

WEALTH AND POVERTY



1 in 9 people in the world regularly go hungry.¹

1 in 9 people in the world don't have clean water to drink.²

24% of the wealth in the UK is possessed by the richest 1% of people.³

Each night, about 4,100 people sleep rough in England.⁴

How might having wealth and being in poverty affect people's lives? Working in pairs or small groups, discuss how the lives of rich and poor people might be different in the following ways. Choose at least three from the list to talk about.

- What sort of house they live in
- What sort of education they have
- The work they do
- Their access to technology
- How good their diet is
- Their access to water
- How safe they are
- Vulnerability to corruption or injustice

Which of these do you think can be problems in the developed world as well as the developing world?

In which of them do you think there is the greatest inequality (difference between wealthy people and poor people?)



Photography by Charles Harker / Shutterstock



Photography by James Derek / Unsplash



Photography by Sara Escobar / Shutterstock



Photography by Lim Eng / Unsplash



Photography by Igor Ovsyannykov / Unsplash



Photography by Sweet Ice Cream Photography / Unsplash

¹Food Aid Foundation ²Water Aid ³World Inequality Report, cited in *The Guardian* 14 Dec 2017 ⁴Ministry of Housing, Community and Local Government, cited in *The Independent* 15 Jan 2018

Christians believe that the Bible helps them to understand how they ought to make decisions about wealth and poverty in their own lives today. If they are wealthy, how should they use their money? If they are poor, how should they feel about that? How important should money be to them?

The Bible has a lot to say about wealth and poverty. Perhaps that is because in the times when it was written, most people were poor, and the gap between the few very rich people and the many poor people was probably much larger than it is today. There was no social security net to help out the poorest in times of need or when they were injured or unwell.

What does the Old Testament say about poverty?

In the time of the Old Testament, prosperity was often seen as a blessing sent from God. However, the Old Testament also talks about the need to look after the poor, and it does not blame them for their poverty.

The book of Proverbs is a collection of wise sayings. It is traditionally associated with King Solomon, who ruled Israel between about 961 and 922 BC. He had the reputation of being the wisest person of his time. Some of the sayings in Proverbs probably did originate with him, while others are more likely to have been added to the collection in later years. They are all ancient, though, and although they were written a very long time ago, Christians still find their wisdom can apply to their circumstances in the modern day. Here are some examples.

A generous person will be enriched, and one who gives water will get water.

Proverbs chapter 11 verse 25(NRSV)

Those who despise their neighbours are sinners, but happy are those who are kind to the poor.

Proverbs chapter 14 verse 21 (NRSV)

Those who oppress the poor insult their Maker, but those who are kind to the needy honour him.

Proverbs chapter 14 verse 31 (NRSV)

Whoever is kind to the poor lends to **the LORD**, and will be repaid in full.

Proverbs chapter 19 verse 17 (NRSV)

Speak out for those who cannot speak, for the rights of all the **destitute**.

Speak out, judge **righteously**, defend the rights of the poor and needy.

Proverbs chapter 31 verses 8-9 (NRSV)

The LORD = God

Destitute means 'extremely poor'

To judge **righteously** means to do it fairly'

1. What do these proverbs say about how to treat the poor?
2. What do they say about why it should be done?
3. What could a modern-day Christian who reads these sayings do to try to put them into practice? (The list from the previous page might give you some ideas.)

The Rich Young Man

The New Testament includes a lot of teachings of Jesus about wealth and poverty, especially about how to treat those who are less fortunate than yourself. One of the best known passages comes from the Gospel of Matthew, an account of Jesus' life which was probably written between AD 75 and AD 90, about 45-60 years after Jesus' crucifixion.

Jesus was in conversation with a young man who had asked him what he must do to receive eternal life (i.e. to reach heaven). Jesus told him that he should keep the Ten Commandments.

To grieve is to be extremely sad about something or someone which has been lost to you.

The young man said to him, 'I have kept all these, what do I still lack?' Jesus said to him, 'If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.' When the young man heard this word, he went away **grieving**, for he had many possessions.

Matthew chapter 19 verses 20-22 (NRSV)

1. What did Jesus tell the young man he had to do? (If you look carefully, there are three things to find.)
2. What would he then receive?
3. Why do you think that the young man went away grieving?

Then Jesus said to his disciples, 'Truly I tell you, it will be hard for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.'

Matthew chapter 19 verses 23-24 (NRSV)

4. Complete this sentence using the missing words.

Jesus' hearers were used to the idea that _____ was a sign of God's _____, so they would probably have been _____ to hear that the young man's wealth was what could _____ him from getting to _____.

wealth stop heaven surprised blessing

5. Sum up what Jesus said in this passage in one sentence of less than 25 words.

To find out more about the story of the rich young man, now watch the video at:

biblesociety.org.uk/e/wealth-and-poverty

How do Bible scholars use different methods to help them to get a better understanding of a Bible passage they are studying?

They make comparisons between different parts of the Bible, especially where the same story appears more than once.

They look for evidence from a _____ or h _____ to help them to understand the background.

They look at the original l _____ that the passage was written in. The Old Testament was written in H _____, most of the New Testament was written in G _____.

Another thing they might do is to look at the type of writing that the passage is, who the original audience was and for what purpose it was written.

The Bible book 1 Timothy is a letter (the type of writing) which was written by the early Christian leader Paul to another Christian who was named Timothy (the audience). In it, he gives Timothy guidance and advice on a range of topics, including money (the purpose).

Though this letter was written to one individual, Christians believe that Paul's advice is also useful to them.

For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains.

As for those who in the present age are rich, command them not to be haughty, or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides for us with everything for our enjoyment. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share.

1 Timothy chapter 6 verses 10 and 17-18 (NRSV)

1. *What does Paul say is 'a root of all kinds of evil'? What specific difficulties does he mention?*
2. *Paul refers to 'the uncertainty of riches'. In some other translations of this passage it says 'wealth that is easily lost' instead. What can be 'easily lost' and 'uncertain' about wealth and riches?*

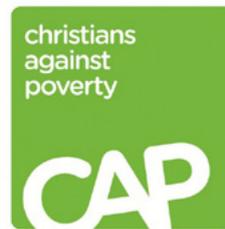


How have Christians responded to what the Bible says about wealth and poverty?

Often, they have given to good causes

In the Middle Ages, all Christians were expected to give a tenth of their income to the church. This was known as a tithe. Some Christians today continue to tithe by giving a tenth of their income to charity or to their church. Others give a lesser amount, but still stick to the principle of giving on a regular basis, or they might give their time and skills as a volunteer instead of giving money. For Christians, charity puts into practice Jesus' instruction to 'love your neighbour'.

Some of the charities which try to bring relief to the poor are specifically Christian in nature. They work internationally and at home, and provide help for everyone, not only Christians. Here are three examples.



Find out more about one of these Christian charities.

Sometimes, they have disagreed among themselves

Although most modern Christians would not say that wealth is a reward for goodness, some would still say that God brings good things to those who are faithful to him. Sometimes known as 'the prosperity gospel', this belief is more commonly found in America and Africa than it is in the UK. Other Christians have been critical of it because it encourages a focus on yourself rather than on God.

Sometimes the church is criticised for having too much wealth, especially in property and works of art. Individual church leaders are sometimes criticised for having too much personal wealth. These criticisms come from Christians as well as non-Christians.

They have spoken out against poverty

Pope Francis, speaking in 2013, said "Poverty in the world is a scandal. In a world where there is so much wealth, so many resources to feed everyone, it is unfathomable that there are so many hungry children, that there are so many children without an education, so many poor persons."

How have Christians responded to what the Bible says about wealth and poverty?

In each box on the left, write a summary of what the Bible passage says about how Christians should handle wealth and treat the poor.

Draw lines to connect the boxes on the left with those on the right that show this teaching being put into practice.

The sayings from Proverbs

How Christians should handle wealth:

How Christians should treat the poor:

Tithing or regular giving

Giving up all possessions

The story of the rich young man Matthew chapter 19 verses 20-24

How Christians should handle wealth:

How Christians should treat the poor:

Christians Against Poverty
CAFOD
Tearfund

Speaking out against poverty

1 Timothy chapter 6 verses 10 and 17-18

How Christians should handle wealth:

How Christians should treat the poor:

Volunteering for a charity

Scripture quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

