

September 8, Ordinary 23B (Proverbs 22:1-2, 8-9, 22-23)

There is no reward in heaven for those who work to accumulate wealth rather than care for people.

by [Katie Van Der Linden](#) in the [September 2024](#) issue

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Does God create certain people to be poor? Are poor people destined for struggle by God's design?

Three of the four gospels repeat Jesus' statement that the poor will always be there, though he, in human form, will not be. So if the poor will always be poor, why not just leave them alone to be mistreated, ignored, overlooked, and hidden? Is there a scripture verse that says, "Let the poor be poor"? Since they will always be there, perhaps we just accept it and move on.

A friend's young child once asked her and her husband how to make love. They were startled. While they had assumed that one day they would have to answer this question, this seemed far too soon. They spoke quietly to each other, attempting to get out of the conversation without being dishonest but also without being *too* honest. The dad started to talk about how when two people are in love, they often get married. Their precocious son continued to ask, How do you make love? It was obvious their stalling tactics were not working.

After a few moments of awkward, vague descriptions, the son interrupted them. "It starts with the letter *L*," he said.

How does one make love *known*? In other languages, *love* gets parsed out into intimate love, friendship, love of things, and so on. In American English we use *love* to denote everything from partnerships to favorite sandwiches. Hopefully your feelings for your spouse are different from your feelings for your PB&J. In any case, feeling love causes a reaction. If you love someone, you tend to them, care for them, respect them, treat them well, put their needs first, listen to them, and more. Love takes action steps. A mere feeling inspires us to much work.

A love of children often means volunteering to coach, helping in classrooms, attending school board meetings, being involved in endeavors that affect children. One does not love kids simply by saying so but by following through, by correlating action with emotion. God did not create humankind simply to feel love but to follow through with action.

In this week's reading from Proverbs, we understand that God creates all, rich and poor. God not only creates everyone but also sets up the system to honor those who take care of the poor. Proverbs insists we take action. God is not rewarding the rich for being rich, as our North American culture often does. Quite the contrary: we are informed that God favors the poor. God pleads for them and is on their side. In order for the rich to be favored, they must take care of the poor. There is no glory in being rich; it is only in taking care of the poor that glory is found.

God values what we do with our riches, how we treat others, our example in the world. Proverbs tells us that a good reputation is far better than riches and that one should choose faithful following over silver and gold. If one is focused on riches, one will fall short. There is no higher calling than to take care of others, no reward in heaven for those who work to accumulate wealth rather than care for people.

Money management guru Dave Ramsey talks about accumulating wealth in order to give generously. But it's difficult to maintain a focus on generosity once growing your wealth is established as the starting point. Far too often, ministries begin with noble and faithful intentions to care for others but soon adjust to the reality that money earned can be saved and grown. The focus shifts to gaining more to give more, only without an actual plan for that giving. The hoarding of funds ends up taking precedence over the benevolence of gifts.

But the Lord pleads the cause of the poor. It is good to give a lot. But generosity is not just the destination; it is integral to the journey. God sets it up perfectly: be grateful, and be generous.