

The Secret of Wealth: Biblical Discussion Questions About Abundance

While *The Secret of Wealth* is rooted in modern research rather than in any religious tradition, its conclusions are affirmed by the teachings of all major faiths. In particular, Christian teaching about the appropriate nature of our relationships to people, money and material goods is consistent with the principles which underlie *The Secret of Wealth*.

The following discussion questions are provided as a way to help integrate Christian teaching with the lessons found in *The Secret of Wealth*.

Introduction to *The Secret of Wealth*

In the introduction to *The Secret of Wealth*, we meet a man who was so rich he could afford to give away over \$100 million. That means he could buy almost anything we can imagine. Yet, he says, “I still had not found joy.”

- **What was missing in his life?**
- **How does he fill that void?**
- **How might we, without his millions, fill a similar void in our lives?**

Scriptural reflection

Give liberally and be ungrudging when you do so, for on this account the LORD your God will bless you in all your work and in all that you undertake. Since there will never cease to be some in need on the earth, I therefore command you, “Open your hand to the poor and needy neighbor in your land.”

- *Deut 15:10-11 (NRSV)*

- **This passage offers two reasons why we should be generous. What are they?**
- **How does it say we should give?**

Needs and Wants, Riches and Wealth (Chapters 1-9)

Scriptural reflection

The avaricious (greedy) man is perturbed about his wealth, and he knows not when want will come upon him.

- *Proverbs 28:22(NAB)*

- **What does it mean to be “avaricious” or “greedy”?**
- **Why do you think those who are greedy take no joy in their wealth?**

Scriptural reflection

The greedy man stirs up disputes, but he who trusts in the LORD will prosper.

- *Proverbs 28:25 (NAB)*

- **Why do you think greed leads to disputes?**
- **How do you think those who trust in the Lord prosper?**

Scriptural reflection

He who trusts in himself is a fool, but he who walks in wisdom is safe.

- *Proverbs 28:26 (NAB)*

- **Why does God tell us that trusting in ourselves is foolish?**
- **What does it mean to “walk in wisdom”?**

Scriptural reflection

You shall not covet your neighbor's wife. You shall not desire your neighbor's house or field, nor his male or female slave, nor his ox or ass, nor anything that belongs to him.

- *Deuteronomy 5:21 (NAB)*

- **What does it mean to “covet”?**
- **Why does God tell us we should not covet what others have?**

Scriptural reflection

My son, while you are well, govern your appetite so that you allow it not what is bad for you; for not every food is good for everyone, nor is everything suited to every taste. Be not drawn after every enjoyment, neither become a glutton for choice foods, for sickness comes with overeating, and gluttony brings on biliousness. Through lack of self-control many have died, but the abstemious man prolongs his life.

- *Sirach 37:26-30 (NAB)*

- **What does “abstemious” mean?**
- **What good advice is found in this scripture passage?**

Scriptural reflection

Then he said to the crowd, "Take care to guard against all greed, for though one may be rich, one's life does not consist of possessions."

- *Luke 12:15 (NAB)*

- **If “one’s life does not consist of possessions,” what does it consist of? What is more important in life than money and possessions?**

Story of Myra and Millie (Chapters 6-9)

Scripture reflection

Blessed are those who trust in the LORD, whose trust is the LORD. They shall be like a tree planted by water, sending out its roots by the stream. It shall not fear when heat comes, and its leaves shall stay green; in the year of drought it is not anxious, and it does not cease to bear fruit.

- *Jeremiah 17:7-8 (NSRV)*

- **What does it mean to “trust in the Lord?”**
- **How does greater “trust in the Lord” enrich us?**
- **What else or who else might we trust in besides God?**
- **Can you think of an example of when or how you or someone you know has placed their trust in someone or something else besides God and have been disappointed? (Don’t name names, just describe the situation in a way that respects everyone’s privacy.)**
- **What is the danger of putting our *ultimate trust* in other people and things or in ourselves?**
- **If you had to guess, who or what do you think Myra and Millie each place their trust in?**
- **Why do our fears decline as our trust in God increases?**
- **What can we do to trust God more tomorrow than we do today?**

What is Enough?

(Chapters 10-17)

Scriptural reflection

“It is enough,” said Israel. “My son Joseph is still alive! I must go and see him before I die.”

- *Genesis 45:28 (NAB)*

- **I thought Israel was a country. A country can't talk. Who is Israel? (Hint: see Genesis 32:25-29.)**
- **To have abundance, we must have a sense that we have “enough.” What do you think Israel means when he says it is “enough” to know that his son, whom he had mourned as dead for many years, is alive?**

Scriptural reflection

He who gives to the poor suffers no want, but he who ignores them gets many a curse.

- *Proverbs 28:27 (NAB)*

- **Recalling the story of the two sisters, do you think either Myra or Millie “suffers no want?”**
- **There must be many things that Millie, the poor sister, wants — if not for herself, then for those whom she loves. Does she suffer from her wants? Why or why not?**

- **Do you see a relationship between the fact that Myra ignores the poor that she is cursed by a painful desire for more?**
- **The scripture passage says those who ignore the poor get “many a curse.” What do you think the word “curse” means here?**
- **Can you think of some examples of “curses” that might afflict those who ignore the poor around them?**

Scriptural reflection

For if you are steadfast in your service, your good works will bring success, not only to you, but also to all those who live uprightly. Give alms from your possessions. Do not turn your face away from any of the poor, and God's face will not be turned away from you. Son, give alms in proportion to what you own. If you have great wealth, give alms out of your abundance; if you have but little, distribute even some of that. But do not hesitate to give alms; you will be storing up a goodly treasure for yourself against the day of adversity. Almsgiving frees one from death, and keeps one from going into the dark abode.

- *Tobit 4: 6-10 (NAB)*

- **Are both Myra and Millie steadfast in their service?**
- **How does Millie’s steadfast service bring “success” to her and others?**
- **How does Millie’s generosity free her from death?**
- **How does Myra’s self-centeredness take her into a “dark abode”?**

Where are we — and where are we going?

Chapter 18-Postscript

Scriptural reflection

This, rather, is the fasting that I wish: releasing those bound unjustly, untying the thongs of the yoke; Setting free the oppressed, breaking every yoke; Sharing your bread with the hungry, sheltering the oppressed and the homeless; Clothing the naked when you see them, and not turning your back on your own. Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your wound shall quickly be healed; Your vindication shall go before you, and the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer, you shall cry for help, and he will say: Here I am! If you remove from your midst oppression, false accusation and malicious speech; If you bestow your bread on the hungry and satisfy the afflicted; Then light shall rise for you in the darkness, and the gloom shall become for you like midday; Then the LORD will guide you always and give you plenty even on the parched land. He will renew your strength, and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring whose water never fails.

- *Isaiah 58: 6-11(NAB)*

- **Since the dawn of humanity people have offered sacrifice to their gods or God. What kind of sacrifice does God say He wants from us? (Hint: see Matthew 9:13 and Romans 12.)**

- **Do you think we can please God if we are not generous with time, talent and treasure?**
- **Do you think it's enough to share — or is more expected of us?**

Scriptural reflection

In the course of his teaching he said, "Beware of the scribes, who like to go around in long robes and accept greetings in the marketplaces, seats of honor in synagogues, and places of honor at banquets. They devour the houses of widows and, as a pretext, recite lengthy prayers. They will receive a very severe condemnation." He sat down opposite the treasury and observed how the crowd put money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. A poor widow also came and put in two small coins worth a few cents. Calling his disciples to himself, he said to them, "Amen, I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all the other contributors to the treasury. For they have all contributed from their surplus wealth, but she, from her poverty, has contributed all she had, her whole livelihood."

- *Mark 12:38-44 (NAB)*

(This account is also found in Luke 20:46-21:4)

- **Jesus seems to criticize people for saying "lengthy prayers." Is he against that?**
- **Who are the scribes?**
- **Jesus says the poor widow "put in more" than people who gave "large sums" of money. How can that be?**
- **How is Jesus measuring generosity in this parable?**
- **Can you think of sacrifices that others have made for you? How would you distinguish between a "small sacrifice" and a "large sacrifice?"**
- **Can you think of sacrifices that you have made for others? Which ones do you think were "small" and why? Which do you think were "big" and why?**

Scriptural reflection

Then he said to the crowd, "Take care to guard against all greed, for though one may be rich, one's life does not consist of possessions." Then he told them a parable. "There was a rich man whose land produced a bountiful harvest. He asked himself, 'What shall I do, for I do not have space to store my harvest?' And he said, 'This is what I shall do: I shall tear down my barns and build larger ones. There I shall store all my grain and other goods and I shall say to myself, "Now as for you, you have so many good things stored up for many years, rest, eat, drink, be merry!" But God said to him, 'You fool, this night your life will be demanded of you; and the things you have prepared, to whom will they belong?' Thus will it be for the one who stores up treasure for himself but is not rich in what matters to God."

- *Luke 12:15-21 (NAB)*

- **What does Jesus mean when he says "one's life does not consist of possessions?" What else matters?**

- **What does this story tell us about the basis of true personal security?**
- **How can we be rich “in what matters to God?”**

Scriptural reflection

“There was a rich man who dressed in purple garments and fine linen and dined sumptuously each day. And lying at his door was a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who would gladly have eaten his fill of the scraps that fell from the rich man's table. Dogs even used to come and lick his sores. When the poor man died, he was carried away by angels to the bosom of Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried, and from the netherworld, where he was in torment, he raised his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. And he cried out, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me. Send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am suffering torment in these flames.' Abraham replied, 'My child, remember that you received what was good during your lifetime while Lazarus likewise received what was bad; but now he is comforted here, whereas you are tormented. Moreover, between us and you a great chasm is established to prevent anyone from crossing who might wish to go from our side to yours or from your side to ours.' He said, 'Then I beg you, father, send him to my father's house, for I have five brothers, so that he may warn them, lest they too come to this place of torment.' But Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the prophets. Let them listen to them.' He said, 'Oh no, father Abraham, but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.' Then Abraham said, 'If they will not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone should rise from the dead.'"

- *Luke 16:19-35 (NAB)*

- **Why do you think the rich man was sent to an afterlife of torment the netherworld?**
- **Why do you think Lazarus is “carried away by angels to the bosom of Abraham?”**
- **Why do you think that Abraham does not give the rich man what he asks for?**
- **Why does Abraham seem to be insensitive when the rich man pleads to let Lazarus rise from the dead to warn his brothers about what they must do to avoid the rich man's awful fate?**

Other Scripture Readings for Discussion and Reflection

Scriptural reflection

I will listen for the word of God; surely the LORD will proclaim peace to his people, to the faithful, to those who trust in him. Near indeed is salvation for the loyal; prosperity will fill our land. Love and truth will meet; justice and peace will kiss. Truth will spring from the earth; justice will look down from heaven. The LORD will surely grant abundance; our land will yield its increase. Prosperity will march before the Lord, and good fortune will follow behind.

- *Psalm 85:9-14 (NAB)*

- **In this passage, what do “the faithful” do?**

- **What is the outcome when people trust the Lord?**
- **What holds us back from trusting the Lord more? Can you think of some everyday events that might make it more difficult for us to trust the Lord?**
- **What are some examples of people trusting in the Lord? Can you think of some in history and from your own experience?**
- **How might the Lord be calling you to trust in Him in your own life?**

Scriptural reflection

Everything indeed is for you, so that the grace bestowed in abundance on more and more people may cause the thanksgiving to overflow for the glory of God. Therefore, we are not discouraged; rather, although our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this momentary light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to what is seen but to what is unseen; for what is seen is transitory, but what is unseen is eternal.

- 2 Cor. 4:15-18 (NAB)

- **In this passage, when St. Paul says, "Everything is indeed for you," do you think he means that each of us is entitled to whatever we want in this life?**
- **What is "the grace (being) bestowed in abundance on more and more people" that will "cause the thanksgiving to overflow for the glory of God?"**
- **How does our outer self waste away? What is our "inner self" and how can it be "renewed day by day"?**
- **In what sense is "the seen" transitory, or passing, in nature?**
- **What is St. Paul referring to when he speaks of "the unseen is eternal"?**

Scriptural reflection

Consider this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each must do as already determined, without sadness or compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. Moreover, God is able to make every grace abundant for you, so that in all things, always having all you need, you may have an abundance for every good work. As it is written: "He scatters abroad, he gives to the poor; his righteousness endures forever." The one who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed and increase the harvest of your righteousness. You are being enriched in every way for all generosity, which through us produces thanksgiving to God, for the administration of this public service is not only supplying the needs of the holy ones but is also overflowing in many acts of thanksgiving to God. Through the evidence of this service, you are glorifying God for your obedient confession of the gospel of Christ and the generosity of your contribution to them and to all others, while in prayer on your behalf they long for you, because of the surpassing grace of God upon you. Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!

- 2 Cor. 9:6-15 (NAB)

- **What does it mean to “sow” and “reap”?**
- **How are these images from farming relevant to a person’s life today?**
- **What does St. Paul mean when he speaks of those who “sow sparingly” or “sow bountifully”?**
- **Why do you think “God loves a cheerful giver”?**
- **In what sense might we always have all we need?**
- **What does St. Paul mean by having “an abundance for every good work”?**
- **Who is “the one who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food” in our lives?**
- **How might God enrich us for our generosity?**
- **Why would that lead us to be thankful?**
- **What do you think St. Paul means by “acts of thanksgiving to God”? Can you think of some examples?**
- **How do we glorify God when we perform acts of generosity?**
- **What is God’s “indescribable gift”?**

Scriptural reflection

I know indeed how to live in humble circumstances; I know also how to live with abundance. In every circumstance and in all things I have learned the secret of being well fed and of going hungry, of living in abundance and of being in need. I have the strength for everything through him who empowers me.

- *Phil 4:12-13 (NAB)*

- **What are some of the valuable lessons St. Paul might have learned while he lived “in humble circumstances”?**
- **What do you think he means when he says “I know also how to live with abundance”? Do you think he is referring only to having a lot of things at some point in his life?**
- **St. Paul refers to “the secret” he has learned about being able to live in any material circumstances. What do you think that secret is?**
- **St. Paul claims to have “the strength for everything.” What is the source of that strength?**

Scriptural reflection

... may grace and peace be yours in abundance through knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. His divine power has bestowed on us everything that makes for life and devotion, through the knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and power. Through these, he has bestowed on us the precious and very great promises, so that through them you may come to share in the divine nature, after escaping from the

corruption that is in the world because of evil desire. For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, virtue with knowledge, knowledge with self-control, self-control with endurance, endurance with devotion, devotion with mutual affection, mutual affection with love. If these are yours and increase in abundance, they will keep you from being idle or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

- 2 Peter 1:2-8 (NAB)

- **God's divine power endows us with two things that make it possible for us to have a relationship with Him. What are they?**
- **What are "the precious and very great promises" to which St. Paul refers?**
- **Can you describe the "evil desire" to which St. Paul refers? What are some examples? What do think causes the "evil desire" we see — and sometimes exhibit — in ourselves?**
- **St. Paul suggests a series of eight progressive steps we can take to more closely reflect God's will for us and for the world. What are the steps? Discuss how each step builds on the prior step in our everyday lives. Why is each one important?**

Other Brief Thoughts for Discussion and Reflection

"To be grateful is to recognize the love of God in everything given us."

-Thomas Merton

- **How might we see "the love of God in everything given us," and how does that lead us to be grateful?**

"The only true wealth is not wanting."

- Chuck Sauber

- **Can you think of a moment in your life — however brief — when you felt you had everything you needed to be happy and wanted for nothing? Describe it. How did you feel at that moment?**
- **What can you do to enjoy more such moments in the future?**

"Live simply, that others may simply live."

- Mother Elizabeth Seton

- **Describe what you think it means to "live simply."**
- **How might our commitment to "live simply" affect the lives of others?**
- **How might our commitment to "live simply" affect our own lives — materially and spiritually?**

“Sin is loving what won’t make you happy.”

- *St. Augustine*

- **We usually think of sin in two ways: as doing something we shouldn't do (sins of commission) or as not doing something we should have done (sins of omission). Is St. Augustine proposing a new way to think of sin?**
- **When St. Augustine uses the word “love,” what do you think he means by it?**
- **When St. Augustine uses the word “happy,” what do you think he means by it? Do you think he is referring to how we might feel at the moment, or to what is really best for us over the course of life?**
- **If sin is a turning away from God, how might loving things, persons and activities that won’t make us happy be considered sinful?**

“Don’t try to be a person of success, try to be a person of value.”

- *Albert Einstein*

- **What is the difference between “a person of success” and “a person of value”?**
- **In what ways might someone try to achieve success that would actually reduce his or her value in the human community? Can you think of some examples?**
- **Do you think it’s possible to be both “a person of success” and “a person of value”? Can you think of some examples of people who have been booth? Do you know which mattered most to them?**
- **How might you become a person of more value to God and to those around you — today, this week, this month, this year?**

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