

How does wealth affect friendships? (19:4)

THE TEXT (NASB)

Wealth adds many friends, but a poor man is separated from his friend.

Wealth maketh many friends; but the poor is separated from his neighbour. KJV - Proverbs 19:4

INTRODUCTION



Wealth brings popularity; poverty repels.

Wealth attracts friends like honey draws flies, but poor people are avoided like the plague. That's how The Message version of the Bible paraphrases this text. The attraction of wealth is described in Proverbs 19:6, and the repulsion of poverty, in Proverbs 19:7.

But... is wealth truly good for your social life?



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COMMENTARY



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This proverb describes a simple fact of life: We're drawn to those who might give us something, and we avoid those who may ask for something. The poor offer no material assistance nor profit, so we avoid them. It's not the poor who avoid us; it's middle-class and wealthy folk who duck them. The ESV renders the text, "a poor man is deserted by his friend." So poverty brings loneliness—or at least robs us of popularity. Some of us want wealth simply for the popularity, but that sort of appeal is really of questionable value. Popularity may foreshadow trouble. According to Proverbs 18:2 (ESV): "A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother."

Is Poverty is Contagious?



Some think that poverty is contagious. The thinking goes like this: If you hang around the poor, they'll drag you down to their level. They'll drain your resources. You'll pick up their loser mentality and pathetic habits. Your friends, who see you with them, may shun you too—best stay clear of the poor.

Some choose to be poor deliberately, taking vows of poverty a life of prayer. Some make themselves poor, so that they can better serve the poor. It's not common, but not unknown. In fact, Jesus made Himself poor so that others could be rich (2 Corinthians 8:9).

For their part, the poor tend to congregate, seeking affordable housing, so they form ghettos. To counteract this economic segregation, modern urban planners deliberately design communities with houses for the upper middle-class, single-family dwellings, interspersed with lower-middle class, multi-family units. It's an attempt to avoid ghettos and socially integrate the economic strata, with everyone in the community using the same shopping, community halls, and sports facilities.

Translation: *Friend*

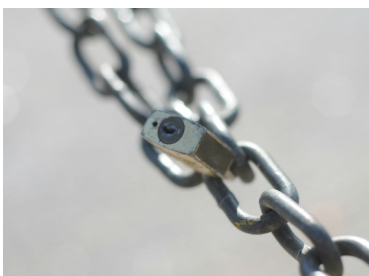
Who is a friend for the poor? The Hebrew word for "friend" here, רֵעַ (rēa', pronounced "rēh-akh"), is used 172 times in the Bible, also translated as "companion, fellow, neighbor, associate" or even simply "another." rēa' is used of close or occasional friendships. It's not the word used to describe the devoted friendship of David and Jonathan.



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For some reason, the KJV translates the same word in the same sentence differently—maybe suggesting a plausible interpretation. It translates *rēa'* the first time as “friend,” and the second time as “neighbour,” as if a friend would never desert a poor friend. Most translations, including German and Spanish, translate the word consistently in the text itself, though the Hebrew word has a variety of senses in other passages. It’s used in that oft-quoted passage: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” Leviticus 19:18.

Testing Friendships



Loving our neighbour as ourselves is precisely the problem. Loving a rich neighbour is easier than loving a poor neighbour. Money-scented love reveals the selfish weight of human nature. Rather than accepting someone for who they are, our treatment is perfumed by how much he has. Almost unconsciously, we may wonder, “What can I get out of this relationship?” or, “Will they make me feel like I should share?” or even, “Will I feel guilty if I don’t share?”

But... if the truth will set us free, a financial storm may really be good for our social life. A personal crisis may shake out the phonies from our true friends, just like a strong wind clears trees of their dead branches. A friend in need is a friend indeed.

Deceptive Appearances

Appearances inevitably play a part in who we choose for friends. We’re more likely to make friends with someone who looks well-groomed and put together than with someone who’s not. We’re more likely to help the well-groomed than the sloppy. The following video puts that theory to test.

[Click here to view video](#)

The appearance of a clean-shaven, busy businessman on the phone makes us willing to help, at least briefly, since we may feel that their financial need is a freak, one-time accident. On the other hand, it seems a waste of our resources, to give to some rough character, likely lacking a job due to poor personal hygiene. Read more about appearances in Proverbs 13:7: [How important is image?](#)



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OUR CREATOR, REDEEMER, AND FRIEND

Although others rejected the poor, Jesus did not.

When asked to validate His supernatural miracles, Jesus replied, “The blind receive sight and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them,” Matthew 11:5.

Normally, the poor would be marginalized by the Jewish rabbis, just like the blind, lame, lepers, and deaf. Jesus took a special interest in the poor. His life-goal was to give, not to get.

APPLICATION

- Memorize the text in your favourite Bible translation and think about it often.
- Befriend someone who is poor.
- Check your attitude—do you favour your richer acquaintances?
- Beware of “friends” who suddenly appear when it’s known that you have more wealth.

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



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KEY WORDS

better life (quality), contentment, friend, loneliness, popularity, poverty, wealth, poor (dāl pronounced “dahl”), bf sharing

ILLUSTRATION

Who is Tax-Driven Ted?



Death and taxes: The only things we can be sure of! Certainly that's the way Tax-Driven Ted sees it. Whereas others pay some or little attention to taxes, he is consumed by tax minimization. Ted is tax obsessed. Why? For many Canadians, if left unmanaged, taxes eliminate over 50% of income. In Canada tax freedom day falls in July.

Tax freedom day is the day of the year when you have paid all your taxes and can now keep the rest of the money you earn. Tax-Driven Ted will spend money just to get a write-off. He fails to seriously evaluate the underlying economics behind the decision and chooses to focus on the tax consequences. He loves to borrow money to invest simply because he can write off the interest costs of amount borrowed. This investment technique is called leveraging and is commonplace.

Ted doesn't believe he should pay any taxes. After all, the government wastes money. It's extremely inefficient. He uses every angle to reduce taxes. He's always looking for loopholes, credits, or write-offs. *His focus is not on customer satisfaction but on tax reduction.*



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He goes on trips and conferences so that he can take the tax write-offs. He loves limited partnerships investments and other tax shelters. For some investors tax considerations are secondary, but for Tax-Driven Ted, they come first.

