

What does the Bible say about money and wealth?

"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (NIV, Matthew 6:19-21)

There is nothing inherently evil about owning the things we need. However, when we strive to collect wealth or possessions beyond our need, we may neglect our duty to God, to our families, and to mankind. Jesus said that serving God and serving wealth are incompatible goals:

"No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money. "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. (NIV, Matthew 6:24-25, 31-33)

In Jesus' time it was a common belief that wealth was a sign of God's favor and poverty was God's punishment for sin. Jesus flatly rejected that idea most clearly in the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus ([Luke 16:19-31](#)). The rich man ended up in hell at least partly because of his hard-heartedness toward the beggar Lazarus. His great wealth was obviously not a sign of God's favor. The beggar Lazarus ended up in heaven although he was about as impoverished as a man could be. His poverty was obviously not a sign of sinfulness or folly. Despite the Bible's many warnings against it, the idea that wealth is a sign of God's favor and that the poor have done something to deserve their condition persists as an undercurrent today that is sometimes used to justify callous economic and social policies.

The craving for wealth and possessions can lead us into all kinds of temptation. While we spend evenings and weekends earning extra money, we are depriving our families of our love and attention. We may cheat on our taxes. We may take unfair advantage of our customers, employers, or employees. We may even steal. We will attempt to rationalize our avarice by closing our minds and hearts to the needs and rights of others. In the process, we could become like Scrooge: stingy, bitter, and isolated.

Do not wear yourself out to get rich; have the wisdom to show restraint. Cast but a glance at riches, and they are gone, for they will surely sprout wings and fly off to the sky like an eagle. (NIV, Proverbs 23:4-5)

What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? (NIV, Matthew 16:26)

People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money,

have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. (NIV, 1 Timothy 6:9-11)

Those of us who are blessed with wealth beyond our need have a responsibility to share generously with the less fortunate. We should view our wealth as a gift from God, entrusted to us, to carry out his work on earth.

If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? (NIV, 1 John 3:17)

Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life. (NIV, 1 Timothy 6:17-19)

Dishonestly gained wealth can bring spiritual destruction to its possessor. The rationalization required to obtain and keep dishonest gain will turn a person cold and bitter. Dishonest gain brings only anxiety and fear of discovery -- never peace of mind.

'You shall not oppress your neighbor, nor rob him. The wages of a hired man are not to remain with you all night until morning. (NAS, Leviticus 19:13)

The LORD abhors dishonest scales, but accurate weights are his delight. (NIV, Proverbs 11:1)

He who walks righteously and speaks what is right, who rejects gain from extortion and keeps his hand from accepting bribes, who stops his ears against plots of murder and shuts his eyes against contemplating evil-- this is the man who will dwell on the heights, whose refuge will be the mountain fortress. His bread will be supplied, and water will not fail him. (NIV, Isaiah 33:15-16)

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Where Are You Wearing?

Kelsey Timmerman



What if you could meet the people who made your clothes—the twentysomething girl in Cambodia who frayed your jeans, the single mother in Bangladesh who stitched your T-shirt, the husband and wife who glued your flip-flops?

And what if they welcomed you into their homes, let you play with their children, and prepared meals for you over gas stoves during power outages? How would you thank them?

In my book *Where Am I Wearing? A Global Tour to the Countries, Factories, and People That Make Our Clothes*, I traced my five favorite items of clothing back to their countries of origin. I was overwhelmed with the hospitality of the workers I met, and a simple, "Thanks for making my boxer shorts," just didn't seem appropriate, so I tried to come up with unique ways to express my gratitude. In Bangladesh I took 19 kids and one old man to an amusement park. In Cambodia I took eight garment workers bowling. But in China I faced a unique challenge: the workers never stopped working.

Dewan, 36, and his wife Zhu Chun, 31, work at the factory that made my Teva flip-flops. Chinese law sets their workweek at 40 hours. They are allowed to work overtime, but no worker should work more than 203.4 hours in a month. But there's the law and then there's Dewan and Zhu Chun.

They told me it wasn't rare to work more than 100 hours in a week. If they complained about the hours, they would lose their jobs, and they couldn't afford that. They had taken out a loan to build a two-story home in their village a few years ago. Shortly after the home was finished, Dewan's mother became ill and died after racking up expensive medical bills. They chose to come to Guangzhou to get jobs and pay down their debt.

I called them during the week, "Can you go out for pizza?" When we had a chance to visit, food was one of our favorite topics. It came up that they had never eaten pizza, or, for that matter cheese. This was a wrong I could right.

"No, we have to work."

On Sundays they are scheduled to get off early, so I called them, "How about a little Karaoke tonight?"

"No, we have to work."

But then I came up with the perfect way to repay their hospitality.

"Can I come over this evening? I have something to give you."

"Yes."

The thing that I haven't told you yet about Dewan and Zhu Chun—the really heartbreaking part—is that they have a son, Li Xin, 13, who lives in their home village 600 miles away, and they haven't seen him in three years. I offered to pay their train fares to go visit him, but—no surprise—they had to work. They encouraged me to go alone to see their beautiful village and home and meet Li Xin.

The air in the village carried neither the muggy scent of progress nor the hustle and bustle of honking horns and screeching breaks as in the city. The village was everything Dewan and Zhu Chun said it was.

Li Xin had a shy exterior, but you could see mischief in his eyes—his dad's eyes.

When I had first visited Dewan and Zhu Chun at their apartment, I noticed that there were no visible signs that they were parents. Their room was just wide enough for their bed. The walls were lined with newspapers and posters. One of the posters said something about Jesus being born and had a picture of Santa on it. But like Dewan's Tim Duncan jersey, I doubt they were familiar with either man.

There were no signs of Li Xin—no photos, no drawings, no letters scrawled in an adolescent's hand writing.

When I arrived at their apartment to give them the gift, Dewan wasn't home. He had visited the doctor for a sore throat, but then returned to work. An important order of shoes needed to be finished. When he returned, he wasn't allowed to clock in.

It isn't rare for the people who make our shoes to work for free, as if making our shoes is a privilege.

I was excited to give them the gift, and as soon as Dewan arrived, I reached into my bag, and handed Zhu Chun a framed 8×10 photo of Li Xin laughing with his cousin. Behind them green terraces of corn stretched to the horizon. Not a skyscraper, highway or shantytown in sight.

Zhu Chun lost herself in the photo before passing it to Dewan. He smiled sadly and made a remark about the green scenery and the state of the crop. Zhu Chun put the photo in a plastic bag and slid it behind the bed, as if it was there to stay.

I had thought the framed photo would go right to the wall or perhaps a privileged place on the nightstand. But once I saw their reaction, I knew that I should have brought a large pepperoni pizza instead.

"One thing is for sure," Zhu Chun said, normally full of jokes and smiles, now ultra serious. "I don't want him to come here to work in the factory. I just want him to study, because people like us who don't have the knowledge have to work very hard."

I wonder if there are other photos of Li Xin tucked away in the nooks and crannies of their room only to be looked at and then put away again. The photos are reminders of what they are working for, and painful reminders of what they are missing.

Zhu Chun is sure of one thing, I'm sure of two:

1. Dewan and Zhu Chun work hard.
2. They miss their son.