

How much is enough? (15:16)

Better is a little with the fear of the LORD than great treasure and turmoil with it.

THE TEXT (NASB)

Better is a little with the fear of the LORD than great treasure and turmoil with it.

Better is little with the fear of the LORD than great treasure and trouble therewith. Classic KJV - Proverbs 15:16

INTRODUCTION

Most of us have at least a little, but is it enough?



When we have little, our first goal usually is to get more. This proverb suggests a different strategy.

This text speaks of a mix of the tangible and intangible, revealing the dual nature of humanity—body and spirit. There is a vital, intangible component to satisfaction. We need to recognize the true source of whatever blessings we now enjoy.

Most economic indicators focus only on the quantity of wealth. But good life is more than just having lots of assets. We are not just highly intelligent animals, as some believe. We have a spiritual existence that also needs attention. But “fear of the LORD” doesn’t sound very pleasant. What is it?



How much is enough? (15:16)

Better is a little with the fear of the LORD than great treasure and turmoil with it.

COMMENTARY

This text does not say that little is better than much. It does not suggest poverty is better than wealth. Clearly, “a little” is better than “nothing.” We are physical beings, needing at least “a little” in order to live. The author understands this. He does not imply that we’re pure spirits, surviving merely on “fear of the LORD.” Contrary to some pagan philosophies, like Buddhism, material assets are not to be shunned as evil. God likes material things; He made them.

The “fear of the LORD” means taking God seriously. Since the LORD is the “King of Kings and Lord of Lords,” then all human authority is under his authority. So, incidentally, we should respect and obey human government in all its forms, whenever it does not directly contradict God’s word. Yet, just as our respect for government should be “contained” by our respect for God, so should our respect for the marketplace be “contained.” So maybe we can begin understanding fear of the LORD by seeing what happens in its absence.

Is Ignorance Bliss or Turmoil?

Capitalism, as espoused by Adam Smith (The Wealth of Nations), does not consider intangibles like fear of the LORD. Smith and classical capitalist economics investigate natural wealth accumulation, then perhaps naively support unlimited wealth maximization. Many conservative economists believe the illusion that “more is always better”—or even “more is the only better.” So a consumption-driven society deliberately boosts its “standard of living,” by creating artificial needs, unhealthy obsessions, and then driving its financial metrics and economic indicators by feeding the disease. Blind consumption tries to bury the human need for security, love, and meaning, trying to suppress the spiritual, but this can only leave us consuming in tears. Wealth without wisdom is turmoil.

Translation: *Turmoil*

The Hebrew word for “turmoil” here, מְהוּמָה (mehû•māh, pronounced “me-hoo-mah”), is used twelve times in Scripture, and it is also translated as: “confusion, trouble, or panic.” The basic meaning of the root seems to be “a severe disturbance,” like a natural disaster. Most interesting: in ten of the twelve uses, this term depicts the intentions of the LORD toward those whom he disciplines or destroys. It’s used first in Deuteronomy 7:23, when the LORD says that he will send great “confusion” against the enemies of God’s people, until they are ruined.

Ignoring the Warning



How much is enough? (15:16)

Better is a little with the fear of the LORD than great treasure and turmoil with it.



What if I just don't believe all this? What if I'd rather concentrate on increasing my asset base, instead of taking my chances with this invisible, inaudible God? What if profit maximization is my primary purpose, my meaning in life? Many people seem to get along just fine without any thought of God. The text warns that those who ignore the LORD, focussing only on ever more wealth, end up "disturbed" by the LORD Himself. He uses different sorts of unavoidable turmoil to get their attention.

A Healthy Fear

The fear of the LORD is almost the opposite of normal anxiety or dread. It's really "an awesome respect for the LORD." If a tiger were loose in the room, we would shrink into unbearable stress and terror. The fear of the LORD is not like this. If we're standing on a lofty mountain or bridge, looking out over a river at sunset, we're awed and quieted by the grandeur before us, but respectful of the drop. This awe and respect is very, very good for us. In this way, fear of the LORD brings life, confidence, and good sense. It guides us and limits our pursuit of wealth. While other fears are painful, the fear of the LORD is happy! It helps us make wise choices. We need to learn it. Yet if God is good, why should we learn to fear Him? Isn't fear an emotion to be avoided? Why does Solomon insist that the fear of the LORD is good?

The very next text, Proverbs 15:17, is parallel in structure and sheds light on this puzzle. "Better is a dish of vegetables where love is, than a fattened ox and hatred with it." It equates fear of the LORD with the presence of "love." Read more about it here: [How much should you spend on food?](#)

To understand the fear of the Lord, we need to investigate its use in the Scriptures:

- The beginning of wisdom (Psalm 111:10, Proverbs 9:10).
- The instruction for wisdom (Proverbs 15:33).
- Wisdom (Job 28:28).
- Clean, unchanging (Psalm 19:9).
- The beginning of knowledge (Proverbs 1:7).
- The hatred of evil (Proverbs 8:13).
- A fountain of life (Proverbs 14:27).



How much is enough? (15:16)

Better is a little with the fear of the LORD than great treasure and turmoil with it.

- The Messiah's delight (Isaiah 11:3).
- Optional (Proverbs 1:29).
- Prolongs life (Proverbs 10:27).
- Good for us and our children (Jeremiah 32:38-41)
- Brings strong confidence (Proverbs 14:26).
- Leads to life (Proverbs 19:23).
- Produces a triple reward (Proverbs 22:4).

A Love-Based Fear

Can fear and love co-exist? That seems almost impossible. It's human nature to be suspicious and fearful of what we don't understand—especially if it may be more powerful than us. We read in the New Testament, 1 John 4:16-19, that "God is love... and there is no fear in love... the one who fears is not perfected in love." It seems that if we fear the LORD, we need to be afraid of nothing else. Fearing the LORD is treated as terror and tension, but with their antitheses, peace, and serenity. This is possible only if God is good and not "out to get us." In one sense, God wants us not to fear Him, yet in another, He surely wants us to fear sin, to fear offending Him, to respect the "mountain top." God hates and punishes pride and rebellion.

This fear is helpful and highly beneficial. We read in Jeremiah 32:40-41 that God puts the fear of Him into His children's hearts, so that "they will not turn from Me." God then says, "I will rejoice in doing them good." Imagine! It is very, very good to fear someone who rejoices in blessing us! To understand better the fear of the LORD, study this verse in its context: Moses said to the people, "Do not fear, for God has come to test you, that the fear of him may be before you that you may not sin," Exodus 20:20. Note the word fear is used in the same sentence yet in two different ways.

OUR CREATOR, REDEEMER, AND FRIEND

The LORD is the "Prince of peace," (Isaiah 9:6).

He *never* wants his followers to be in a state of terror. For example, when Jesus walked on water during a night storm toward the disciples' boat, they were terrified thinking a ghost - a supernatural being was approaching them while they had no means of escape. Jesus did not sadistically prolong their panic. He said, "Take courage; it is I, do not be afraid," (Mark 6:50).

Six times in the gospels Jesus tells his followers to "take courage."



How much is enough? (15:16)

Better is a little with the fear of the LORD than great treasure and turmoil with it.

APPLICATION

- Memorize the text in your favourite Bible translation and think about it often.
- Thank God right now for whatever you have, even if it seems insignificant.
- If you prefer to keep God out of your financial world, then you will have major sorrows. Ask God to guide you in your financial decisions. Do not ignore Him.
- Have you confused more with better? Simply having more things does not result in a better life.
- Ask the LORD to help you truly enjoy what you have now.

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



How much is enough? (15:16)

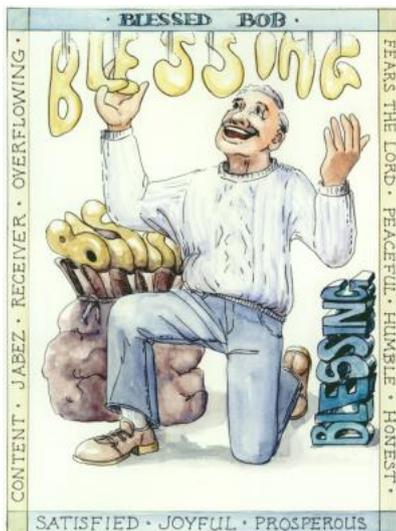
Better is a little with the fear of the LORD than great treasure and turmoil with it.

KEY WORDS

better life (quality), capitalism, contamination, contentment, distress, fear, LORD, prosperity, treasure, bf saving

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



How much is enough? (15:16)

Better is a little with the fear of the LORD than great treasure and turmoil with it.

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!

