

How can you get God's full reward? (22:4)

The reward of humility *and* the fear of the LORD are riches, honor and life.

THE TEXT (NASB)

The reward of humility *and* the fear of the LORD are riches, honor and life.

By humility and the fear of the LORD are riches, and honor, and life. KJV - Proverbs 22:4

INTRODUCTION

[How Can You Get God's Best?](#)

Humility!

Humility offers a reward in three dimensions: Wealth, dignity, and life itself. Most of us think mostly about hard cash and valuable things. God's real reward has many dimensions for those who struggle to live humbly.

Humility? What is humility?



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COMMENTARY

Accuracy of Translation



Before focusing on “humility,” let’s make sure the proverb is translated accurately. The translations from Hebrew are identical in most English versions, and much the same in Spanish and German. We find a minor discrepancy in Young’s Literal Translation, “The end of humility is the fear of Jehovah, riches, honour, and life.” So, “fear of the LORD” may be the first product of humility, rather than a second, added requirement for the resulting, three-fold blessing.

The first conjunction, “and,” appears in italics, because it’s absent in the Hebrew. So the Keil & Deitzsch commentary suggests it be translated: “The reward of humility is the fear of the Lord, resulting in riches, honour, and life.” So humility produces fear of the LORD, which in turn draws the three-fold divine blessing. So this minor ambiguity of the text conveys a single reality: The LORD blesses the humble—specifically those who fear him—with a triple blessing.

Humility

What is humility? And fear of the LORD? Humility or the habit of acting humbly signifies an “unassuming” disposition, a character without “presumption.” So in fact, humility is a true and accurate awareness of our own real importance, our real place in the world. Its synonyms include: Meek, lowly, gentle, quiet, unassuming, and poor in spirit. Humility does not mean thinking ourselves worthless. It means thinking little about ourselves, and thinking more about others. It means directing our attention truthfully to the Big Picture.

The Hebrew word for “humility,” עֲנוּה (ʿă•nā•wāh, pronounced “ă-nah-vah”), is closely related to the results of affliction. The Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament (TWOT) says: “It is the goal which God intended when he afflicted his people and toward which they are to endure affliction. The humble consider and experience God as their Deliverer (Psalm 10:17; 76:9) receiving grace...from him (Proverbs 3:34). They keep his ordinances (Zephaniah 2:3). They wait on God (Psalm 37:11) and are lead by him (Psalm 25:9).”



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Strangely, this word first appears in 2 Samuel 22:36, to describe the humility of God himself. Does this mean that God suffered to learn humility? It seems bizarre that the Creator of the Universe would stoop to suffer. Yet in Jesus Christ, God himself experiences being broken. Brokenness is the prerequisite for humility. It hurts to be broken.

The Fear of the LORD



The fear of the LORD is not inborn, but learned. Parents are commanded to train their children “in the discipline and instruction” of the LORD. To fear the LORD means to hold Him truly in the highest regard and reverence. This fear is not terror and panic, but the greatest, most honest respect and reverence. Terror and panic lead to paralysis, anxiety, and even death. Extreme respect and reverence lead to admiration, obedience, and worship.

Fear of the LORD must be understood its original context. Here, Deuteronomy 10:12-13 sheds much light: “Now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments and statutes of the LORD, which I am commanding you today for your good?”

So the fear of the LORD includes walking with Him, loving Him, serving Him, and obeying His instructions. It's for our own good, not for His ego. We could not love, walk with, or serve someone with all our heart and all our soul, if we lived in terror of Him.

Trusting the Master, not the Method

The greatest thing about our Universe is not a thing; it's a Person, God. This is counter-intuitive. We'd like to think that God doesn't exist, or He's uninterested in our puny lives. Untrue. He's so interested in us, that he numbers all the hairs on our head (Matthew 10:30). He wants us to prosper in every way, even financially, but under His direction. God never gave Israel the same battle plan twice, because He wanted them to trust the Master, rather than the method. This is not what we're taught in our schools; as Generations puts it so well: “Pride in human achievement and self-assurance constituent the very backbone of modern education. It would be against the law to fear God or to teach the fear of God in those classrooms.”¹



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This modern “self-discovery” and “self-satisfaction” is self-defeating. If we or our kids think we’re the best things in the universe, then nothing in our lives is worthy of us; nothing can satisfy us. If we realize that God loves us and is in control, then everything can be to our own benefit (Romans 8:28). So this proverb invites us to enter into a partnership with God, including a financial partnership, but it cannot be an equal partnership.

Sin is Not Tolerated

We do need to fear the LORD, simply because He is all-holy and will never tolerate sin. Human beings are sinners and cannot co-exist with a holy God. So the LORD is sometimes called a “consuming fire.” To develop a cavalier attitude towards God is to court disaster. He wants us to know beyond all doubt that He has absolutely no need for any of our skills or assets. He is in no way dependent on us. So an essential component of the fear of the LORD is the knowledge that we need Him totally. He does not need us nor our money. To discover more about the fear of the LORD see Proverbs 15:16 and read the response to the question: [How much is enough?](#)

Fear Through Fun



Moses instructions on fear of the LORD in the Book of Deuteronomy is fascinating:

You shall surely tithe all the produce from what you sow, which comes out of the field every year. You shall eat in the presence of the LORD your God, at the place where He chooses to establish His name, the tithe of your grain, your new wine, your oil, and the firstborn of your herd and your flock, so that you may learn to fear the LORD your God always. You may spend the money for whatever your heart desires: For oxen, or sheep, or wine, or strong drink, or whatever your heart desires; and there you shall eat in the presence of the LORD your God and rejoice, you and your household.

Deuteronomy 14:22-26



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I'm amazed that the prescription for learning fear of the LORD is having a party! But it's not a party for wickedness; rather it's for celebrating the goodness and greatness of God. It is funded by the tithe, the tenth of income dedicated to God and his purposes. Again, God is in NO WAY dependent on any human gift.

The Three Dimensions of “Reward”

Let's return to our proverb and look closely at its second phrase, the reward: Riches, honour, and life. Note that the word reward is singular, not plural, implying that all three come together as a single whole. They may come like three small grapes which grow in size, together. Take a look at this video from Star Trek where Kirk plays Spock in a game of 3D chess.

[Click here to view video](#)

I am not saying that we get God's full reward by playing chess. The video is meant simply to expand our thinking about God's full-bodied blessing. We see an example in the life of King David at the time of his death: “Then he (David) died in a ripe old age, full of days, riches and honour,” 1 Chronicles 29:28. Note God blessed David with the three dimensional reward: (3) honour, (2) riches, and (1) life as a ripe old age. But David had more than simply “length of days” on earth. He looked forward to everlasting life—to dwell in the house of the LORD forever (Psalm 23:6).

One of King David's descendants, King Hezekiah was also blessed with immense riches and honour (2 Chronicles 32:27). But he did not live long to enjoy his grand inheritance, and neither did his wicked son, Manasseh. Hezekiah lacked the wisdom to use his great wealth. With more wisdom, he would have avoided the naive display of riches that attracted his future enemies, wasps to honey described in Isaiah 39:1-8.

Reward of Riches

The Hebrew word for “riches,” עֲשָׂרָה (ʿōšārā, pronounced “ō-shāre”), is used six times in Proverbs, and its verbal form is explained in detail in Proverbs 10:22. It never refers to spiritual riches, but always to material possessions. So I must disagree with the commentaries of Matthew Henry and John Gill, who want to include the spiritual here. Henry and Gill are obviously right to insist that spiritual riches far exceed material wealth, but this text does not point there. Proverbs 10:22 and 28:20 help us understand the tension between spiritual and material riches. Believers will choose to sacrifice short-term material wealth for permanent spiritual wealth. As missionary martyr Jim Elliot said, “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.”

The Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament (TWOT) has it right: “As in so many areas of life, the evil is not in one's riches, but in one's attitude toward them.” So the apostle Paul wrote



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“not money but the love of money is a root of all types of evil,” 1 Timothy 6:10.

We read in Ecclesiastes, “He who loves money will never be satisfied with money.” Right. Riches that are truly God-blessed come as the by-product of a righteous life sometimes. They are not the pursuit of a righteous life. God-blessed wealth does not come through the short-sighted pursuit of cash. Hasty money is not blessed. Toggle through the texts associated with [Quick Buck Betty](#) to learn more about the “quick buck.”

Reward of Honour



What of honour? The Hebrew word for “honour,” כבוד (kā•bōd, pronounced “kah-vōd”), occurs 376 times in the Bible. The root word means “heavy” or “weighty.” Figuratively, it refers to someone who carries weight or importance in society, someone impressive and worthy of respect. The word appears first in Genesis 31:1 when it refers to the wealth of Laban. It refers to prestige and achievements, not so much in the sense of material assets, but in the sense of glory, splendour, and aura of accomplishment—all the good things someone has attained.

One might ask, why would we respect someone who reveres another (here, the LORD)? Aren't we supposed to admire rebels, who have the courage to stand on their own? Yet honour is meaningful only in public life. And the rebel, like a man on a deserted island, has chosen a kind of loneliness. To be honoured, we must first be with others, and we must choose, not to “go up,” but to “go down.” So paradoxically, but truly, God promises honour to those who show humility. He gives honour to those who honour Him (1 Samuel 2:30).

Reward of Life



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Life is the last reward promised, but it is clearly most important. Both riches and honour are meaningless to a corpse. Yet the life described in this proverb is written to people already alive, so what kind of life is it? How is it better than the life we already have? “Life” must mean more than ordinary survival. Does it mean longer life, healthier life, happier life, or a more fulfilling life?

The Hebrew word for life, “hay,” is used over 450 times, appearing first in Genesis 1:20. Here it describes the swarms of living beings, first created by God. Wherever it appears, it signifies activity, growth, and motion. As the TWOT says:



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Throughout the [Old Testament], the possession of life is an intrinsic good... life as the experience of life, rather than an abstract principle of vitality... Life is the ability to exercise all one's vital power to the fullest: death is the opposite. The verb (haya), 'to live,' is [existing] somewhere on the scale between the fullest enjoyment of all one's powers... with health and prosperity, on the one hand, and descent into trouble, sickness and death, on the other.

Moses dying words to the people of Israel in Deuteronomy 30:15-20 are wonderful, as he offers them two choices: Life and prosperity, or death and adversity. He must tell them point-blank, something that should be obvious, but that we often ignore: "Choose life."

Rewards by Their Significance

I believe the sequence of rewards here, in order of real importance, runs: first, life; second, honour; and third, riches. I put them in reverse order for the following reasons:

- Proverbs 22:1 recognizes honour ahead of riches, even great riches.
- Proverbs 3:16 puts life alone in the right hand; riches and honour together in the left.
- In Hebrew (I've been told), when many items are listed, the most important comes last.
- On reflection, we realize that honour and riches are worthless to someone dead.

Given these four points, the three dimensions of reward are not of equal significance.

Basic Arithmetic

An analogy for the sequence of rewards can be found in arithmetic. The product of multiplication is generated by the multipliers. So: Full Reward = Riches X Honour X Life. Now, we know that $3 \times 3 \times 3 = 27$, but if any of the three multipliers is zero – or negative, the entire product is transformed. So: $3 \times 3 \times 0 = 0$. A dead man does not benefit from any of his riches or honour. So all multipliers are not equally weighted. Again, in arithmetic terms: Riches + Honour (the weak left hand of Proverbs 3:16) < Life (the strong right hand).

We might also consider the rewards in the form of a negative arithmetical sequence: The reward for Arrogance, resulting in Defiance of the LORD, is Poverty, Disgrace, and Death.



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OUR CREATOR, REDEEMER, AND FRIEND

Jesus once met a rich, young ruler, a wealthy and respectable man who came on his own initiative. He already had riches and honour, but sensed something important was still missing in life. He wanted a life free from decay—New Life.

Jesus told him, “Sell all that you have, give it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.” Jesus was not opposed to wealth. Jesus wanted the young man to be wealthy, but told him to exchange his earthly treasures for heavenly treasure. So of the three blessings, Riches, Honour, and Life, the most important is life!

A wise wealth manager uses his short-term wealth to acquire permanent wealth. Don't we long to life forever healthy, forever respected, and forever secure? Jesus offered this to the rich young ruler, but sadly the youth loved his fleeting wealth too much (Luke 18:18-23).

APPLICATION

- Memorize the text in your favourite Bible translation and think about it often.
- Review events in your life which cost you money. Were you proud and arrogant shortly before?
- List examples of honour being of great value—even more than wealth.
- Determine how you can personally increase your fear of the LORD.
- Research God's full reward for Jehoshaphat in 2 Chronicles 16:9, 17:3,4,5, 18:31

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



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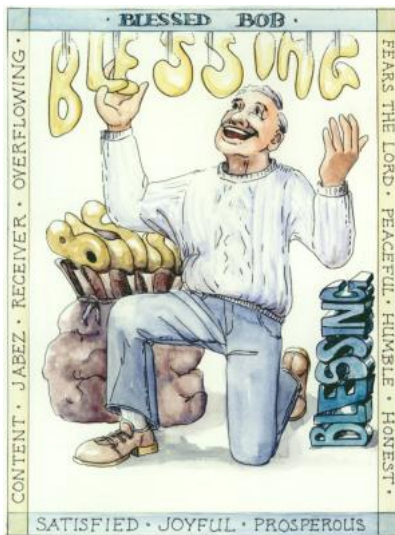
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KEY WORDS

arrogance, dishonesty, fear, honesty, honor, humility, life, LORD, more assets (quantity), reward, wealth

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!



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FOOTNOTES

1. Generations Family Devotional on Proverbs 22:4 accessed 22 June 2022.

