

Dr. Knut Heim, Proverbs, Lecture 9, Prosperity Gospel Part 2

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This is Dr. Knut Heim in his teaching on the book of Proverbs. This is session number nine, Prosperity Gospel in Proverbs, part two.

Welcome to lesson nine. We are continuing with our exploration of prosperity in the book of Proverbs. Here now, we will be looking particularly at the beginning of this lecture at the connection between the acquisition of wealth on the one hand and social responsibility associated with that wealth on the other. So that's the overarching theme for much of this lecture.

First then, we look at the acquisition of wealth. And here we have a host of statements about practical advice on how to become wealthy, and how to do well financially in life. And much of this is kind of just practical, down-to-earth economic wisdom.

Often it is not particularly associated with any religious values. Sometimes that happens, but much of it just has to do with how do you do well practically. Nonetheless, there are many statements, and I will open with a few of them now, of a general nature that emphasize that generosity will in the long term be rewarded, whereas cruelty will in the long term be punished.

The following section is particularly instructive, especially when the individual proverbs are read together as a proverbial cluster where several proverbs together mean more than the sum of the individual parts. And I'm going to read here now from chapter 11, and I read the whole section from verse 16 to verse 20 in one go. And I invite you to read along with me and think along with me as I read this.

A gracious woman gets honor, but she who hates virtue is covered with shame. The timid become destitute, but the aggressive gain riches. Those who are kind reward themselves, but the cruel do themselves harm.

The wicked earn no real gain, but those who sow righteousness get a true reward. Whoever is steadfast in righteousness will live, but whoever pursues evil will die. Crooked minds are an abomination to the Lord, but those of blameless ways are his delight.

Now there's nothing here about commercial praxis, economic engagement, or even practical work. This has more to do with character, with attitude, with virtues. How do the various people here engage with others? Those who are selfish in order to get something for themselves will ultimately be impoverished in a general sense.

Those who are generous and sow righteousness, who want to benefit others, will ultimately benefit themselves. This can be applied to all walks of life, economic practice, and anything else in between, all human interactions. Something here about generosity towards others.

The following cluster is also related to generosity and also includes ethical implications for a moral evaluation of what is being described. Again, I read from chapter 11 from verse 23 onwards to chapter 26. The desire of the righteous ends only in good, the expectation of the wicked in wrath.

Some give freely, yet grow all the richer. Others withhold what is due and only suffer want. A generous person will be enriched, and one who gives water will get water.

The people curse those who hold back grain, but a blessing is on the head of those who sell it. At least one of these verses has certainly been used frequently in prosperity-type teaching, namely verse 24. Some give freely, yet grow all the richer.

Others withhold what is due and only suffer want. Now to be honest, as a generic statement as such, I cannot fully fault the application of this statement. Where it becomes problematic, however, is when people make this into a deed-consequence nexus or connection, where it will always be like this, and we will come back to this later.

Another question is, of course, what is it to do with withholding what is due? It is not clear in the saying, but it is likely that what we are dealing with here is not kind of the giving of alms or the giving of offerings, whether that's to a vulnerable person or whether that is to a religious activity, like the temple in ancient Israel or an evangelistic or other kind of Christian charity ministry type of thing in the modern world, but what is due may actually have to do with an economic exchange. And the person who is asked to pay a price for something will not only pay the minimum price that they can get away with but pay a fair price, a generous, fair price for what they are buying. Another proverbial cluster, a very interesting one, links laziness, wickedness, and religious hypocrisy.

This is chapter 1, verses 25 to 27. The craving of the lazy person is fatal, for lazy hands refuse to labor. All day long the wicked covet, but the righteous give and do not hold back.

The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination. How much more when brought with evil intent? Now, one could argue, are these just three unrelated sayings that talk about three different things? I would argue, that not only are there indirect sequences, 25, 26, 27, but there is a conceptual connection between these three

statements. There is desire involved of the lazy person, which ends fatally because no work is being done.

Although the person wants something, and wants more than they have, they are not willing to work for it, in verse 25. In verse 26, there is also longing and desire involved. In this case, it is the desire of the wicked, who covets all day long.

This is contrasted with the righteous, who generously give of what they have, rather than desire more than they have. And they seem to be contrasted, not only with the wicked in verse 26, but also with the lazy in verse 25. And then, it connects with verse 27, where the wicked are again in focus, as in verse 26a, where even when the wicked give something, because that's what a sacrifice is, it is a generous, supposedly generous giving, in this case it is, to the temple, but even as they do the right kind of thing, it is considered to be an abomination, presumably by God, God hates it, although they are doing the right religious activity, because they bring it with an evil intent.

And here, I think we need to have a sober warning for deluded Christians, who think that generous giving to the Lord, if it is brought with evil intent, will bring them the desired results, namely God's blessings, even though they think now, oh, I don't have to work anymore, because I'm generously giving, so the Lord owes me now, and will give back to me. In the context of these three verses, if you as a Christian only give to God because you want to get back more from Him, it seems to me that is a wicked sacrifice, according to Proverbs 31, 27, because you're bringing it with an evil, a selfish intent. You're not bringing it in order to delight the Lord, you're not bringing it in order to make other people's lives better, you're bringing it to make your own life better.

You think you can get something without having to work for it. That's what these three verses together may be saying about your situation. Another example, 22 verse 9, Those who are generous are blessed, for they share their bread with the poor.

And I want to contrast this specifically with the attitude that I have just described, namely, the giving of the generous here that is blessed, is not blessed because they want something for themselves, but quite specifically, there is a motivation, there is an explanation here, in the second half of the verse, which says, for they share their bread with the poor. The generosity here is not in order to get something for myself, but in order to benefit others. And then the blessing naturally follows from that.

So, the question really has to do with motivation. But also, it has to do with the fact that generosity is really designed to benefit others, not ourselves. There is a social component, and a community component associated with this.

I now turn to another very prominent aspect of the teaching on prosperity in the Book of Proverbs, namely the fact that there are numerous proverbs that say that get-rich-quick schemes are useless. They are in vain. They will get you nowhere.

And I am still presenting these, and the statements I have already made, in the wider context, first of all, of how does one get truly wealthy? How is true prosperity gained practically? And then in the even wider context, how in the long run is that acquisition of wealth, of true wealth, associated with an obligation to benefit others? We have already touched on that a little bit just now. But there will be more, much more later on. For now, let's just bear with how we gain wealth. How do we get truly prosperous? This section now gives practical advice on the fact of how not to do it, which still, of course, implicitly helps us better understand what the positive flip side of that is and how the right way to go about it is.

So here we go. Get-rich-quick schemes are in vain. And I shall give a few verses here to help us get a sense of this.

Chapter 19, verse 2. Desire without knowledge is not good, and one who moves too hurriedly misses the way. Again, so much more could be said about this. 2021, an estate quickly acquired in the beginning will not be blessed in the end.

Chapter 21, verse 5. The plans of the diligent lead surely to abundance. But everyone who is hasty comes only to want. Chapter 23, verse 4. Do not wear yourself out to get rich.

Be wise enough to desist. Verse 5. When your eyes light upon it, it is gone. For suddenly it takes wings to itself, flying like an eagle toward heaven.

And here is a sober reminder that there are many people then and now and throughout the world who are desperately trying to get rich and get rich quickly and they wear themselves out. And they put how to get rich first before anything else. Often their relationships suffer, their families suffer, their employees suffer, their business partners suffer, and they ultimately themselves suffer.

And the proverb is sobering in its realism. You may get all this wealth and whatever, but when you then actually see it, actually it is gone the moment you have it. For suddenly it takes wings to itself, flying like an eagle toward heaven.

Which may mean that it may be just quickly lost in a bad business venture or through an external economic crisis or through a change in the law or a change in technology or whatever it might be. But then also it might be you may have that wealth and you suddenly think it wasn't worth it. It's not giving me at all what I wanted.

It's what I really wanted has flown off to heaven and is beyond my reach now. So, all of that can play into here. Then chapter 28 verse 20.

The faithful will abound with blessings, but one who is in a hurry to be rich will not go unpunished. Again, this constant drumming on the fact get quick rich schemes are not going to work, are not going to pay off, and are not worth it. Either you will not get satisfaction in the first place even if you have the wealth.

And secondly, there are moral consequences, there are social consequences, there are religious consequences. And ultimately you may lose it all anyway. Then there's another related section of proverbs, a group of proverbs that I want to mention briefly.

There are many more but I'll only use a few of them. That ill-gotten gain is also in vain. So, get rich quick is in vain and ill-gotten gain is also in vain.

Chapter 10 verses 2 and 3. Treasures gained by wickedness do not profit, but righteousness delivers from death. The Lord does not let the righteous go hungry, but he thwarts the craving of the wicked. Chapter 10 verses 14 to 17.

The wise lay up knowledge, but the babbling of a fool brings ruin near. The wealth of the rich is their fortress, the poverty of the poor is their ruin. The wage of the righteous leads to life, the gain of the wicked to sin.

Whoever heeds instruction is on the path to life, but one who rejects a rebuke goes astray. Again, chapter 10 verse 15. The wealth of the rich is their fortress, the poverty of the poor is their ruin.

If we read this independently out of context, just on its own, it may simply be making a statement of fact. The rich have a fortress, the poor are ruined. And that's just the reality of how things are.

But when in the next verse we hear the wage of the righteous leads to life, the gain of the wicked to sin, then the fortress of the wealth of the rich appears to be the wage of a righteous lifestyle leading to life. Contrasted with the gain of the wicked that leads to sin, is associated with the poverty of a wicked poor person that will end up in ruin. So, reading the two verses together gives an entirely different twist to the whole thing.

And let's compare this with another group of sayings. And I'm just going to read these now. Chapter, I think this is chapter 11.

Chapter 11 verses 10 and 11. The name of the Lord is a strong tower. The righteous run into it and are safe.

The wealth of the rich is their strong city. In their imagination, it is like a high wall. Or chapter 11 verse 28.

Those who trust in their riches will wither, but the righteous will flourish like green leaves. We've heard that earlier, but let's hear it now in conjunction with the other verses that I'm reading here. Chapter 13, 11.

Wealth hastily gotten will dwindle, but those who gather little by little will increase it. Chapter 15 verse 27. Those who are greedy for unjust gain make trouble for their households, but those who hate bribes will live.

A clear impression emerges of get-rich-quick schemes being associated with ill-gotten gain. Instead, the book of Proverbs recommends diligent, honest, and hard work as opposed to laziness, which will either end up in poverty or entice people into tempting get-rich-quick schemes that can only reach their goals, namely great riches with little effort, through moral compromise and immoral behavior. So, what is being promoted here is character over action and true prosperity over material gain.

I now turn to another one of those examples of attitudes and behaviors that prevent me from gaining prosperity. And this section really deals with laziness and then leads on to a discussion of diligence. The book of Proverbs is very clear.

Laziness leads to ruin. I'm reading several longer sections here to give you a flavor of the strong feelings associated with laziness in the book. Chapter 6, verses 6 to 11.

Go to the aunt, you lazybones! Consider its ways and be wise. Without having any chief or officer or ruler, it prepares its food in summer and gathers its substance in the harvest. How long will you lie there, O lazybones? When will you rise from your sleep? A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest, and poverty will come upon you like a robber and want like an armed warrior.

And we can see here the humorous, funny side of this. Laziness is being ridiculed. Chapter 24, verses 30 to 34.

I passed by the field of one who was lazy, by the vineyard of a stupid person, and see it was all overgrown with thorns. The ground was covered with nettles and its stone wall was broken down. Then I saw and considered it.

I looked and received instruction. A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest, and poverty will come upon you like a robber and want like an armed warrior. Similarly, in chapter 10, verses 4 to 5. A slack hand causes poverty, but the hand of the diligent makes rich.

Chapter 19, verse 15. Laziness brings on deep sleep. An idle person will suffer hunger.

I've already mentioned the fact that laziness is often ridiculed. I now want to give a number of proverbs and verses that highlight this even more clearly. Chapter 19, verse 24.

The lazy person buries a hand in the dish and will not even bring it back to the mouth. Chapter 22, verse 13. The lazy person says, there is a lion outside, I shall be killed in the streets.

Or chapter 26, verses 13 to 16. The lazy person says, there is a lion in the road, there is a lion in the streets. As a door turns on its hinges, so does a lazy person turn in bed.

The lazy person buries a hand in the dish and is too tired to bring it back to the mouth. The lazy person is wiser in self-esteem than the seven who can answer discreetly. Then finally, laziness brings shame to the family.

Chapter 10, verse 5. A child who gathers in summer is prudent, but a child who sleeps in harvest brings shame. Conversely, now, I want to highlight a few verses and show how important diligence is in leading to success, to prosperity in a wider sense. Many of these associate diligent people with wisdom, righteousness, and social prestige, while contrasting them with foolish people and even more interestingly, with wicked people and criminals.

Listen to this. Chapter 12, verse 11. Those who till their land will have plenty of food, but those who follow worthless pursuits have no sense.

13, verse 2. From the fruit of their words, good persons eat good things, but the desire of the treacherous is for wrongdoing. Chapter 12, verse 13. The evil are ensnared by the transgression of their lips, but the righteous escape from trouble.

With verse 14, from the fruit of the mouth one is filled with good things, and manual labor has its rewards. Chapter 12, verse 24. The hand of the diligent will rule, while the lazy will be put to forced labor.

Ironically, it is the diligent who work hard that will eventually get to a position where they rule over others who will work for them. It doesn't mean they don't work anymore, but they will have a surplus of income through others working for them. While the lazy, who didn't want to work in the first place, are forced to work because there is no other way around for them.

Chapter 13, verse 4. The appetite of the lazy craves and gets nothing, while the appetite of the diligent is richly supplied. 14, verse 23. In all toil there is profit, but mere talk leads only to poverty.

20, verse 13. Do not love sleep, or else you will come to poverty. Open your eyes, and you will have plenty of bread.

20, verse 5. The plans of the diligent lead surely to abundance, but everyone who is hasty comes only to want. You see this connection between hastiness, get-rich-quick, a lazy way of getting prosperity, through schemes that try to avoid honest and hard labor and work and investment, but try to get it on the cheap. And to be honest, the longer I work with these materials, I want to challenge those who both preach prosperity gospel values and those who listen to them.

If you want to gain true prosperity from God, do not use generous giving to Christian ministries as a substitute for diligent, consistent, honest work. There is, of course, nothing wrong with giving to Christian ministry. But do you have something to give? Or are you digging so deep into your pocket that you are left with less than you need for yourself and your family, and you're then half hoping that the Lord will somehow generously bless you, as you've been promised, and if the Lord doesn't do it, you think, I need to find another way to claw back what I have given away without reward.

So, I think, as we continue to read the practical advice of the Book of Proverbs, it may help us to see that, yes, there is a prosperity gospel, but perhaps it is so much more for the rich. Often, the rich are not nearly as generous in many societies throughout the ages as the poor. And perhaps many of these sayings in prosperity-type teaching and preaching are more specifically addressed to wealthy people.

And here I want to speak specifically to wealthy Christians and Jews. If God has blessed you through your hard work and through generosity, and you are doing well for yourself, see it as a motivation to do even better for other people, to become ever more generous. As I mentioned already, I think it was in Lecture 2 or Lecture 3, when we looked at Proverbs 3, verses 9-10.

I now want to talk for a while about the connection between diligence and righteousness, on the one hand, versus or contrasted with laziness and wickedness, on the other, leading to wealth and high social standing, on the one hand, but dissatisfied prosperity, and sometimes poverty and shame, on the other. Chapter 10, verse 20-22. The tongue of the righteous is choice silver, the mind of the wicked is of little worth.

The lips of the righteous feed many, but fools die for lack of sense. The blessing of the Lord makes rich, and he has no sorrow with it. Chapter 12, verse 27.

The lazy do not reap their grain, but the diligent obtain precious wealth. One who is slack in work is close kin to a vandal. Chapter 18, verse 9. Then chapter 21, verse 25.

We've already mentioned this briefly. The craving of the lazy person is fatal, for lazy hands refuse to labor. And then the next two verses.

All day long the wicked covet, but the righteous give and do not hold back. The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination. How much more when brought with evil intent? We've already mentioned this earlier.

And then finally, laziness hurts also, not just the lazy person themselves, but also their employers. Chapter 10, verse 26. Like vinegar to the teeth, and smoke to the eyes, so are the lazy to their employers.

And I'll mention a number of verses in quick succession to show other practical points of how people can gain true prosperity and wealth. One of these is conscientiousness. Chapter 16, verse 20.

Those who are attentive to a matter will prosper, and happy are those who trust in the Lord. The next one is shrewdness. Chapter 20, verse 14.

Bad, bad, says the buyer. Then goes away and boasts, presumably about what he's just bought for a cheap price. Motivation.

16, 26. The appetite of workers works for them, or their hunger. Their hunger urges them on.

Need. God's blessing leads to success, but this is less prominent than commonly thought. Chapter 16, verse 3. Commit your work to the Lord and your plans will be established.

16, verse 7. When the ways of people please the Lord, he causes even their enemies to be at peace with him. Same chapter, verse 20. Those who are attentive to a matter will prosper, and happy are those who trust in the Lord.

I mentioned that already. Then another number of behaviors that are not recommended in order to get rich. One of these is bribes.

Chapter 15, verse 27. Those who are greedy for unjust gain make trouble for their households, but those who hate bribes will live. Or 17, 8. A bribe is like a magic stone in the eyes of those who give it.

Wherever they turn, they prosper. 17, verse 23. The wicked accept a concealed bribe to pervert the ways of justice.

18, 16. A gift opens doors. It gives access to the great.

19, 6. Many seek the favor of the generous, and everyone is a friend to a giver of gifts. Then something more positive. Proper investment.

14, verse 4. Where there are no oxen, there is no grain. Abundant crops come by the strength of the ox. And there are a number of other verses along the same lines.

Then about right priorities. 24, 27. Prepare your work outside.

Get everything ready for you in the field. And after that, build your house. 27, 18.

Anyone who tends a fig tree will eat its fruit. And anyone who takes care of a master will be honored. 27, verses 23 to 27.

Know well the condition of your flocks and give attention to your herds. For riches do not last forever, nor a crown for all generations. When the grass is gone and new growth appears and the herbage of the mountains is gathered, the lambs will provide you clothing, and the goats the price for a field.

There will be enough goat's milk for your food, for the food of your household, and nourishment for your servant girls. Or 28, 19. Anyone who tills the land will have plenty of bread, but one who follows worthless pursuits will have plenty of poverty.

Skills bring success. Do you see those who are skillful in their work? They will serve kings. They will not serve common people.

Rhetorical skills in particular are important. 18, 20 to 21. From the fruit of the mouth, one's stomach is satisfied.

The yield of the lips brings satisfaction. Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit. And there are several other verses to do with a skillful tongue and pleasant or positive speech.

So, in the past few minutes we have spent really very much focusing on what are the kinds of practical things that people can do to bring themselves success, social prestige, material prosperity, and true prosperity, really. And I think it's really worth highlighting that the Book of Proverbs has both a lot of simple, practical, straightforward basic common sense type of advice on this, but also to highlight that much of this is connected with having the right kind of more important values that will, as a by-product, often foster material prosperity, but even and much more

importantly, will lead to good, rich, healthy, rewarding relationships, both with God, from a religious perspective, but also then with neighbors, family members, and wider society, including the point of high social esteem in the community through being recognized as a valuable member of society who contributes to the welfare of all around them. And so, what the Book of Proverbs is fostering in the larger scheme of things is character and virtue over money and prosperity and physical value.

And this now leads us to another very important and significant range of verses and groups of verses to do with care for the poor and vulnerable, statements about poverty and how those who are better off in society should interact with the poor. Such statements are surprisingly frequent and surprisingly prominent. They are also surprisingly theological.

So first of all, there is a range of Proverbs that show how people do not normally associate with the poor but also highlight that such engagement is rewarding, ethical, and desirable. 14, verse 20, The poor are disliked even by their neighbors, but the rich have many friends. Verse 21, Those who despise their neighbors are sinners, but happy are those who are kind to the poor.

17, 17, A friend loves at all times, and kinsfolk are born to share adversity. 18, 24, Some friends play at friendship, but a true friend sticks closer than one's nearest kin. 19, verse 4, Wealth brings many friends, but the poor are left friendless.

Yet pair this with verse 6 in the same chapter. Many seek the favor of the generous, and everyone is a friend to a giver of gifts. Verse 7, If the poor are hated even by their kin, how much more are they shunned by their friends? When they call after them, they are not there.

Then some Proverbs show the vulnerability of the poor and the concomitant responsibility of the well-off to care for them, although they have no power over them. 18, 23, The poor use entreaties, but the rich answer roughly. 22, 16, Oppressing the poor in order to enrich oneself and giving to the rich will lead only to loss.

This verse, by the way, flies both in the face of Greco-Roman ideas of patronage and attitudes towards the poor and also to many modern attitudes with regard, for example, taxation of the rich. I'm particularly aware of this in the United Kingdom and in the United States where, let me just read it to you again, oppressing the poor in order to enrich oneself and giving to the rich will only lead to loss. The argument for lowering taxes for the rich has often been rehearsed and is usually associated with arguments like the rich create work for other people.

I think this is far too simplistic and this particular proverb is addressing particularly this kind of attitude, I think, which was, of course, has always been a prominent

attitude or argument in commercial societies. Chapter 22, verses 22 to 23, Do not rob the poor because they are poor or crush the afflicted at the gate for the Lord pleads their cause and despoils of life those who despoil them. Other proverbs ground care for the poor in theology and a divine preference for the poor.

1431, Those who oppress the poor insult their maker, but those who are kind to the needy honor him. 1705, Those who mock the poor insult their maker. Those who are glad at calamity will not go unpunished.

1917, Whoever is kind to the poor never lends to the Lord and will be repaid in full. This is again about generous giving, but it is generous giving not to an organization, but specifically to those who are needy in society. I think an organization that is particularly targeting that is very good.

I think more problematic is where we have a Christian ministry which consistently with its teaching does include enriching the people at the head of that ministry. That does not seem to be covered by this kind of proverb. 21 verse 13, If you close your ear to the cry of the poor, you will cry out and not be heard.

22 verse 1, A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches and favor is better than silver or gold. Verse 2, The rich and the poor have this in common, the Lord is the maker of them all. 22 verse 9, Those who are generous are blessed for they share their bread with the poor.

So, this is, if you like, a prosperity gospel at its best. Yes, generous giving leads to blessing from God, but the highlighting consistently in the proverbs is giving it to those who really need it, giving it to the poor. And let's compare this with chapter 28 verse 27, Whoever gives to the poor will lack nothing, but one who turns a blind eye will get many a curse.

Or 29.7, The righteous knows the rights of the poor. The wicked have no such understanding. And compare this with the opposite in 28.22, The miser is in a hurry to get rich and does not know that loss is sure to come.

The irony of it. Among many other proverbs that I have no time to highlight now, I want to mention a whole range of proverbs that explore the responsibilities of the powerful towards the poor and vulnerable. And this is something I think that is specifically addressed in the modern world to people with significant influence in the public sphere, whether that is through the media, whether it is through social networks, whether it is through significant financial well-being, whether it is through civic leadership roles, or political power that people hold, or whether it is to do with their position at the head of large corporations and businesses with huge influence in wider society.

I think all of the groups of people I've just mentioned are implicated in the proverbs that I'm now going to list. Chapter 29, verses 12 to 14. If a ruler listens to falsehood, all his officials will be wicked.

The poor and the oppressor have this in common. The Lord gives light to the eyes of both. If a king judges the poor with equity, his throne will be established forever.

Well, here's an incentive for social engagement for modern politicians and rulers. Chapter 30, verses 13 to 15. There are those how lofty are their eyes, how high their eyelids lift.

There are those whose teeth are swords, whose teeth are knives to devour the poor from off the earth, the needy from among mortals. The leech has two daughters. Give, give, they cry.

Chapter 31, verse 4 following. It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine, or for rulers to desire a strong drink, or else they will drink and forget what has been decreed and will pervert the rights of all the afflicted. Speak out for those who cannot speak for the rights of all the destitute.

Speak out, judge righteously, and defend the rights of the poor and needy. I now have a section that would also be worth looking at. We don't have time to do this in this lecture on surety and lending or giving pledges which is considered as dangerous and financially ruinous.

The association here is with risky business ventures that involve high-interest rates that can really lead to quick, rich schemes and are doing so in the modern world, but who are seen as potentially ruinous for the people who do this and also seen as morally, deeply morally flawed. There is a whole range of these which I don't have time for. A few verses on borrowing and lending.

22.7, the rich rule over the poor and the borrower is the slave of the lender. How true this is in modern societies. 28.8, one who augments wealth by exorbitant interest gathers it for another who is kind to the poor.

I wish that was true as straightforwardly as it is being stated here. Again, I don't have time to go into the details of what's going on here. I think there is an ideal statement being made from a religious perspective in the long run.

But of course, in the real world, short term, those who gather wealth by exorbitant interests indeed get very rich very quickly and impoverish other people. I now want to end with a statement near the conclusion of the book of Proverbs. The enigmatic arguer, an idiosyncratic author-collector of the book of Proverbs' penultimate chapter and collection in Proverbs 30 says this.

Two things, O God, I ask of you. Do not deny them to me before I die. Remove far from me falsehood and lying.

Give me neither poverty nor riches. Feed me with the food that I need. Or I shall be full and deny you and say, Who is the Lord? Or I shall be poor and steal and profane the name of my God.

There is a careful realism about this prayer informed by a mature understanding of human response to material success and failure leading to deep anthropological and theological insight into a constructive and wise attitude towards material possessions. What do I mean? I want to come back to what I was saying at the very beginning of the two lectures on prosperity, namely that the book of Proverbs fosters healthy attitudes, values, and virtue ethics in helping us to gain a proper sense of what is truly important in life. And Agur, in this prayer, is recognizing that poverty should not be glorified and should not be minimized either.

Poverty is a serious problem for many people. And while sometimes poverty is people's own fault, we have seen in the book of Proverbs, and we see this in reality in life throughout history anywhere in the world, poverty is often inflicted on others through unjust means. But this poverty also can very seriously lead to a religious and moral crisis among those who are poor, often not through any fault of their own.

But their desperation may sometimes tempt them and often does tempt them, to do things that are not right before God. On the other extreme, there are people, for various reasons, who are conspicuously rich. Sometimes they deserve it through their hard work, their excellent skills, and their tenacity.

Sometimes they have it because of sheer luck, because they have been born at the right place at the right time, into the right kind of family, into the right social strata in society. Whatever that may be. Sometimes they have become exorbitantly rich through impoverishing other people.

Sometimes it seems just to be completely random. But how easy it is for those who are comfortable in their financial situation to think that they can rely on themselves. Their wealth is the strong tower in their imagination.

Agur recognizes deeply that this kind of situation may be dangerous for him, and of course, it is dangerous for all of us, that we think because we are comfortable financially that we do not need God. We may not be opposed to God, we are just kind of indifferent to God, because we don't need God. And here I think the book of Proverbs is posing a challenge to those of us who are extremely poor and those of us who are extremely rich.

What role does God play in your life? Is your wealth truly fulfilling you? Does your poverty justify you cutting corners? Or is there something that the living God can do for you and with you and through you to make your life better as a rich person and to make your life better as a poor person? This prayer is a model prayer for all of us, at both extremes, at the economic and financial spectrum and anywhere in between, to ask God to give us what we need and then help us to use the more surplus that we may have for the benefit of others. That, I believe, is the true gospel of prosperity that emerges from this incredible book of Proverbs of Israel's wisdom for us today.

This is Dr. Knut Hein in his teaching on the book of Proverbs. This is session number 9, Prosperity Gospel in Proverbs, part 2.