

Economics, According to King David

King David was one of the most popular and powerful kings of ancient Israel. During his reign of 40 years, he brought unity to a divided nation and established Jerusalem as the mightiest capital of the ancient world. He was a soldier king who made his coffers rich by conquest as was the custom of oriental potentates of that day. Yet, we have a hint in his 144th psalm that he disliked the ways of battle and longed for the sound economy of a healthy agricultural prosperity. "Rescue me and deliver me from the hand of foreigners, whose mouths speak lies and whose right hand is a right hand of falsehood. May our sons in their youth be like plants full grown, and our daughters like cornerstones, cut in the similitude of a palace, that our granaries may be full, providing all manner of produce, that our sheep may bring forth thousands and ten thousands in our fields, and may our cattle be strong in labor. May there be no breaking in or going out, and no wailing in our streets. Blessed are the people who have such things; indeed, blessed are the people whose God is the Lord" (Ps. 144:11-15).

In spite of the riches he accumulated, we see a healthy lack of the materialistic philosophy that delights in things that money can buy. Psalm 62:10 gives this advice: "If riches increase, set not your heart on them."

But it is in Psalm 128:2 that we discover a rare gem. I call it a "gem" because, like so many truths in the Bible, you have to pick them up, polish them, and give them a proper setting before they become valuable to you.

Here is the quotation: "For you shall eat the fruit of the labor of your hands; you will be happy, and it shall be well with you."

Shall we begin the polishing process?

To labor with “your hands” is a figure of speech, for we know that it is possible to work with our feet, our tongues, our brains, or with other parts of our body. But “hands” are personal things. The words show that it is our own labor that is intended and not another’s.

“Labor” is work—accomplishment as a result of energy expended. This must mean constructive, creative or helpful work. It is unthinkable that the Bible would advocate work that is detrimental to one’s fellow man. Therefore, any work that one is able to do that does not injure society is acceptable. We realize that it is possible to accumulate energy in the form of capital or tools that enable one to work more effectively than he could otherwise. But it is still the labor of our “hands” in that it took creative energy on our part to administer it or to put it to use after it was stored up. The gem is beginning to shine.

The next facet we work on is that word “fruit.” The fruit of our labor is the net result of the labor of our hands. If I am a farmer, the fruit may be literal fruit that is good to eat. But what difference is it if I eat it or trade it for another kind of fruit? Or perhaps I might sell it and buy another kind of fruit from my neighbor, a kind that I might not have the ability to grow and yet a kind that I need and want very much.

These other fruits that I might want could be *pieces of art*, the fruit of labor of the artist; or *instruction*, the fruit of labor of the teacher; or *administration*, the fruit of those with organizational and leadership ability. These fruits could be listed ad infinitum, a tremendous storehouse or granary to hold the many fruits of labor of mankind—a lovely facet of our jewel.

The word “eat” is the next facet to tackle.

It is necessary for me to eat in order to live. The plan in

the quotation unfolds: work, reap fruit, eat and live. It is a workable circle that perpetuates itself. It is life itself in its barest outline. If I don't work, I will not reap, I will not eat and soon I will not live. On the other hand, I may work a lot, reap a lot, eat a lot and have some left over to give away, and some to sell or to store up in order that more work may be done.

It is this possibility of putting more energy to work to produce more fruit that makes an efficient system of economics possible. There are some who cannot work because of sickness, either mental or physical. Their fruit will not sustain them. Therefore, it will be the privilege of those who can and do produce more than they need to put another Bible precept into practice: "Happy is he who is kind to the poor," (Proverbs 14:21) and also, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." (Acts 20:35) There is no law involved here—no law voted in by men, that is. But shall we call it a higher principle? It is the principle which says, "Do this, if you wish, and you will receive the reward that goes with it." This is much stronger than man-made laws which say, "Do this or else."

Now look at our shining jewel. It is a valuable one because it teaches valuable lessons in economics, and they are principles, by the way, which have stood the test of time.

First of all, it utterly outshines the socialistic imitation which says, "The state shall take the fruit of your labor and administer it equally to all men." It outshines it because of one important element. It is the element of *happiness* which is missing in all socialistic paste imitations. In every one of the verses cited in this study, happiness is the result. And I am not referring to the emotion that comes from having your physical needs met. This is satisfaction for the moment, but happiness is deeper and more valuable. It comes as a result of freedom. Here's how it works. If I am free to work as much as I please, to reap as much as I please, to dispense with my

fruit as I please, to enjoy the fruit of my own labors, to give to my neighbor in want, then I will enjoy the result: a happy life.

A happy life, then, will be a giving life. This meets the needs of my unfortunate neighbor and makes my own life overflow with the warm kind of joy that is the product of such giving. Will you pardon me if I cannot become enthusiastic over socialistic programs that involve compulsory "giving" in the form of high taxes to pressure groups that never fully meet the wants of those who cry for help? Thank you, but I have found a better plan.

This plan, which I learn from King David, and believe to be God's plan, is vibrant with the heart-warming values of the good life He is trying to teach. Of course, I have to fight greed and selfishness, but that puts iron in the soul and makes life worth the living when we taste a bit of victory now and then. May I look for the injured traveler along life's road. May I stop, bind up his wounds, care for his needs, and pay the bill out of the surplus I have been able to accumulate as the result of the labor of my own hands. Then only will I feel the glow of satisfaction that results from learning God's lessons in economics which form for me a pattern of life that gives me an incentive to labor that much the harder. {eoa}

Mr. Johnson was editor of *Young Life*, a magazine for high-school and college-age youth, published in Colorado Springs, Colorado. This article was first published on November 1, 1959.

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