

# What happens to you if you ignore the pleas of the poor? (21:13)

He who shuts his ear to the cry of the poor will also cry himself and not be answered.

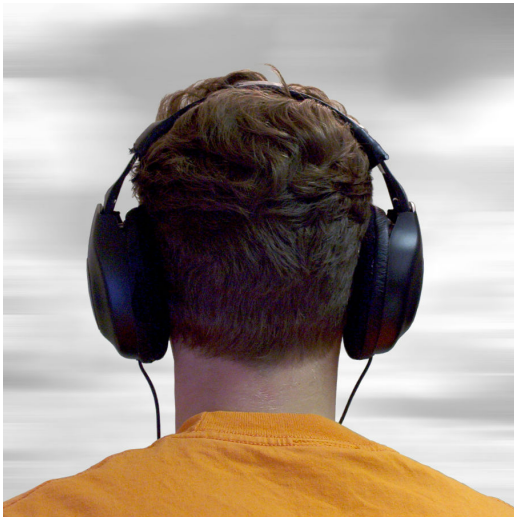
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## THE TEXT (NASB)

He who shuts his ear to the cry of the poor will also cry himself and not be answered.

*He who stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he also shall cry himself, but shall not be heard.  
KJV - Proverbs 21:13*

## INTRODUCTION



Stinginess leads to personal disaster: Our treatment of others determines how we will be treated.

The opposite is also true: Charity in prosperity ensures survival in scarcity—a principle of God's universe.

If you want to avoid poverty, give your money away—but learn to do it right.



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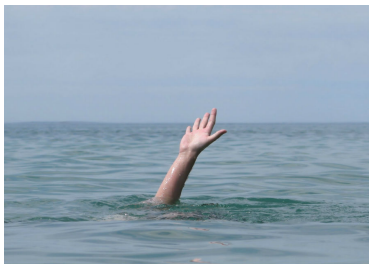
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## COMMENTARY

The expression, “shuts his ear,” is unique here, and used nowhere else in the Book of Proverbs. The text does not condemn a failure to give, but a refusal to listen. He shuts his ear, because he doesn’t want to hear, lest his conscience persuade him to help. Helping means giving, and giving means having less, at least for the moment. But how can anyone shut his ears? The eyes and mouth can be shut, but not ears, except deliberately with our fingers. He shuts his ear, because he has already turned away his eyes. Refusing to look, he doesn’t want even to hear their pleas. He refuses to acknowledge the plight of the poor in a callous act of self-worship.

### Translation: Cry



The Hebrew word for “cry,” זעקה (zeqā•qāh, pronounced “zě-ah-qah”), is derived from a root meaning “to cry for help in time of distress.” Everyone has had, or will have, times of despair. So the Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament says the word is used “almost exclusively in reference to a cry from a disturbed heart, in need of some kind of help. The cry is not in summons of another, but an expression of the need felt.” So it’s a moan from a wounded heart, not a call from a beggar.

### Who Are The Deserving Poor?

The proverb does not forbid refusing junk mail or other charitable solicitation, but condemns only ignoring the poor. Who are the poor? People can be poor financially, or they may lack health, or starve for friendship.



Four Hebrew adjectives are used for the “poor” in the Book of Proverbs; דָּל (dāl), שָׁר (rāš), יָנֵעַ (ā•nî), and יָבֵן (’ěb•yôn). Unfortunately, the distinction between them is lost in the single English word, “poor.”



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Three of the words; דָּל (dāl), יָגֵעַ (‘ā•nî), and אִיבָּיִן (‘ēb•yôn), are used in Proverbs to describe those who are poor through no fault of their own. These are the truly needy or humbled, as a lost class of humanity. Most often, the context is one of compassion, where God is pictured caring about the poor, and the rich are encouraged to help them. They may be oppressed by birth, tyranny, physical or mental disability, or natural disaster. Children, the weak, and the aged certainly fit this category.

This proverb does not refer to someone poor through laziness or timidity. When responsibility is implied, the Hebrew adjective, רָשׁ (rāš, pronounced “rash”), is consistently used. This רָשׁ (rāš) does not always carry a negative connotation. In the Book of Proverbs, it’s used eight times in a neutral or supportive way, but on six occasions, when a judgement is implied, רָשׁ (rāš) is always used. These implications, the suggestions of personal responsibility, are definitely negative:

- The poor man does not hear a rebuke (Proverbs 13:8)
- He is destroyed for lack of judgment ( Proverbs 13:23)
- He is hated even by his own neighbor ( Proverbs 14:20)
- He is hated by all his brothers and friends ( Proverbs 19:7)
- He is a slave through borrowing ( Proverbs 22:7)
- He is an oppressor of the poor (dal) ( Proverbs 28:3)

In the text of Proverbs 21:13, however, the Hebrew word poor (dal) is used: The poor who are not responsible for their poverty. Sometimes, we may shrink back from acknowledging the poor, because we don’t want to embarrass them with a personal judgement. But if we know that they did not cause their need, and we ignore them anyway, we’ve unjustly condemned them as responsible for their need.

## Responsibility and Retribution

This proverb illustrates two important principles: Personal responsibility and retribution. We are responsible for what we know, not for what we don’t know. We’re responsible to help the poor right around us, not necessarily the poor in a distant land. That may mean spending our even more valuable time and attention. Yet, with modern communications, even distant lands are nearby. If we deliberately isolate ourselves from the plight of the poor, we are inviting others to do the same to us. We reap what we sow. We do not know when our own cries will go unanswered, but the text guarantees it. Classic commentator Matthew Henry repeats: “God will be deaf to the prayer of those who are deaf to the cries of the poor.”

## The Cry According to Howard Dayton

Howard Dayton<sup>1</sup>, founder of Compass Ministries, says that our supporting or ignoring the poor affects us in three areas:



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- Prayer - Our hardheartedness for the poor may cause unanswered prayer: "Is this not the fast which I choose...to divide your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into the house? ...Then you will call and the LORD will answer," Isaiah 58:6-9.
- Provision - Our giving to the needy will determine our provision: "He who gives to the poor will never want, but he who shuts his eyes will have many curses," Proverbs 28:27.
- Knowing Jesus Intimately - If we refuse or neglect to share our resources with the poor, we are keeping our distance from the Lord himself: " 'He pled the cause of the afflicted and the needy; then it was well. Is that not what it means to know Me?' declares the LORD," Jeremiah 22:16.

## Cheaper than Insurance



If we hear someone agonizing in need, we must be very careful not to snub them. Sensitivity and generosity to the poor, especially those poor through no fault of their own, is a cheaper alternative to traditional insurance. It's a way to secure your prosperity. Pay your premiums by acknowledging their plight, and you will not be ignored in your time of need. Our financial security is determined by how we treat the deserving poor. Prudent generosity short-term ensures prosperity long-term. To quote from the wise theologian, Jonathan Edwards, in his classic, *Christian Charity*, "When a man charitably gives to his neighbor in want, the giver has the greatest advantage by it, even greater than the receiver."

## OUR CREATOR, REDEEMER, AND FRIEND

Jesus never ignored humble pleas for help. The prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 42:3) foretold that the Messiah would not "break a bruised reed or extinguish a smoldering wick."

Jesus said that they who show mercy will receive mercy (Matthew 5:7). This mirrors our proverb here, implying that whoever deliberately withholds mercy will find mercy withheld from him.

Jesus even invited ALL who need help to come to Him (Matthew 11:28-29). What amazing love! What infinite capacity to serve!



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## APPLICATION

- Memorize the text in your favourite translations and think about it often.
- Compare the two keywords for poor: poor (d?l, pronounced “dahl”) and poor (r?š, pronounced “rash”).
- Identify those who genuinely need help and help them *without delay*.
- When designating a gift to a charity, pick “Where Needed Most” since it is most likely meeting a sudden, not self induced, need. Consider <https://www.compassion.ca/>
- View the poor with humility, not as a nuisance. They may be an opportunity to ensure your own welfare.

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



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## KEY WORDS

charity, generosity, humility, insurance, less assets (quantity), poor (dāl pronounced “dahl”), security, stinginess, poor (rāš pronounced “rash”), bf sharing

## ILLUSTRATION

### Who is Generous Genevieve?



Generous Genevieve loves to give and has a big heart. Sometimes she chuckles to herself as she gives her gifts. Now here's a secret about her giving: She only gives to those who really need it—not just to anyone who asks for a handout. She gives because she thinks it's the right thing to do.

Strangely enough, the more she gave to those in genuine need, the more she got back. Some people give in order to get, but she considers that mere trading. Generous Genevieve gives for the sheer thrill of it. By giving she is keeping herself from emotional cancer. Emotional cancer, also known as greed, can take over one's heart and destroy their ability to enjoy even the simple things of life. Genevieve gives in order to increase her giving capacity.

Sometimes it hurts Genevieve to give. Sometimes she is short of cash because she has given to someone else, but that shortage doesn't last long.

Genevieve believes that there is always a reward for giving to those in need. She thinks that her generosity will come back to her benefit sooner or later. She coined the expression, “What goes



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around—comes around.”



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## FOOTNOTES

1 Howard Dayton, (This email address is being protected from spambots. You need JavaScript enabled to view it.

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