

Finances and Faith

1. 'Neither Poverty nor Riches' *Christian attitudes towards poverty and wealth*

Aim of the study: To help people reflect on their attitudes towards money in general and, specifically, their own financial position. To help us realise our relative wealth, the dangers of that and how we might bless others, protect ourselves and honour God with the money he has given us.

To start with (10 min max):

As a culture we are renowned for our reluctance to discuss money. Do you think this is true? If so, why do you think this is the case and what do you think are the consequences of this?

Thinking through the issues:

- How much does someone need to earn/have in order to be considered wealthy? The Joseph Rowntree Foundation uses the following definitions to describe those in the UK who are living in poverty:

- * *In arrears on rent/mortgage, utilities and hire purchase payments*
- * *Buy second-hand not new clothes (by necessity not choice)*
- * *Cannot afford meat, chicken or fish every second day*
- * *Cannot afford to keep home adequately warm*
- * *Cannot afford carpets in living areas and cannot replace worn out furniture*
- * *Cannot afford a week's annual holiday away from home*
- * *Cannot afford to have friends/family for a meal once a month*

Based on this scale how would you describe your financial situation?

Biblical poverty refers not to peasant farmers or skilled workers like Jesus or Peter (though by our standards they were poor). It refers to those who had no land or no option to alter their financial circumstances; those who were trapped in or on the edge of destitution. These groups included widows and orphans with no family to care for them and 'aliens' - non-Jews who lived amongst the population but without land, family or community.

- In the light of this, who would you describe as 'poor' today?
 - In your experience how many of the poor do you imagine are part of the Body of Christ in Britain today? Why do you think that is?
- From the following verses what can we deduce about God's concern for the poor and his attitude towards those who do/don't help them?

Proverbs 21.13

Proverbs 22.2

Proverbs 29.7

Amos 2.6-8

(Note for leaders: taking a cloak as payment of a debt was forbidden in Old Testament law as it was often the only warmth a poor person might have during the night.)

Amos 4.1-2

- How do you react personally to this? Why do you think you react like that? How do you think God would have you respond?

In the Old Testament in particular, wealth was often seen as a sign of God's blessing, although how people handled their wealth was part of whether they were righteous - or not. (Compare, for example, Abraham who offers his nephew Lot the best land with Ahab who covets and takes the vineyard of Naboth.) Prosperity doctrines have simplified this idea, distorting it into the 'right' of every Christian to be materially prosperous.



4. Read the following passages and consider how they present wealth and its consequences:

Proverbs 11.28

Proverbs 18.10-11

Matthew 19.16-26

Mark 4.18-19

Luke 12.15-34

In the light of this, as relatively wealthy people, how should we view our affluence and in what ways might we protect ourselves from the dangers of it?

Both the Old and New Testaments present a model of financial 'moderation'.

Read Proverbs 30.8b-9 and Philippians 4.10-14.

5. What might we practically do to develop this sort of attitude towards our material wealth? (or lack of it)