

# How does poverty affect family ties? (19:7)

All the brothers of a poor man hate him; how much more do his friends abandon him! He pursues *them with words, but they are gone.*

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## THE TEXT (NASB)

All the brothers of a poor man hate him; how much more do his friends abandon him! He pursues *them with words, but they are gone.*

*All the brethren of the poor do hate him: how much more do his friends go far from him? he pursueth them with words, yet they are wanting to him. KJV - Proverbs 19:7*

## INTRODUCTION



Poverty repels—even members of our own family!

There is a stigma to being poor: Brothers and sisters should be more loyal than friends, but poor siblings are often shunned, horribly. Family ties may be strong, but they're not unbreakable.

We all yearn for a friendship that's more secure and supportive even than family ties.



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## COMMENTARY

Like many other texts, Proverbs 19:7 is descriptive and not prescriptive. Indeed, it's a sad commentary on the effects of poverty on our closest relationships. The natural tendency to shun the poor is expressly forbidden in Leviticus 25:35. "Now in case a countryman [brother] of yours becomes poor and his means with regard to you falter, then you are to sustain him... that he may live with you." God is aware of the evil in human hearts. The Law of Moses is meant to heighten our own awareness of right and wrong. However, the Laws of Moses cannot generate the desire and strength to do good.

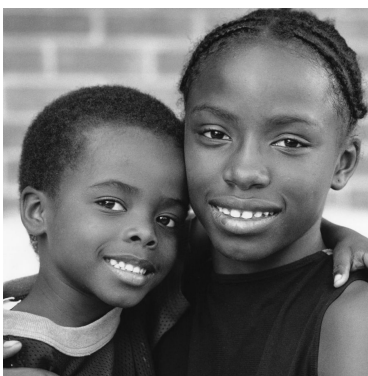
### Translation: *Hate, Brothers, Abandon*

The Hebrew word for "hate" here, שָׂנֵא (śā•nē, pronounced "sah-nay"), means exactly what it says: "hate, detest, despise." It's a powerful word, denying any desire for contact or interaction with another. It is the opposite of love. Being hated is a high price to pay for poverty, and when the poverty might be avoided, it's a high price to pay for financial carelessness!

The term "brothers" here is the Hebrew word, אָח (āḥ, pronounced "akh"), and it's used roughly 600 times in the Bible, equally translated as relatives, fellow, countryman, and friend. It narrowly denotes half-brothers and cousins, but always those in the same family tree. The Hebrew word for sister is אחות (ā•ḥōt, pronounced "ah-khōth").

The Hebrew for "abandon," רָחַק (rā•ḥāq, pronounced "rawkhak"), indicates a great distance between the parties. It's more than just "a cold shoulder." Better-off people resolutely withdraw from the poor, on their own initiative.

### Oh, Brother!



Unfortunately, there's an excessive "gender sensitivity" in North American culture today. Many now refuse to read the word, "brother," in a broad, inclusive sense, as it was used for centuries in English and Romance languages. They bristle that



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expression here is not “brother and sister.” This text is not commenting on “male and female.” It’s comparing the rejection of the poor by their siblings with their being shunned by friends—period. Friends desert the poor quickly; siblings somewhat more slowly.

## Classic Comment

The classic preacher-commentator Matthew Henry writes: “Even his own relations are shy of him, because he is needy and craving, and expects something from them, and because they look upon him as a blemish to their family; and then no marvel if others of his friends, that were nothing akin to him, go far from him, to get out of his way.

## Begging and Causes of Poverty

Though the poor pursue them only with words—that’s all he has—siblings and friends flee from him. How do the poor pursue? Directly or indirectly, they ask for financial help: “Just until I get paid...” Or, “Remember the time when we...” Or, “Come on, you know me—I’ll pay you back.” While mooching from family and friends is uncomfortable, being mooched by family or friends can be worse. Everyone needs their dignity, and being confronted with someone else’s indignity can be even more undignified.

Sometimes we fall into poverty through mishap or sickness. Sometimes we haven’t prepared properly for the “lean” years, when our earnings drop from unpredictable circumstances. There are lots of ways to become poor. Poverty is unleashed by accident, flood, sickness, or earthquake. Sometimes we need help desperately, especially from family or friends.

## Family Responses

How does the truth of this proverb play out in a family context? When children are all young and living in their parents’ home, there may be much unity. If they take on careers that differ greatly from each other, some high-paying and some low-paying, or if some manage their assets well and others badly, then a rift develops between wealthier and poorer siblings. All else being equal, if we’re lazy, reckless, and poor, maybe we should expect a little distance from both friends and family.

It’s noteworthy that father and mother are not mentioned among those hating the poor man. Parents will love the foolish child whose siblings reject him. There’s an English expression, “A face only a mother could love,” an ugly face, and this proverb may describes someone only a parent could love. Yet no human relationship should be as tight as that between a husband and a wife. For centuries, marriage vows have included the words, “for richer, for poorer.” Parents and spouses may be poverty-proof.

What happens when poverty comes suddenly, and relationships with family and friends are few



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or feeble? When there's little "social capital?" Then the need for personal insurance is urgent. A personal calamity like a disabling car accident can quickly drain any reserves, prompting friends and siblings to ask, "Why should we pay for their failure to carry proper insurance?" Yet some Christian communities, like the traditional Mennonites, carry little insurance. If a family's barn burns down, everyone rallies around to build a replacement. Financial interdependence with those of kindred spirit brings more joy and security than financial independence in isolation.

The communist system in theory has the noble aim of keeping people from extreme poverty, recognizing both poverty's social blight and its practical hardships. But rather than seeking to make the poor equally independent, it tries to make everybody equally, totally dependent on the state. As U.S. President Abraham Lincoln said, "You can't make the weak stronger, by making the strong weaker." The great 20th century theologian, Dr. Francis Schaeffer, said that the proper understanding of communism is to see it as a Christian heresy—Christian, in that it voiced its concern for the poor, but a heresy because it rejects the reality of the Saviour God and so makes the state into a divine authority.

Poverty can benefit our lives in that it reveals our most loyal companions.

## OUR CREATOR, REDEEMER, AND FRIEND

Jesus gave money to the poor. Leading His band of followers, He periodically told the group's treasurer, His betrayer Judas, to give to the poor from their jointly held funds (John 12:5, John 13:29).

When friends and even family fail, Jesus is willing to help. He said, "Come to me ALL (emphasis added) who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest," Matthew 11:28.

Our natural family may reject us if we are poor, but Jesus will accept us, if we just turn to Him.

## APPLICATION

- Memorize the text in your favourite Bible translation and think about it often.
- Check and correct any attitudes of rejection towards poorer siblings.
- Don't reject the poor even though others do.
- Learn how to earn money and manage it well.

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



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## KEY WORDS

communist, family, friend, hate, insurance, less assets (quantity), marriage, poor (rāš pronounced “rash”), wealth, 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.”

