

# Poverty and Prosperity from the New Testament

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## I. What the New Testament has to say about poverty and being poor.

### A. Two Greek words

"hustereo"

It means means "lack, or to come behind, or come late, to be left behind in the race, to fail to reach the goal, to fall short," "to be inferior in power, influence or rank; to suffer want; to lack excellence or worth."

"ptochos."

It means to be "reduced to beggary or asking of alms; to be destitute of wealth, influence, position or honor; to be lowly, afflicted helpless, powerless and needy." It is to be "lacking in anything."

### B. How these words are used in the New Testament

These two words are used around 50 times in the New Testament in various forms. Below is a study of how these words are used.

1. Jesus said to John the Baptist - The Gospel is preached to the poor  
Mat 11:5 ... the POOR HAVE THE GOSPEL PREACHED TO THEM. (Lk 4:18; 7:22)
  2. Conversation of Jesus with the rich young ruler (Mk 10:21; Lk 18:22)  
Mat 19:20-21 The young man said to Him, "All these things I have kept; what am I still lacking?"  
21 Jesus said to him, "If you wish to be complete, go and sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."
  3. Jesus turns the water into wine (Jn 2:1-11).  
v. 3 When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to Him, "They have no wine."
  4. Jesus commends the poor widow's contribution (Lk 21:1-4; Mk 12:41-44)  
Lk 21:1-4 And He looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the treasury. 2 And He saw a poor widow putting in two small copper coins. 3 And He said, "Truly I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all of them; 4 for they all out of their surplus put into the offering; but she out of her poverty put in all that she had to live on."
  5. Jesus instructs to invite the poor when having a party  
Lk 14:13-14 "But when you give a reception, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, 14 and you will be blessed, since they do not have the means to repay you; for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.
  6. Jesus often used the poor and rich to illustrate principles  
Parable of the Dinner Invitation (Lk 14:16-23)  
Lk 14:21 'Go out at once into the streets and lanes of the city and bring in here the poor and crippled and blind and lame.'
- Story of the prodigal son; experienced poverty before returning home (Lk 15:11-32)  
Lk 15:14 "Now when he had spent everything, a severe famine occurred in that country, and he began to be impoverished."
- Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Lk 16:19-31)  
Lk 16:20 ... a poor man named Lazarus; 22 poor man dies

7. The conversion of Zaccheus,( Lk 19:1-10)
  - v. 8 Zaccheus stopped and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, half of my possessions I will give to the poor, and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will give back four times as much."
8. The apostles did not experience poverty when Jesus sent them to preach
 

Lk 22:35 And He said to them, " When I sent you out without money belt and bag and sandals, you did not lack anything, did you?" They said, "No, nothing."
9. Jesus anointed by a woman before His death (Mat 26:6-13; Mk 14:3-9; Jn 12:1-8)
 

Mat 26:9 "For this perfume might have been sold for a high price and the money given to the poor." 10 But Jesus, aware of this, said to them, "Why do you bother the woman? For she has done a good deed to Me. 11 "For you always have the poor with you; but you do not always have Me. 12 "For when she poured this perfume on My body, she did it to prepare Me for burial. 13 "Truly I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be spoken of in memory of her."
10. Judas leaves to betray Jesus (Jn 13:21-30)
 

Jn 13:29 For some were supposing, because had the money box, that Jesus was saying to him, "Buy the things we have need of for the feast"; or else, that he should give something to the poor.
11. Persecution can lead to poverty
 

Heb 11:37 They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated

Rev 2:9-10 church of Smyrna was poor because of persecution.  
 9 'I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich), and the blasphemy by those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.
12. New Testament churches make contribution to the poor saints in Jerusalem.
 

Rom 15:26-27 For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. 27 Yes, they were pleased to do so, and they are indebted to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in their spiritual things, they are indebted to minister to them also in material things.

2 Cor 8:1-4 Now, brethren, we wish to make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia, 2 that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality. 3 For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, they gave of their own accord, 4 begging us with much urging for the favor of participation in the support of the saints,
13. Apostles ask Paul to remember the poor
 

Gal 2:10 They only asked us to remember the poor-- the very thing I also was eager to do.
14. Jesus became poor for us so that through His poverty, you might become rich.
 

2 Cor 8:9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich.
15. God gives abundance to the poor.
 

2 Cor 9:9 as it is written, "HE SCATTERED ABROAD, HE GAVE TO THE POOR, HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS ENDURES FOREVER." (Ps 112:9)
16. The apostle Paul experienced need at times, but wasn't a burden to the churches.
 

2 Cor 11:9 and when I was present with you and was in need, I was not a burden to anyone;

Phil 4:11-13 Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. 12 I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. 13 I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.

17. Result of a Christian work ethic - to provide for your needs and help somebody else.  
1 Thes 4:11-12 make it your ambition to lead a quiet life and attend to your own business and work with your hands, just as we commanded you, 12 so that you will behave properly toward outsiders and not be in any need.
18. The sin of giving preferential treatment to the wealthy (Jas 2:1-6).  
Jas 2:3 and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the fine clothes, and say, "You sit here in a good place," and you say to the poor man, "You stand over there, or sit down by my footstool," 4 have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives? 5 Listen, my beloved brethren: did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? 6 But you have dishonored the poor man. Is it not the rich who oppress you and personally drag you into court?
19. Sin produces spiritual poverty  
Rom 3:23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,
20. Lack of rest produces spiritual poverty  
Heb 4:1 Therefore, let us fear if, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you may seem to have come short of it.
21. Lack of grace produces spiritual poverty  
Heb 12:15 See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled;
22. The Corinthians were rich in spiritual gifts (1 Cor 1:4-8)  
v. 7 so that you are not lacking in any gift,
23. Physical needs can't produce spiritual maturity  
1 Cor 8:8 But food will not commend us to God; we are neither the worse if we do not eat, nor the better if we do eat.
24. There is no (spiritual) poverty in the body of Christ.  
1 Cor 12:24 But God has so composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that member which lacked,
25. The apostle Paul wasn't inferior (poverty) to the other apostles.  
2 Cor 11:5 For I consider myself not in the least inferior to the most eminent apostles.
- 2 Cor 12:11 I have become foolish; you yourselves compelled me. Actually I should have been commended by you, for in no respect was I inferior to the most eminent apostles, even though I am a nobody.

### C. Synonyms and Antonyms

The Complete Word Study Dictionary gives the following list of other Greek words for poverty:

#### Synonyms:

déomai; to recognize one's need and beg;  
aporéō; to be without means;  
leípō; to fall short, be destitute;  
elattonéō; to have less;  
chrēzō; to need;  
échō anágkēn; to have need, or to have a need.

#### Antonyms:

perisseúō; to abound;  
hyperperisseúō; to abound exceedingly;  
hyperpleonázō; to abound exceedingly;  
pleonázō; to superabound;  
plēthúnō; increase, multiply;  
huperbállō; to exceed, excel;  
euporéō; to be well off;  
akmázō; to be fully ripe;  
gémō; to be full.

## II. What causes poverty?

### 1. Sin & Disobedience

Gen 2:17 but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die." (Gen 3:17-19 ground is cursed)

Dt. 28:15-68 Curse of disobedience

### 2. Resisting correction and discipline

Prov 13:18 Poverty and shame will come to him who neglects discipline ...  
(Prov 12:1, 15; 13:1, 8; 15:10)

### 3. Negligence

Prov 10:4 Poor is he who works with a negligent hand, But the hand of the diligent makes rich.  
(Prov 6:6-11; 12:24; 19:15)

### 4. Laziness

Prov 13:4 The soul of the sluggard craves and gets nothing, but the soul of the diligent is made fat.  
(Prov 10:4-5; 12:11, 24; 19:15, 24; 20:4; 24:30-34; 28:19; Eccl 10:18; Heb 6:11-12)

### 5. Sleep

Prov 20:13 Do not love sleep, or you will become poor;  
(Prov 6:9-11; 19:15; 24:30-34; Rom 12:11; 2Thes 3:10-13)

### 6. Loving pleasure

Prov 21:17 He who loves pleasure will become a poor man;  
(Prov 5:10-11; 23:21)

### 7. Intoxication, gluttony, sexual sins

Prov 23:21 For the heavy drinker and the glutton will come to poverty,  
(Prov 5:8-10; 6:26; 21:17; 29:3; Isa 28:1-3; Phil 3:19)

### 8. Idle chatter

Prov 14:23 In all labor there is profit, But mere talk leads only to poverty.  
(1Tim 5:13)

### 9. Pursuing empty (vain) things

Prov 28:19 He who tills his land will have plenty of food, But he who follows empty pursuits will have poverty in plenty.

### 10. Making hasty, rash decisions

Prov 21:5 The plans of the diligent lead surely to advantage, But everyone who is hasty comes surely to poverty. (Prov 19:2, 29; 22:26)

### 11. Making pledges

Prov 22:26 Do not be among those who give pledges, among those who become guarantors for debts.  
(Mt 5:34-37; Jas 5:12)

### 12. Co-signing (surety) loans

Prov 22:26-27 Do not be among those who give pledges, among those who become guarantors for debts. 27 If you have nothing with which to pay, why should he take your bed from under you?  
(Prov 6:1-3; 11:15; 17:18; 27:13)

### 13. Withholding what is due or owed.

Prov 11:24 There is one who scatters, and yet increases all the more, and there is one who withholds what is justly due, and yet it results only in want.  
(Prov 3:27-28; Rom 13:7; Jas 5:4-5)

#### **14. Debt**

Prov 22:7 The rich rules over the poor, and the borrower becomes the lender's slave.  
(Lev 25:39-40; Ex 21:2; Deut 15:2; 1 Sam 22:2)

#### **15. Ignoring those in need**

Prov 28:27 He who gives to the poor will never want, But he who shuts his eyes will have many curses. (Prov 11:25; 14:21; 21:13)

#### **16. Oppressing the poor, ignoring their needs**

Prov 22:16 He who oppresses the poor to make more for himself ... will only come to poverty.  
(Prov 14:31; 21:13; 22:9, 17, 22-23)

#### **17. Giving to the rich**

Prov 22:16 He who oppresses the poor ... or who gives to the rich, will only come to poverty.  
(Lk 6:33-35; 14:12-14)

#### **18. Pursuing wealth**

Prov 28:22 A man with an evil eye hastens after wealth And does not know that want will come upon him. (Prov 28:20; 1 Tim 6:9-10)

#### **19. Covetousness**

Ex 20:17 Do not covet ...  
(Ex 20:17; 34:24; Deut 5:21; 7:25; Rom 7:7; 13:9; 1Cor 5:10-11; 6:10; 2Cor 9:5; Eph 5:5)

#### **People who coveted or mishandled money and consequently suffered:**

1. Heb 12:16; Gen 25:30-33 Esau sells his birthright for a meal.
2. Gen 31:41 Laban deceives Jacob and changes his wages.
3. Gen 39 Joseph betrayed by his brothers for money.
4. Ex 4-12 Pharaoh won't let Israel go because of a loss of money.
5. 2Ki 5:22-27 Elijah's servant takes clothing for himself.
6. 1Ki 12:10 Jeroboam splits the Kingdom over taxation of people.
7. 1Ki 21:15 Ahab kills man for his vineyard
8. Mk 10:22 Rich young ruler walks away from Jesus.
9. Lk 16:19 Rich man goes to hell, while beggar Lazarus to paradise.
10. Mat 26:15 Judas betrays Jesus for money.
11. Mat 28:12-15 Roman guards paid off to lie about resurrection.
12. Ac 5:1-11 Ananias and Saphira lie to the Holy Spirit about the sale of their land.
13. Ac 8:18 Simon the Sorcerer tries to bribe the Apostles to gain spiritual power.
14. Ac 6:1 Greeks complained about daily distribution to their widows in Early Church.
15. Ac 19:25-27 Riot in Ephesus over the loss of idolatry sales.
16. 1Tim 6:10 Greedy People pierced through with many sorrows.
17. Jas 2:6 Rich people drag the poor into court.
18. Jude 11 Deceivers because they are greedy.
19. Rev 18:24 Nations become deceived by the devil's sorceries and materialism.
20. Ac 16:19 Paul thrown in prison because fortune-telling spirit is cast out of a slave girl and her owners lose their source of profit.

#### **Results of poverty:**

Ruin - Prov 10:15 the rich man's wealth is his fortress, the ruin of the poor is their poverty.

Shame - Prov 13:18 Poverty and shame will come to him who neglects discipline, But he who regards reproof will be honored. (Lk 16:3)

Misery - Prov 31:6-7 Give strong drink to him who is perishing, and wine to him whose life is bitter.  
7 Let him drink and forget his poverty and remember his trouble no more.

Crime - Prov 6:30; 30:9 people steal when they are hungry

### III. Notes:

#### Consider this:

If you were the devil, would you want the church to prosper, or God's people to be healthy and happy and having sufficient resources to preach the gospel to the ends of the earth? Of course not! Therefore, it should not surprise us that it is the work of the devil to use reactionary theology and religion to keep us from true faith, and to keep us from having a Biblical view of prosperity that might liberate us to use the blessing of the Lord for righteous purposes.  
(from "Prosperity with Purpose," by Wendell Smith)

#### If poverty were a virtue:

Then we would pursue poverty (Prov 21:5).

Then we would love pleasure because it produces poverty (Prov 21:17).

Then we would despise the blessing, favor, rewards and riches that come to the righteous and the wise (Prov 22:4; 21:20).

We would want to come to poverty (Prov 22:16).

Then why does the Lord plead the cause of the poor, if He wants them that way? (Prov 22:23)

Why would the poor cry out for help if poverty were good? (Job 29:12)

Why would we grieve for the poor? (Job 30:25)

Why would God bring justice to the poor, if they already have it? (Psalm 72:4)

The Bible does not teach that poverty is a blessing, for it tells us to take care of the poor and needy, but that poverty need not rob us of blessing. It has well been said that many people know the price of everything but the value of nothing. It is not a sin to be rich, but it is a sin to trust riches and think you are a special person in God's sight because of your wealth. Character is the important thing, not possessions.

(from Wiersbe's Expository outlines on the New Testament)