequent revelation in the New Testament that expands and informs the Old Testament, we understand the horizon provided by

the book of Proverbs and we read it with a Gospel center. Proverbs warns: “*Riches do not profit in the day of wrath.*” (**Proverbs 11:4**) Paul clarifies why: only His righteousness avails in judgment (**Romans 3:21-26**). What Proverbs commends as “*better than gold*” (**Proverbs 8:10-11; 16:16**), the New Testament locates in Christ Himself (**Philippians 3:7-11**).

## *Treasure in Heaven: Union, Reward, and Inheritance*

Our richest possession is Christ Himself (**Galatians 2:20**). God “*has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing*” (**Ephesians 1:3**). We are heirs to “*an inheritance... imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven*” (**1 Peter 1:4**; cf. **Romans 8:17**). Scripture speaks of reward without legalism (**Matthew 6:4; 10:42**). Giving “*lays up treasure... as a good foundation for the future*” (**1 Timothy 6:19**) not as purchase, but as the Father’s pleasure to honor the obedience of His children.

## *Common Distortions (with Correctives)*

### *Prosperity Mechanism*

- **Distortion:** Give to get more now.
- **Corrective:** Reward language is filial, not transactional (**Matthew 6:4; 1 Timothy 6:19**); God often tests faith in scarcity (**Philippians 4:12**).

### *Pious Asceticism*

- **Distortion:** Money is evil; avoid creation goods.
- **Corrective:** Creation is good (**1 Timothy 4:4**); the problem is idolatry (**1 Timothy 6:10**). Enjoy with thanksgiving. Steward with open hands.

### *Quietism*

- **Distortion:** “Treasure in heaven” excuses indifference to earthly needs.
- **Corrective:** Eternal hope intensifies present mercy (**James 2:14-17; Proverbs 14:31; 21:13**).

### *Family-Neglect Piety*

- **Distortion:** Radical giving that abandons basic obligations.
- **Corrective:** Provide for one’s household (**1 Timothy 5:8**) and practice generous justice (**Proverbs 3:27-28**). Wisdom orders both.

## Conclusion

Christ, the Wisdom of God, reorders work and wealth so that they become *arenas of worship* rather than *rivals for our hearts*. In Him we learn that work is not our *savior* but our *service*, labor done “*for the Lord and not for men*” (**Colossians 3:23**), marked by:

- Diligence without greed
- Integrity without manipulation
- A “*bountiful eye*” that looks for ways to bless (**Proverbs 22:9**)

We receive wealth as a gift and trust to steward. We honor the LORD with it (**Proverbs 3:9-10**), provide responsibly, practice honest measures, and move mercy from impulse to habit. The cross sets our valuation: “*though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor*” (**2 Corinthians 8:9**), so we *seek* neither poverty nor riches but rather to honor the Name of our God (**Proverbs 30:7-9**).

The kingdom fixes our horizon: “*riches do not profit in the day of wrath*” (**Proverbs 11:4**). Therefore we lay up true treasure by generous, just, and joyful stewardship (**Matthew 6:19-21; 1 Timothy 6:17-19**).

Living in the fear of the LORD, united to Christ, being heirs of an unfading inheritance, we are free to work hard, give gladly, and spend ourselves for the good of neighbor and the glory of God.

Spiritual wisdom for this world.

Eternal wealth for the world to come.

May we adorn the Gospel of Jesus Christ with our wisdom and obedience.