

Impactical Presents: Giving Worth to Those with None (Prov. 22:2) – Chris Altrock – November 22, 2009

I recently came across an online “Net-worth Calculator.” Net-worth, according to this calculator is the difference between your assets and your liabilities. It adds up your assets—how much you have in checking and savings, how much life insurance you possess, how much your home, car, jewelry, and art are worth, your mutual funds, pension funds, stocks, bonds, and other investment vehicles. Then, it subtracts your liabilities—outstanding mortgages, student loans, car loans, credit card debt, and similar items. What’s left is your net-worth. This software will calculate any person’s net-worth.

This calculator raises an interesting question: what *is* net-worth? How *do* we determine someone’s worth? Our society, like many, uses money as one way of answering that question. We assign greater worth to the wealthy than to the poor, in more ways than one. Our society also uses other things to measure worth. Race, age, gender, and nationality have all been factors used to measure the value or worth of people. If someone is of a different race than us, or if someone is older or younger than us, or if they are of a different gender, or if their country of origin is different than ours, it has been common to assign that person lower value or worth.

Worth was measured similarly in the world to which Proverbs was addressed. Proverbs is the collection of wisdom from Solomon, King David’s son, as well as from others like a man named Agur and a king named Lemuel. As these men watched people and observed circumstances, they wrote down their conclusions in short statements we know as proverbs. And one of the things they reflect on is how some in their culture assigned higher worth to certain people.

This comes out in at least two proverbs: *Rich and poor have this in common: The LORD is the Maker of them all.* (Prov. 22:2 TNIV); *13 The poor and the oppressor have this in common: The LORD gives sight to the eyes of both.* (Prov. 29:13 TNIV) The first proverb literally says, “The wealthy and poor meet together. Yahweh made both of them.” The proverb addresses the fact that on the surface, rich and poor have many differences. In most societies, including ancient Israel, the two groups kept a distance from one another.¹ They had no reason “to meet.” They had little in common. In fact, as the second proverb points out, often the wealthy would become oppressors of the poor. The rich would treat the poor as worthless. A person’s worth was largely determined by his or her wealth.

But against that ancient and contemporary tendency, listen to the conclusions of these proverbs: *Rich and poor have this in common: The LORD is the Maker of them all.* (Prov. 22:2 TNIV); *13 The poor and the oppressor have this in common: The LORD gives sight to the eyes of both.* (Prov. 29:13 TNIV) The first proverb is probably aimed at rich people.² The author wants to remind the rich, who treat the poor as worthless, that they’d better get out their net-worth calculators. Why? Because the poor actually have assets which the rich have overlooked. What are those assets? This: “the LORD made them both.” The point is that both rich and poor have a common Maker and therefore a common value. Regardless of what the financial

balance sheet says, or the passport indicates, every person has value because every single person is crafted by God.³ The next proverb makes the same point with different language. What do the poor have that the rich have overlooked? Literally this: the LORD “gives light” to both. The word “light” probably is an image for life. Both rich oppressor and the poor have life given them by God.⁴ In that ancient culture, no two people could seem farther apart in worth or value than rich oppressor and poor victim. But Proverbs argues that both have equal value. Why? They are creatures of the same Creator. The author is making this argument: *All people have high worth because they are all creatures of the same Creator.*

In other words, net-worth has nothing to do with assets and liabilities. It has nothing to do with race, gender, age or nationality. The proverbs author rewires that net-worth calculator. He removes all previous questions. He rids it of all our society’s “isms”—racism, sexism, nationalism, and materialism. He instead writes in just one question: “Are you made by God?” There’s a box to click “Yes” and a box to click “No.” And when anyone marks “Yes”—be they CEO, homeless mother, American, Philippino, white, black, or brown—the software automatically responds with this phrase: “Your net-worth is immeasurable.” All people have high worth because they are all creatures of the same Creator.

And that’s one reason why we are involved in World Missions. Our culture might argue that poor people living in the jungles of Papua New Guinea, and foreigners living in the cities of the Philippines, and strangers walking the streets in Ukraine are not worth our time, our effort, or our money. On our culture’s net-worth calculator, the value of people like that would be far less than the value of people like us. But Proverbs shows us just how wrong that calculation is. Though the people in these countries may be of different race, ethnicity, and income, they are just as valuable to God as you and I. And that’s why we invest in efforts to serve them, love them, and share with them the story of their Creator. All people have high worth because they are all creatures of the same Creator. That’s what drives our World Missions.

Today we will hear from some of those closely associated with our World Missions. We’ll be reminded how valuable people in those areas are, and why we need to give to our Special Contribution for World and Urban Missions on December 13. Sharing this morning will be Tracy Childers, David Ralston, and Lawana Maxwell.

- Tracy Childers is a Highland deacon who recently travelled to the Philippines where he visited our missionaries Nathan and Karen Luther. Tracy is unable to be with us today so we asked him to share some impressions about the Luthers by video:
- David Ralston is a Highland elder and member of the elder committee which oversees Highland’s world missions. The most recent trip by a Highland member to Papua New Guinea was made by David. *David, tell us a little about the work in Papua New Guinea—how it began, your impressions, etc.* [CONTEMPORARY SERVICE ONLY: DR – ENDS BY TALKING ABOUT THE SCHOOL; CA – HCC IS HEAVILY INVOLVED IN THAT SCHOOL... DR – ENDS BY TALKING ABOUT PRIMITIVE NATURE OF PNG; CA – YOU HAD AN INTERESTING EXPERIENCE ON YOUR LAST TRIP, TELL US ABOUT IT... CA – TELL US ABOUT YOUR MOST RECENT TRIP TO UKRAINE...]

- Lawana Maxwell is the Women's Minister and last year travelled to Kiev and Bila Tserkva, along with David and Joshua Ray, our preaching apprentice. Lawana, *share some of your impressions about the ministry in Bila Tserkva... You also visited the Ukrainian Education Center in Kiev. Share some things about the UEC...*

By the way, Highland elder Wayne Simpson is putting together a Let's Start Talking trip to Ukraine for 2010. If you are interested in going please see him or call the church office. On December 13, we have an opportunity to express our belief that the people who live in Ukraine, Papua New Guinea and the Philippines have high worth. We need to raise \$148,000 to fund six months of ministry in our World and Urban Missions, including our missions in the Philippines, Ukraine, and Papua New Guinea. Here's what that means: on December 13, we need to give 6 times what we give on a normal Sunday. It's a lot. But we do it because Americans and Philipinos have the same Maker; Americans and Ukrainians have the same Maker; those in the States and those in Papua New Guinea have the same Maker.

Let's close by praying for these mission points. **Wayne Simpson** will come now and pray for our world missions.

¹ Tremper Longman III Proverbs Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms (Baker Academic, 2006), 403, 505.

² Longman.

³ Bruce K. Waltke The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 15-31 The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Eerdmans, 2005), 200-201, 441.

⁴ Waltke.