

Points of Wisdom from Hesiod

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Note • The following points of wisdom come from Hesiod's *Theogony* and *Works and Days*. Each begins in *italics* with a single word or more indicating the point's topic or meaning. For more points of wisdom from Hesiod organized by topic, buy the Cave's *The Wisdom & Way of Hesiod*.

Points of Wisdom from Hesiod

The iron race of human beings. Presently, the race of men is truly one made of iron. Oppressed by wearisome work and suffering, men will not rest day or night. And the gods will give them anxious thoughts that are hard to endure. Yet for these people too, the good will be mixed with the bad—the noble with the ignoble, the fortunate with the unfortunate.

Humans perish without what it takes to live. For wretched mortal human beings, life amounts to what one needs.

Why providing for life is a challenge. The gods keep what it takes to live hidden from human beings. Otherwise you could easily work for a day and have enough for the year without any more work.

Add little to little for a lot. If your spirit within you longs for wealth, then work in this way, and add work upon work. . . . The man who adds to what he has will ward off burning hunger. If you add only a little to a little, and you do this often, soon the "only a little" will become a lot.

The pathways of Failure and Success. It is easy to grab at Failure (Kakotēs). It is there in abundance for you. The way is smooth to her, and she dwells very near to you. But the immortal gods have put sweat in front of Success (Aretē). The path to her is long and steep. And so it is rough-going at first. Nevertheless, when one comes to the highest point, then the path becomes easy—however hard it is *at first*.

Work! You, god-born Perses, always keep in mind my command to work. . . . Work is no disgrace; rather, it is

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not working that is the disgrace. . . . Work at the tasks that the gods have assigned to human beings.

Work—success and glory. If you work, the man who does not work will quickly become jealous when you are wealthy because the excellence of success and glory of being a prominent man follow upon wealth.

The problem with laziness. The lazy man, needing what it takes to live and waiting upon an empty hope, plots all sorts of evil in his spirit. Hope doesn't take care of the needy man seated on a couch, the one who doesn't securely have what it takes to live.

Do not procrastinate. Do not put your work off until tomorrow or the day after tomorrow. For the aimless worker who puts his work off does not fill his storehouse. Careful attention prospers work. But the negligent man is always wrestling with ruin.

An early start. Dawn carries a man forward on the pathway to success, advancing his work. . . . Rise early so that your fields will be full.

A right time for everything. Remember every sort of work at the right time. . . . Get used to arranging your work in due order.

Know the days. Observe well the days that come from Zeus. . . . Everyone praises one day or another, but few know them. Sometimes a day is a stepmother, sometimes a mother.

The best is order and management. To be well-ordered is best for mortal human beings. Mismanagement and disorder is the worst.

Do! Don't daydream! The man who is rich in fancy thinks his wagon is as good as built already. The fool! He does not know that there are a hundred parts to a wagon! Take care to prepare these beforehand at home.

Think for yourself and take advice. Best of all is the man who thinks about everything for himself, pondering how things will turn out in the end and what will be better. And noble too is the kind of man who is won over by good advice. But good for nothing is the man who does not think for himself or take to heart what he hears from another man.

The blessing of wealth. Ploutos (Wealth) goes everywhere over the land and the broad back of the sea. Whoever chances to meet him when Ploutos comes into his hands, he makes that man rich and grants him much prosperity and happiness as his companion.

Unhealthy shame versus boldness. Self-respecting shame doesn't take care of the needy man—shame, which can greatly harm and benefit a man. Rather, for the needy man, self-respecting shame brings poverty and unhappiness, whereas boldness brings wealth and happiness.

The two kinds of strife. Upon the earth there are two kinds of strife. The one is praised once a man comes to know her, while the other is found blameworthy. The spirit of each is quite different.

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The bad strife. The blameworthy Strife, being cruel, multiplies evil war and battle. No mortal man loves her. Even so they honor the oppressive Strife by necessity, by the plans of the immortals.

The problem with harming others. The man who causes harm to another causes harm to himself. So then, the plan to harm is most harmful to the one who plans.

Embrace the good strife. Dark Night (Nyx) gave birth to the praised Strife first. And Zeus, Kronos' high-throned son, who dwells in the brightest and purest sky, planted her in the roots of the earth. She is much better for men. She rouses even the helpless man to work. Such a one will long for work when he sees a wealthy man hurrying to plow and plant and put his house in good order. . . . This Strife is good for mortal men.

Greed's deception—earn wealth honorably. The love of gain deceives the mind of human beings. . . . Property should not be stolen. God-given property is much better. . . . Do not profit through evil means. Such profit amounts to ruin.

Work—don't steal. Whatever you are by some god, by fortune, working is better if you turn your thoughtless desires and muddled mind away from another man's possessions. Turn them instead toward work and, as I have encouraged you, think about what it takes to live.

Be a friend, be available. Be friendly to those who are friendly to you and available to those who are available to you.

The good of generosity. Giving is good. . . . For the man who gives willingly, even if he gives a great thing, he rejoices in his gift and takes pleasure in his spirit.

The evil of rapacity. Stealing is bad, a giver of death. . . . The man who seizes things in obedience to shamelessness, even if it is a small thing, he hardens his dear heart until it is cold and stiff.

Poverty. Never venture to reproach a man for destructive, spirit-wasting poverty, the gift of the blessed ones who always are.

Justice. Zeus gave human beings Justice, which is by far the best thing that has come to be.

The path toward Justice and away from Hubris. Give ear to Justice (Dikē), to what is right and customary, and do not multiply needless Violence (Hubris). . . . The better, mightier pathway is to pass by needless Violence on the other side and move on toward what is just—toward what is right and customary. Going to the end of the pathway in this way, Justice restrains needless Violence—something the fool comes to know only after he has suffered.

Stick with justice. Those men who give straight judgments to foreigners and to those who live within the city and the surrounding land and do not swerve from justice at all, their city thrives and the people in it flourish. Then does Peace (Eirēnē), who safeguards young men, come upon the earth, and far-seeing Zeus does not ordain painful war for them.

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Distribute goods fairly. Justice brings evil to those human beings who drive her out of the city and do not make straightforward distributions.

Justice is tied to happiness. If someone who knows what is just is willing to declare it in the assembly, then far-seeing Zeus gives him the happiness of wealth.

The happiness formula. Divinely favored and happy in wealth is the man who knows all these things and does his work, blameless before the immortals, distinguishing the birds of omen and shunning transgressions.

When to enjoy what you have. It is fine to take from what you have but miserable to need something and not have it. . . . Satisfy yourself in full when the storage jar is first opened and when it is nearly at end. Be sparing in the middle. Thrift at the bottom is worthless.

Be measured. Due measure is the best in all things.

How to borrow. Take a fair measure from your neighbor, and pay him back fairly with the same measure, or more if your stores allow it. That way, if you are in need later on, you will find that he can be relied on.

Whom to befriend. Do not be the companion of worthless men.

Be loyal in friendship. The man is worthless who keeps making new friends.

Treat aged parents well. The gods diminish the man who abuses his aged father, who is travelling along the pathway of evil old age, with words that are hard to bear.

Guard what you say. The best treasure human beings can have is a tongue that is used sparingly. The tongue's greatest boon is to move according to measure. But if you say what is wrong, then you will quickly hear a bigger wrong about yourself.

Bad things. Countless miseries roam around among human beings. For the earth and the sea are full of evil misfortunes.

The gods. The holy race of the immortals always are. They live on forever.

Gods and human beings. The gods and mortal human beings came into being from the same source.

The source of good things. The gods are the givers of good things.

Know that God gives and takes away, exalts and humbles. It is through Zeus that mortal men are either named or not and known or not by the will of great Zeus. He easily makes a man strong and mighty, and just as easily he crushes his strength and might. He easily lays low the conspicuous man and raises high the one unknown. Dwelling in the uppermost house, high-thundering Zeus easily straightens out the crooked man and withers the arrogant.

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The poet-singer—diversion and happiness. Happy is the man whom the Muses love! Sweet speech flows from that man's mouth. Even when some man is bearing sorrow, even when it is some brand-new care in his spirit that dries out his heart with weeping, even so, when the poet-singer, the servant of the Muses, sings about the glorious deeds of men from long ago and about the blessed gods who hold Olympus, that man suddenly forgets his concerns and does not remember his troubles. Quickly do the goddesses' song-gifts divert his mind!

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