

# Economic and Spiritual Poverty

**Lesson in a Sentence:** Poverty is both an economic and spiritual condition.

## FOCUS:

- 1) Is it a sin to be wealthy?

**The BIG Picture:** There are two types of poverty: economic and spiritual. While the first type of poverty is experienced externally, the second type of poverty is internal. Conversely, while economic wealth represents the economy of the kingdom on earth, spiritual wealth represents the economy of the kingdom of Heaven.

Interestingly, the economic poor are often spiritually rich. For many poor people, their faith may be their greatest, and sometimes, only asset. Conversely, the economically wealthier have to deal with unique spiritual challenges such as materialism, consumerism, greed, and even the exploitation of the poor.

Of course, they both need Christ, we all do!

The Bible says, in *1 Timothy 6:10-For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. And some people, craving money, have wandered from the true faith and pierced themselves with many sorrows.* Notice, it does not say that money in and of itself is evil. We must be careful not to judge a person who has obtained financial blessings through hard work or through a rightful inheritance. Being wealthy is not sinful. In fact, many churches and Christian organizations often rely on the generosity of wealthier members or foundations for financial support.

Nevertheless, we must be honest. There are many unique ethical and spiritual challenges for those who are wealthier. Wealthy Christians have an obligation and responsibility to assist the poor. Overwhelmingly, it is the rich who oppress the poor. It is the wealthy corporations, economic systems, and structures that often perpetuate the cycle of poverty. It is the wealthy who are at the center of power, the poor on the fringes. In this world it is the rich who are powerful. This is why we need to pray for our wealthy Christian brothers and sisters. Wealthier Christians need to develop strong support systems, accountability relationships, and spiritual disciplines, in order to deal

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with the temptations, passions, ethical dilemmas, and greed which frequently exist in the world of wealth.

Jesus says, in *Matthew 26:11- You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me.* He also says, very disturbingly, *Matthew 19:23-24- "I tell you the truth; it is very hard for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. I'll say it again—it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God!"*

But there are those referred to as the middle class. This group is neither rich nor poor. They are burning the candle at both ends, working long hours, trying to live a decent life, paying the rent, taking care of their children, keeping the healthcare, maintaining their bills, etc. While this group is not economically poor, many live in fear of becoming poor. While they are not rich, they often get pulled into the seductive temptations of wealth, trying to "Keep up with the Jones".

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## Discussion:

1. Do people choose to be poor?
2. Do wealthier Christians have an obligation to assist the poor?
3. Are poorer people holier or more spiritual than wealthy people?
4. Are wealthy people holier or more spiritual than poorer people?
5. Can you be economically rich and spiritually poor?
6. Can you be and spiritually rich and economically poor?
7. Can you be and spiritually poor and economically poor?
8. Can you be and spiritually rich economically rich?

## Read:

*Luke 6:20-“God blesses you who are poor, for the Kingdom of God is yours.*

*Matthew 5:3- “God blesses those who are poor and realize their need for him, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.”*

In the Christian tradition these are called the beatitudes, from the Latin word meaning blessings.

Jesus turns conventional thinking on its head here, how is it possible to be poor and blessed at the same time? Jesus recognizes that according to the world’s standards the rich are the ones, who are blessed, but Jesus knows that it is those who are struggling economically and spiritually who will experience the true blessings of the Kingdom of Heaven.

In Luke Jesus is talking specifically about those who are financially poor. While God loves all people, the poor need special help, sometimes just to survive. God stands with these people in their poverty. Jesus knows and understands how it feels to live among the poor.

In Matthew Jesus is speaking to the spiritually poor. We have all experienced those moments of spiritual poverty. There are times in all of our lives when we feel spiritually bankrupt, hurting, and all alone. Jesus offers us a word of hope and encouragement. He reassures us that the pain of spiritual poverty will not last forever- *“for yours is the Kingdom of Heaven.”*

Ultimately it is spiritual wealth which matters most, as Jesus tells us in *Mark 8:36-37- And what do you benefit if you gain the whole* **There is much suffering in the world-physical, material, mental. The suffering of some can be blamed on the greed of others. The material and physical suffering is suffering from hunger, from homelessness, from all kinds of diseases. But the greatest suffering is being lonely, feeling unloved, having no one. I have come more and more to realize that it is being unwanted that is the worst disease that any human being can ever experience.-Mother Theresa**

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*world but lose your own soul? Is anything worth more than your soul?*  
Whether one is rich or poor we are all sinners. We all need Jesus Christ. We must all repent from our sins and confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. Economic wealth will not guarantee us heaven, neither will economic poverty. Only our faith in Jesus Christ will assure us of participation in the economy of Heaven.

Are you spiritually poor in your life right now? Commit or re-commit your life to Jesus right now. This in the end is the only wealth that matters.

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