

When should you sell for money rather than give for free? (11:26)

He who withholds grain, the people will curse him, but blessing will be on the head of him who sells *it*.

THE TEXT (NASB)

He who withholds grain, the people will curse him, but blessing will be on the head of him who sells *it*.

He that withholdeth corn, the people shall curse him, but blessing shall be upon the head of him that selleth it. KJV - Proverbs 11:26

INTRODUCTION



There are very many texts in Proverbs that encourage giving, but sometimes it's better to sell goods and services rather than freely giving them away. Grain is a basic need. People gladly pay to meet their basic needs. In this text, someone is blessed because he sells to people in need. He doesn't give it away for free, but sells it and is blessed. The price is not even mentioned.

What is the principle here? Don't withhold a benefit in miserly hoarding, but don't give it away in naïve generosity. This principle applies to any good: Avoid both extremes, especially in times of dire need.



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COMMENTARY

This truth applies to commodities as basic as bread. This was the case with Joseph who sold grain to the Egyptians during the seven years of famine (Genesis 47:13-27).

Translation: *Sell*



All major English Bibles translate the Hebrew word, שָׁבַר (*šā•bār*, pronounced “shah-var”), as “sell.” It indicates commerce, the exchange of goods and services for money. *Šā•bār* is used most frequently in buying and selling food—especially grain. It does not refer to a hand out (Deuteronomy 2:6, 28). The word “it” is in italics, because it’s absent from the Hebrew text. The emphasis is on the exchange of value (sell or *šā•bār*) rather than on whatever good or service is being sold.

Most traditional commentaries (Adam Clarke, John Gill, Matthew Henry, JFB, and Albert Barnes) see this proverb as a warning against hoarding food, while others suffer, just to increase future profits. This is the strongest and clearest message here, yet the text also advises against inappropriate generosity. Good business is neither miserly nor free.

In Praise of Payment

If we’re willing to pay for our real needs, then surely we’re willing to pay for our luxuries. Why?

Payment completes the transaction. Once payment is made, there’s no outstanding obligation. The balance-sheet is cleared, and there’s no sense of outstanding debt to the other party. This permits a better relationship, a friendship between equals. As my dad used to say in German: “Strenge rechnung gute freundschaft”: Keep tight accounts with all your friends, and you’ll keep



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tight friendships.

If we're given gifts and never allowed to give in return, we're deprived of any chance to show our own abilities and generosity. People who live off handouts develop a poor self-image and even resentment of their "betters," the very people who support them. And especially in business, if we're given something for nothing, even advice, we think that "it's worth what we paid for it"—nothing.

We tend to waste whatever we get for free. Easy come, easy go.

Blessed Business Transactions



With this in mind, we should charge as much as we can, subject to the constraints of the competition and supply, the buyer's ability to pay, and our own conscience. If we refuse to trade with others, when we have the opportunity, and others have the need, we're guilty of selfishness, "inflating" the value of our goods. So refusing to engage in business may be a kind of cheating in business.

In praise of commerce, we honour the personal dignities of buyer and the seller when each one exchanges something of value in a win-win trading arrangement. It's a symbiotic relationship. I scratch your back and you scratch mine.

Certainly, we like free gifts, every now and then, but do we bless the givers? Or do we think them foolish, giving something for nothing? Or maybe they're "up to something," swindlers? Do we bless those who freely give us bread? Yes, if we can't pay. No, if we can pay and aren't give a chance.



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OUR CREATOR, REDEEMER, AND FRIEND

Jesus said that the worker is worthy of his hire (Matthew 10:10). In other words: A person should get properly paid for the benefits he provides. That's the free market economy. Fees for products and services have clear biblical support. Commerce is not inherently evil.

Jesus also criticized the lazy servant for burying his "talent"—a silver bar—rather than depositing it in a bank, where it could earn some interest (Matthew 25:26-28).

Even God Almighty does not like to see money stand idle.

APPLICATION

- Memorize the text in your favourite Bible translation and think about it often.
- Rather than giving products or services away for free to those in need, consider charging a reduced fee to the poor.
- Don't participate in a cartel, or any other similar organization, aiming to fix quotas for sales, production, or profit—especially one selling basic goods and staples.
- Don't reject free enterprise and prefer a government-controlled economy.

Which of these steps, if any, does Jesus want you to take first? Ask Him.



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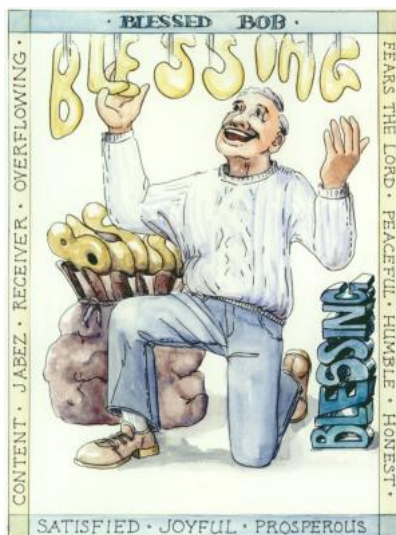
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KEY WORDS

blessing, business, charity, curse, food, free, generosity, hoard, stinginess, more assets (quantity), price, responsibility, withhold, bf sharing

ILLUSTRATION

[Who is Blessed Bob?](#)



Blessed Bob is very fortunate. He recognizes that good things come from God! God is shunned by many, but not by Bob. Bob loves God. He wants to receive all the good things that God has for him. He's not too proud to ask God for help. In fact, Bob prays often. Some think that he prays without ceasing. But he is not without fault. Blessed Bob makes many mistakes, and when he does, he admits his errors. He corrects them and presses on.

Bob gets so many blessings he feels overwhelmed. His cup overflows. But he doesn't hoard his blessings. Like Generous Genevieve, Blessed Bob likes to give to others. He is truly prosperous, even though there are many who are financially richer than he is.

We see examples of Blessed Bob in the Bible in the lives of Job and Joseph. Job went through some very good times (Job 29:2-25) and some very bad times (Job 2:7-8). Joseph had similar financial cycles (Genesis 39:2,21). Both men kept their focus on God, not on their financial condition (Job 1:21, Genesis 50:19-21).

More recently we have examples of those who have lived with the same life focus. R. G. LeTourneau was the inventor of the largest earth moving machines in the 1930's and 1940's. He credited God for his tremendous success. He gave away much of his wealth while he was



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still living saying that, "When I shovel money out to God's interests, God shovels money back to me, but God's shovel is bigger than mine." He was called the mover of men and mountains because of his great work and influence. On his gravestone, R. G. LeTourneau left all visitors with these words, SEEK YE FIRST THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS AND ALL THESE THINGS SHALL BE ADDED UNTO YOU MATTHEW 6:33.

Blessed Bob is full of joy. He is satisfied with life!

