

# Who says money can't buy happiness? (14:21)

He who despises his neighbor sins, but happy is he who is gracious to the poor.

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## THE TEXT (NASB)

He who despises his neighbor sins, but happy is he who is gracious to the poor.

*He that despiseth his neighbour sinneth: but he that hath mercy on the poor, happy is he.  
Classic KJV - Proverbs 14:21*

## INTRODUCTION



We all want to be happy—all of us, and money can buy happiness! How? Give it to the poor.  
It's really an unhappy weakness to disdain any of our neighbours, but especially those in need.  
The rich need the poor, in fact, even more than the poor need the rich.



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## COMMENTARY

The popular financial strategy runs something like this: “Happiness comes in spending all our spare money on our own entertainment.” This proverb says exactly the opposite: Happiness comes in sharing with those in need. And it’s easy to find them. God arranges things so that we meet the poor among our neighbours and colleagues, in the course of our everyday activities

Sometimes urban planners deliberately design districts according to financial status. That may make for more homogeneous housing and better investments, but impairs the happiness of the rich and health of the poor. The poor need the help of the rich, and the rich need the poor to save them from self-worship: The I-land of Annihilation. The poor provide the wealthy with the happiness of generosity. The rich, trapped in themselves, are doomed to misery.

Following the destruction of much of Paris in a civil war, 19th century French urban planners rebuilt some neighborhoods with “layered” townhouses: The wealthy on the first two floors, the middle-class on the third floors, and the poor in the attics, so everyone had to rub shoulders.

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### Translation: *Poor, Gracious*



The Hebrew word for “poor” here, עָנִי (ʿā•nî, pronounced “ah-nee”), is used 26 times in the Bible, often translated as “meek” or “humble.” It’s used first in Numbers 12:3, when Moses is described as the most humble man in the world. Its primary meaning is not financial poverty, but spiritual poverty or humility: Someone free from any sense of their own self-importance. It’s the word that King David used to describe himself in Psalm 34:6. Those who are “poor” are not insulted by this: The fact is, they hardly think about themselves at all. They’re focused on others and on God. Such people often have few material resources, because they don’t aggressively pursue wealth. They seek more substantial treasure.

The Hebrew word for “gracious,” חָנָן (hā•nān, pronounced “khah-nan”), stems from a root verb that means, “to bend or stoop in kindness to an inferior.” It doesn’t necessarily imply generosity or direct monetary gift-giving. It may mean simply noticing them, greeting them with a friendly word or smile. It may mean more. The importance of this “noticing” reveals that our own true wealth is really our time. Nothing is more important than our time, and therefore giving the



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needy our time. As has been said, “You can give without loving, but you can’t love without giving.”

## Happiness Clarified

The Hebrew word for “happy,” אֲשֶׁר־רֵא (āš•rê, pronounced “ash-ray”), is used 45 times in the Bible and usually translated as “blessed.” For example, in Psalm 41:1 we read, “How blessed is he who considers the helpless.” It’s first used at Deuteronomy 33:29: “Blessed are you, O Israel; Who is like you, a people saved by the LORD. Who is the shield of your help and the sword of your majesty! So your enemies will cringe before you, and you will tread upon their high places.”

God loves to help those in need, and whenever we do the same, God blesses us.

## Don’t Indulge; Be Happy



“He who gives to the poor will never want, but he who shuts his eyes will have many curses,” says Proverbs 28:27, warning that it’s better to share our blessings and wealth, instead of hoarding or spending on ourselves. Elizabeth Dunn PhD (UBC Psychology) and Michael Norton (Harvard Business) rediscovered this timeless truth in their *Happy Money: The Science of Smarter Spending*. They found that happiness comes, not from overindulging, but under-indulging and giving away our surplus to others.

This academic research confirmed God’s promise. We receive happiness, blessings, when we give to others, especially one of God’s five favourite charities: Full-time ministers, the poor, widows, orphans, and refugees.<sup>1</sup> The text does not say we should be gracious to all our neighbours. We should be kind to all, but the greatest satisfaction comes when we’re kind to the poor.

How much money do we need to be happy? Let’s think about it. What’s our number?

Many of us just aren’t content with what we now have, so we’re constantly angling for a raise at work, befriending aged relatives, or springing for lottery tickets—the tax on stupidity.



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So is it crazy to ask how much money we need to be happy? The notion that money can't buy happiness has been tossed around forever—even before yoga came into vogue. But there is a measurable connection between income and contentment; not surprisingly, people with a comfortable living standard are happier than people in poverty.

The catch: Once we're comfortable, any additional income doesn't buy any extra happiness. The magic number defining this "comfortable standard" varies by territory, but in the United States, it falls somewhere around \$75,000, just slightly over the average family income. With Gallup data from almost half a million Americans, Princeton researchers found that higher household incomes are associated with contented daily attitudes—but the beneficial effects of money taper off entirely after the \$75,000 mark.

[Read the rest at: "Don't Indulge; Be Happy" by Elizabeth Dunn and Michael Norton](#)

## Giving: The Enemy of Poverty

In his book, *Business at its Best*, Robert J. Tamasy correctly identifies giving as the enemy of poverty: "Perhaps the most profound statement about giving I have ever heard came from a friend who for many years has led an organization to assist the poor in a very neglected area of this city. He told me, 'The greatest poverty is the inability to give.' ... Regardless of your level of affluence, according to that statement, if you fail to give from what you have, you are the poorer for it."<sup>2</sup>

He does not refer to the incapacity to give, but the unwillingness to share from whatever you have. Giving is not only the opposite of greed, but it also breaks the power of poverty.



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## OUR CREATOR, REDEEMER, AND FRIEND

Jesus was once asked, "Who is my neighbour?"

Jesus told the story of a traveller who was robbed and left half-dead by the roadside. A religious man came by, and, rather than helping, he walked by deliberately on the far side of the road. Then someone of high social standing came along and also ignored the helpless victim. Finally a foreigner passed by, nursed him back to consciousness, and arranged for ongoing medical care (Luke 10:30-37).

The point is this: God expects us to assist whoever comes across our path and happens to be in need, especially if they're in need of a little of our time. If we can give them our time, the money comes easily.

## APPLICATION

- Memorize the text in your favourite Bible translation and think about it often.
- Give generously to the poor and you will increase your own happiness. You can read more in this article by Susan Johnston: ["Why Money Really Can Buy Happiness."](#)
- Enlarge your definition of the poor to include the discouraged and downcast.
- Give your poorer neighbors preference over your richer neighbors—the opposite of what is usually done.

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



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## KEY WORDS

better life (quality), charity, hate, entertainment, ethical investing, financial status, generosity, gracious, happy, love, neighbor, poor (אֶנִּי pronounced “ah-nee”), satisfaction, sin, 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. The table below shows God's five favourite charities as stated in the Mosaic Law. The first column shows my commentary.

	Orphan	Widow	Alien	Levite	Poor
Hebrew Word	יָתוֹם <a href="#">wə-yā-tō-wm</a>	אַלְמָנָה	גֵּר		עָנִי
Strong Number	Strong's 3490 yathom An orphan or fatherless child	Strong's 490 almanah A widow	Strong's 1616  a sojourner, stranger, alien, immigrant, foreigner		Strong's 6041  poor, afflicted, humble, needy
Both without a man in the family. Husbands should provide and protect !	Exodus 22:22 You shall not afflict any widow or orphan.	Exodus 22:22 You shall not afflict any widow or orphan.			Exodus 22:25 Now in case a countryman of yours becomes poor and his means with regard to you falter, then you are to sustain him, like a stranger or a sojourner, that he may live with you.
Effort sometimes required by those in need. Receiver should expend some effort.	Deut. 10:18 He [ the LORD] executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and shows His love for the alien by giving him food and clothing.	Deut. 10:18 He [ the LORD] executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and shows His love for the alien by giving him food and clothing.	Deut. 10:18 He [ the LORD] executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and shows His love for the alien by giving him food and clothing.		Leviticus 19:10 Nor shall you glean your vineyard, nor shall you gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the





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				needy and for the stranger. I am the LORD your God
Deut. 14:29 The Levite, because he has no portion or inheritance among you, and the alien, the orphan and the widow who are in your town, shall come and eat and be satisfied, in order that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hand which you do.	Deut. 14:29 The Levite, because he has no portion or inheritance among you, and the alien, the orphan and the widow who are in your town, shall come and eat and be satisfied, in order that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hand which you do.	Deut. 14:29 The Levite, because he has no portion or inheritance among you, and the alien, the orphan and the widow who are in your town, shall come and eat and be satisfied, in order that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hand which you do.	Deut. 14:29 The Levite, because he has no portion or inheritance among you, and the alien, the orphan and the widow who are in your town, shall come and eat and be satisfied, in order that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hand which you do.	Leviticus 23:22 When you reap the harvest of your land, moreover, you shall not reap to the very corners of your field nor gather the gleaning of your harvest; you are to leave them for the needy and the alien. I am the LORD your God
Deut 16:11 and you shall rejoice before the LORD your God, you and your son and your daughter and your male and female servants and the Levite who is in your town, and the stranger and the orphan and the widow who are in your midst, in the	Deut 16:11 and you shall rejoice before the LORD your God, you and your son and your daughter and your male and female servants and the Levite who is in your town, and the stranger and the orphan and the widow who are in your midst, in the	Deut 16:11 and you shall rejoice before the LORD your God, you and your son and your daughter and your male and female servants and the Levite who is in your town, and the stranger and the orphan and the widow who are in your midst, in the	Deut 16:11 and you shall rejoice before the LORD your God, you and your son and your daughter and your male and female servants and the Levite who is in your town, and the stranger and the orphan and the widow who are in your midst, in the	Deut. 15:11 For the poor will never cease to be in the land; therefore I command you, saying, 'You shall freely open your hand to your brother, to your needy and poor (6041) in your land.



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	place where the LORD your God chooses to establish His name. Deut 16:14 and you shall rejoice in your feast, you and your son and your daughter and your male and female servants and the Levite and the stranger and the orphan and the widow who are in your towns. Deut. 24:17 You shall not pervert the justice due an alien or an orphan, nor take a widow's garment in pledge.	place where the LORD your God chooses to establish His name. Deut 16:14 and you shall rejoice in your feast, you and your son and your daughter and your male and female servants and the Levite and the stranger and the orphan and the widow who are in your towns. Deut. 24:17 You shall not pervert the justice due an alien or an orphan, nor take a widow's garment in pledge.	place where the LORD your God chooses to establish His name. Deut 16:14 and you shall rejoice in your feast, you and your son and your daughter and your male and female servants and the Levite and the stranger and the orphan and the widow who are in your towns. Deut. 24:17 You shall not pervert the justice due an alien or an orphan, nor take a widow's garment in pledge.	place where the LORD your God chooses to establish His name. Deut 16:14 and you shall rejoice in your feast, you and your son and your daughter and your male and female servants and the Levite and the stranger and the orphan and the widow who are in your towns. Deut. 24:14 You shall not oppress a hired servant who is poor (6041) and needy, whether he is one of your countrymen or one of your aliens who is in your land in your towns.
Two descriptors - poor and needy				
	Deut. 24:19 When you reap your harvest in your field and have forgotten a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it; it shall be for the alien, for	Deut. 24:19 When you reap your harvest in your field and have forgotten a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it; it shall be for the alien, for	Deut. 24:19 When you reap your harvest in your field and have forgotten a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it; it shall be for the alien, for	



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for the widow, for the widow, for the widow,  
in order that the in order that the in order that the  
LORD your LORD your LORD your  
God may bless God may bless God may bless  
you in all the you in all the you in all the  
work of your work of your work of your  
hands. hands. hands.

Deut. 24:20 Deut. 24:20 Deut. 24:20  
When you beat When you beat When you beat  
your olive tree, your olive tree, your olive tree,  
you shall not go you shall not go you shall not go  
over the over the over the  
boughs again; it boughs again; it boughs again; it  
shall be for the shall be for the shall be for the  
alien, for the alien, for the alien, for the  
orphan, and for orphan, and for orphan, and for  
the widow. the widow. the widow.

Deut. 24:21 Deut. 24:21 Deut. 24:21  
When you When you When you  
gather the gather the gather the  
grapes of your grapes of your grapes of your  
vineyard, you vineyard, you vineyard, you  
shall not go shall not go shall not go  
over it again; it over it again; it over it again; it  
shall be for the shall be for the shall be for the  
alien, for the alien, for the alien, for the  
orphan, and for orphan, and for orphan, and for  
the widow. the widow. the widow.

Deut. 26:12 Deut. 26:12 Deut. 26:12 Deut. 26:12  
When you have When you have When you have When you have  
finished paying finished paying finished paying finished paying  
all the tithe of all the tithe of all the tithe of all the tithe of  
your increase in your increase in your increase in your increase in  
the third year, the third year, the third year, the third year,  
the year of the year of the year of the year of  
tithing, then you tithing, then you tithing, then you tithing, then you  
shall give it to shall give it to shall give it to shall give it to  
the Levite, to the Levite, to the Levite, to the Levite, to  
the stranger, to the stranger, to the stranger, to the stranger, to  
the orphan and the orphan and the orphan and the orphan and  
to the widow, to the widow, to the widow, to the widow,  
that they may that they may that they may that they may



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eat in your towns and be satisfied.	eat in your towns and be satisfied.	eat in your towns and be satisfied.	eat in your towns and be satisfied.
Deut. 26 13	Deut. 26 13	Deut. 26 13	Deut. 26 13
You shall say before the LORD your God, 'I have removed the sacred portion from my house, and also have given it to the Levite and the alien, the orphan and the widow,	You shall say before the LORD your God, 'I have removed the sacred portion from my house, and also have given it to the Levite and the alien, the orphan and the widow,	You shall say before the LORD your God, 'I have removed the sacred portion from my house, and also have given it to the Levite and the alien, the orphan and the widow,	You shall say before the LORD your God, 'I have removed the sacred portion from my house, and also have given it to the Levite and the alien, the orphan and the widow,
according to all Your commandments which You have commanded me; I have not transgressed or forgotten any of Your commandments.	according to all Your commandments which You have commanded me; I have not transgressed or forgotten any of Your commandments.	according to all Your commandments which You have commanded me; I have not transgressed or forgotten any of Your commandments.	according to all Your commandments which You have commanded me; I have not transgressed or forgotten any of Your commandments.
Deut 27: 19	Deut 27: 19	Deut 27: 19	Deut 27: 19
Cursed is one who distorts the justice due a stranger, an [f]orphan, or a widow.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.'	Cursed is one who distorts the justice due a stranger, an [f]orphan, or a widow.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.'	Cursed is one who distorts the justice due a stranger, an [f]orphan, or a widow.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.'	Cursed is one who distorts the justice due a stranger, an [f]orphan, or a widow.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.'

2. *Business at its Best* - Timeless Wisdom from Proverbs for Today's Workplace by Robert J. Tamasy Copyright 2015, p 112,113

