



## ECONOMIC FREEDOM AND THE PATH TO FLOURISHING

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*“The righteous will flourish like a palm tree,  
they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon;  
planted in the house of the LORD,  
they will flourish in the courts of our God.”  
Psalm 92:12-13*

The concept of shalom appears throughout the Bible. It describes the way things were before the Fall and it is the way things will be after Christ returns. Christians are to work toward the Christ’s restoration of this fallen world, and this involves striving toward flourishing for themselves and others as they live their lives. There is a strong correlation between economic freedom and human flourishing, showing Christians how economic wellbeing can help them achieve flourishing at all levels.

### **THE PATH TO FLOURISHING**

In the Old Testament, the concept of flourishing is best described by the Jewish word *shalom*. Biblical scholars note that shalom signifies a number of things, including salvation, wholeness, integrity, soundness, community, connectedness, righteousness, justice, and well-being.<sup>1</sup>

Shalom denotes a right relationship with God, with others, and with God's good creation. It is the way God intended things to be when he created the universe.

Most English Bibles translate shalom as "peace," but it means much more than just an absence of conflict. The idea of flourishing as shalom in the widest sense of the word is a significant theme in the Old Testament:

- When the Lord brings shalom, there is prosperity.<sup>2</sup>
- There is health.<sup>3</sup>
- There is reconciliation.<sup>4</sup>
- There is contentment.<sup>5</sup>
- When the shalom of the Lord is present, there are good relationships between the nations and peoples.<sup>6</sup> God's shalom has a social as well as a personal dimension.

Shalom means universal flourishing, wholeness, and delight. It is the way things ought to be. The Old Testament prophets pictured shalom as the wolf living with the lamb, weapons turned into farming tools, deserts blooming, and the mountains streaming with red wine.<sup>7</sup>

The Bible reveals that full shalom awaits God's people at the end of this age, in the last chapter of redemptive history when Christ returns to consummate his kingdom.<sup>8</sup> In the meantime, Christians are called to work toward shalom while they await the return of Christ. This working towards shalom can be described as flourishing. Social psychologist Barbara Frederickson describes this concept of flourishing in her book *Positivity*:

*People who flourish function at extraordinarily high levels – both psychologically and socially. They're not simply people who feel good. Flourishing goes beyond happiness, or satisfaction with life. Beyond feeling good, they're also doing good... People who flourish are highly engaged with their families, work, and communities. They're driven by a sense of purpose: they know why they get up in the morning.<sup>9</sup>*

This idea of flourishing goes beyond just physical well-being. People flourish when their lives have meaning and purpose. They flourish when they routinely experience optimism, hope, and gratitude. They flourish when they make a positive impact on others through their work.

This meaning of flourishing stems from the awareness that the lives of individuals are part of the larger story told in the Bible. Finding their place in this narrative helps them to realize that they are connected to creation and humanity in fundamental ways that allow them to truly understand their purpose and calling.

When we honor God, serve the common good, and further the kingdom of God through our work, we enable flourishing. God wants his people to flourish in this present age, so that they might offer those around us a picture of the way things could be.

This notion of flourishing is one that Christians have a strong heritage of upholding, especially regarding the promotion of human freedom. The Magna Carta signified the beginning of the political recognition of the rights and freedoms of the individual. The authors of this great charter understood the relationship between the biblical notion of flourishing and freedom.

In the preamble of the reaffirmation of the charter, written in 1297 A.D., the barons of England desired more freedom "for the health of our soul and the souls of our ancestors and heirs, for the exaltation of holy

Church and the better ordering of our kingdom.”<sup>10</sup> Here, the Old Testament notion of flourishing comes through in the desire to live as free people. The original charter, written in 1215 A.D., emphasized how this was to be achieved, namely, “that the English Church shall be free, and shall have its rights undiminished, and its liberties unimpaired.”<sup>11</sup> The very first clause of the charter did not end with the freedom of the clergy. The authors believed all free men of the kingdom were also to be granted “all the liberties written out below, to have and to keep for them and their heirs, of us and our heirs.”<sup>12</sup>

The Magna Carta illustrates that the promotion of flourishing and freedom is an integral part of our Christian heritage. Today, God calls Christians to continue this work and promote the flourishing of all people through the protection of their freedom.<sup>13</sup> To do this, Christians must examine and understand the specific economic constraints that either foster or impede this flourishing.

## WHAT DOES FLOURISHING LOOK LIKE?

How do we know that we are approaching greater levels or degrees of flourishing here on our earthly journey? One way is to look at the world around us and to understand how we are doing as stewards. Recall Barbara Fredrickson’s description of flourishing: It is not just about feeling good, but about doing good. How do we know that we are doing good? Part of this is fulfilling our call in the creation mandate to be good stewards of the earth. Being a good steward goes beyond maintaining God’s good creation. We are called to multiply and leave more than what we started with.

Stewardship then means making the best use out of the scarce resources with which God has entrusted us. These include material resources and our human capital, such as our talents, energy, gifts, and skills. Countries and societies that foster good stewardship and creativity and harness each person’s God-given purpose are ones that have higher degrees of flourishing among their people.

Economics is a tool that God has given people to better understand the ramifications of their decisions and to help us engage in long-term thinking—thus helping us to be better stewards. Using economics, Christians can gain a better understanding of the factors that allow them to be better stewards. They can do this in an objective manner using data on the characteristics associated with flourishing. The analysis indicates that the ability of people to be economically free is what defines good stewardship and flourishing. This suggests that economic freedom is an objective measure of how individuals are doing as stewards. It serves as a benchmark of current levels of flourishing, how each society compares to others, and what people can do to help those who are suffering.

The Economic Freedom of the World Project of the Fraser Institute uses five categories to construct an annual index of overall prosperity and flourishing, and economic freedom for 141 countries.<sup>14</sup> The report, authored by James Gwartney, Joshua Hall, and Robert Lawson, assesses the degree to which the laws and institutions of these countries protect the abilities of people to open businesses, pursue work, and exercise their creativity in ways they see fit. These opportunities, in turn, lead to greater overall prosperity for that society.

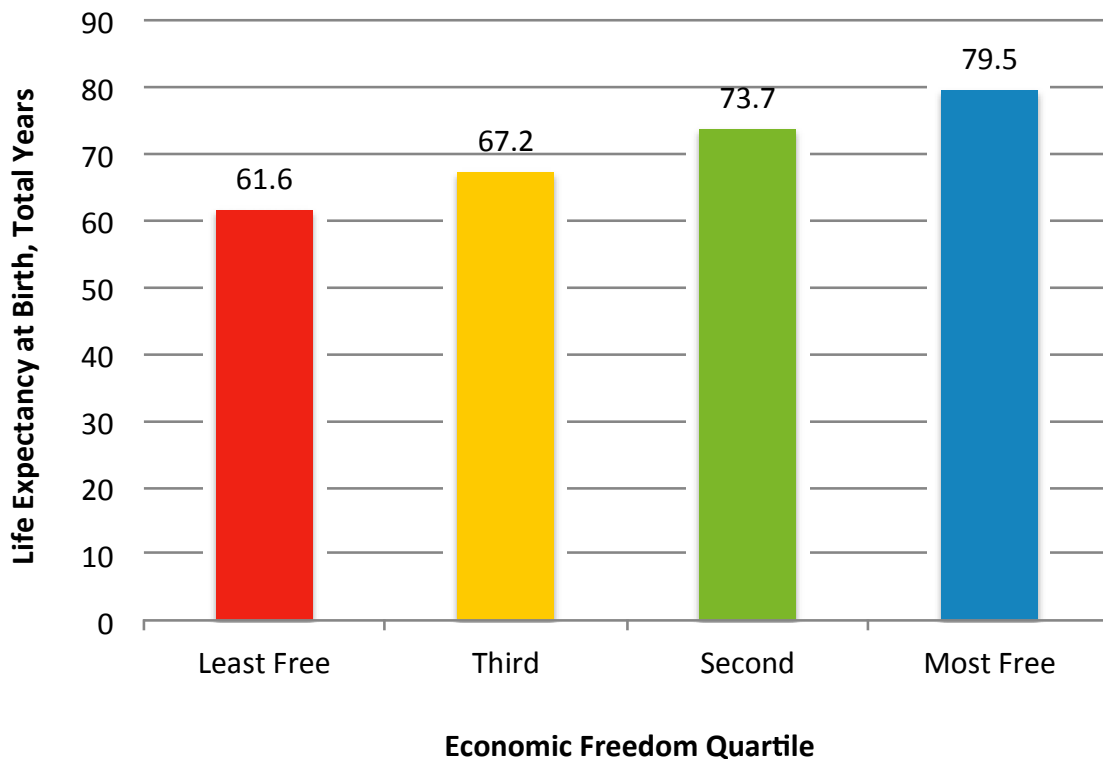
There are many reasons that Christians should understand what economic freedom is, and work to promote greater flourishing for everyone by making advances in those freedoms. Before we dive into what

economic freedom is, however, an examination of its results will prove helpful. For Christians, economic freedom is not an end in and of itself; it is a means to the end of bringing about shalom. The Index of Economic Freedom put out by the Fraser Institute is powerfully correlated with many things that Christians need to create and spread flourishing. In addition, it is negatively-correlated with things that do not improve human well-being.

Economic freedom strongly influences many characteristics of flourishing. The figures shown here are just a sampling, but they represent some of the important aspects of examples of flourishing today. They also illustrate the outcomes of when a country embraces the rules and institutions that support a high degree of economic freedom.

## Life Expectancy

Figure 1: Economic Freedom and Life Expectancy at Birth, 2010<sup>15</sup>



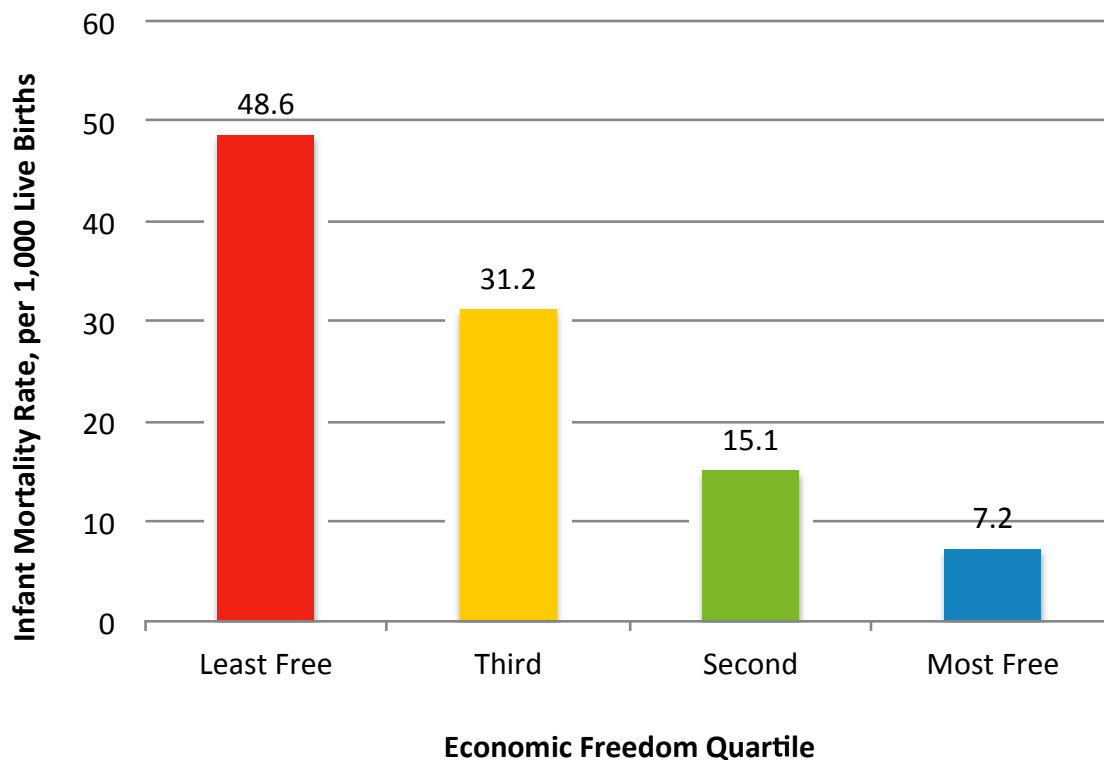
Economic freedom is powerfully correlated with living longer, healthier lives. This is one of the most obvious distinctions between the developed and the developing world. The life expectancy gap between the most free and least free countries is eighteen years. This means that many people in free countries get to experience the happiness of seeing and getting to know their great-grandchildren while many people in less free countries will not live long enough to experience that same joy.

Living a long life is also closely related to flourishing. Many of the key figures of the Old Testament, including Noah, Abraham, Sarah, and Jacob, lived long and fruitful lives. While God blesses people in many different ways, he showed his favor to these individuals by granting them longevity.

Prior to the explosion of economic growth fostered by greater economic freedom and robust markets in the Western world, life expectancy in the United States was much lower than it is now. Economic freedom makes this—and the continual advances that increase lifespan—possible.

## Infant Mortality

Figure 2: Economic Freedom and Infant Mortality, 2010<sup>16</sup>

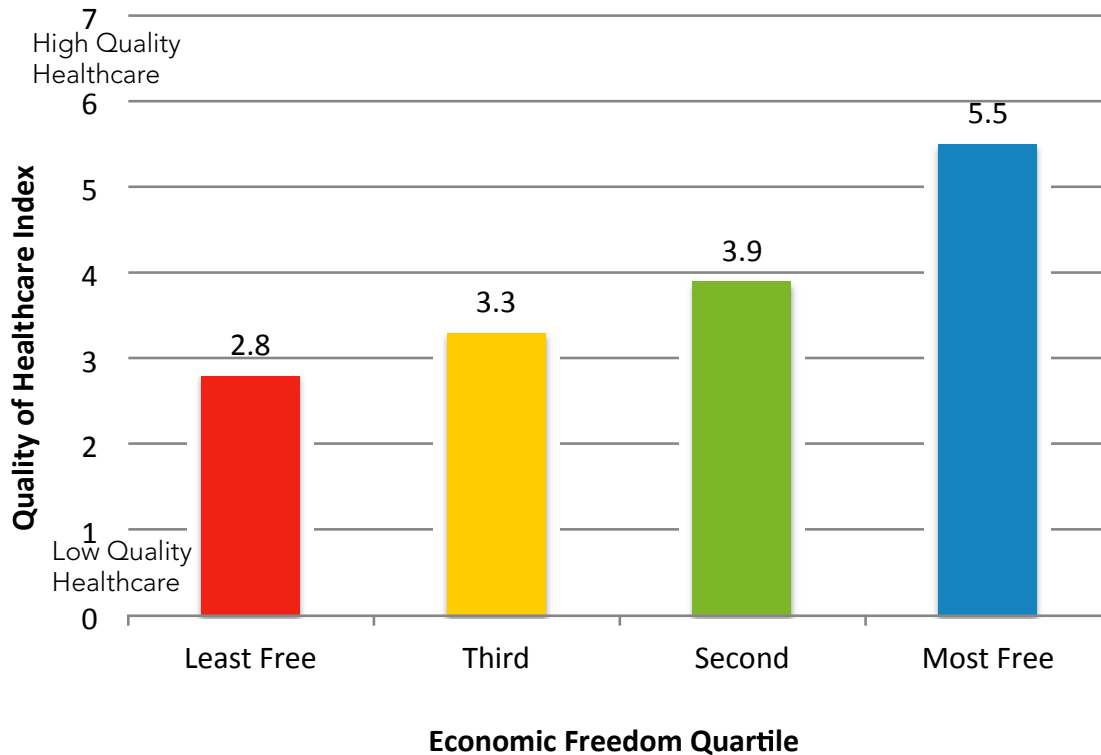


In Genesis 22:17, God says to Abraham, “I will bless you abundantly and make your descendants as countless as the stars of the sky and the sands of the seashore.” The notion of flourishing appears in God’s promise to Abraham of numerous descendants. It is not a static notion, but one that God desires for every generation.

The rate of infant mortality in the least free countries is almost seven times that of the most free. Other outcomes such as maternal mortality and the percentage of children who live past the age of five have the exact same relationship with economic freedom. This indicates that high levels of economic freedom have important consequences for women, the family, and for young children. Building strong families and having children is fundamental to the creation mandate and to stewardship. Economic freedom has a powerful impact on protecting and preserving the life of the most vulnerable.

## Quality of Healthcare

Figure 3: Economic Freedom and the Quality of Healthcare, 2009<sup>17</sup>

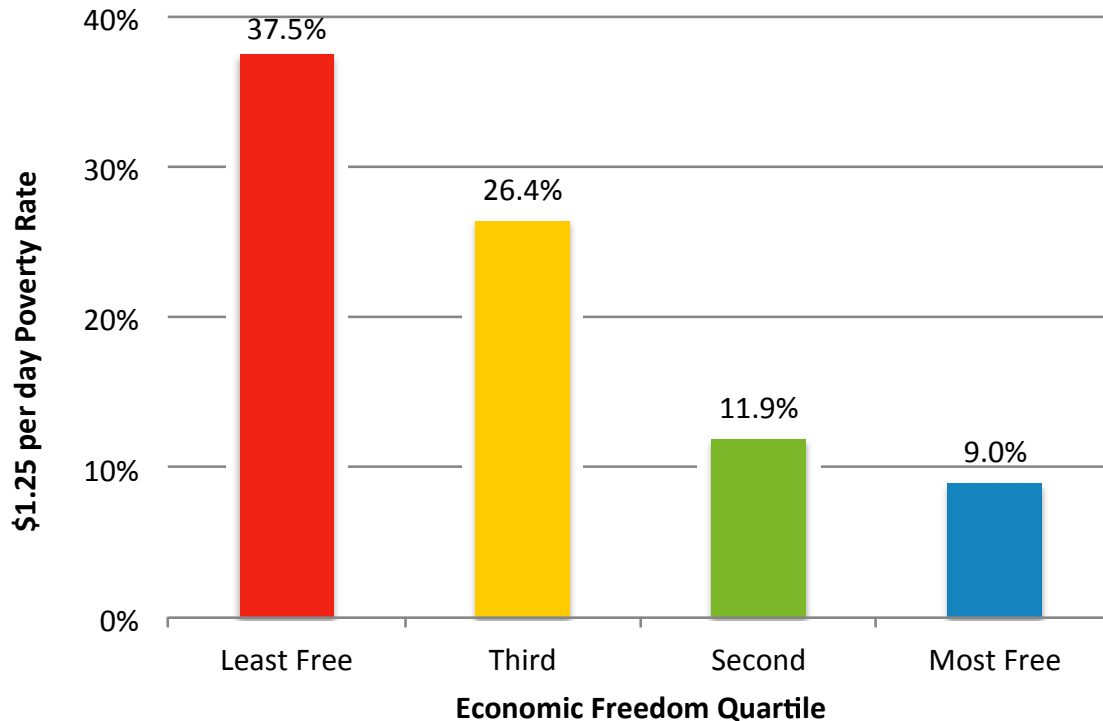


The quality of healthcare is a critical reason for the increased life expectancy and improved health for mothers and their children in the economically free world. This, along with many other outcomes, is undoubtedly associated with shalom and flourishing. We live at a time when technological progress has never been faster. One of the important ways this plays out is through medical technology and medical advances. Figure 3 indicates that it is difficult for these advances to reach people in the least free countries. Thus, economic freedom is important for much more than just everyday commerce; it helps create an environment in which people are able to use their gifts to improve the lives of the sick and the infirm. This is much harder to do in the least free countries.

It is often said that flourishing is hard to describe, but you know it when you see it. Many members of free societies have seen or experienced the ways in which advances in healthcare bring about flourishing in their own lives. Many accidents and ailments that were once fatal are now treatable and are hardly a cause for concern. The ways in which this impacts our lives can be large or small, but they are always meaningful.

## Abject Poverty Rates in the Developing World

Figure 4: Economic Freedom and \$1.25 per day Poverty Rate in the Developing World, 2005<sup>18</sup>

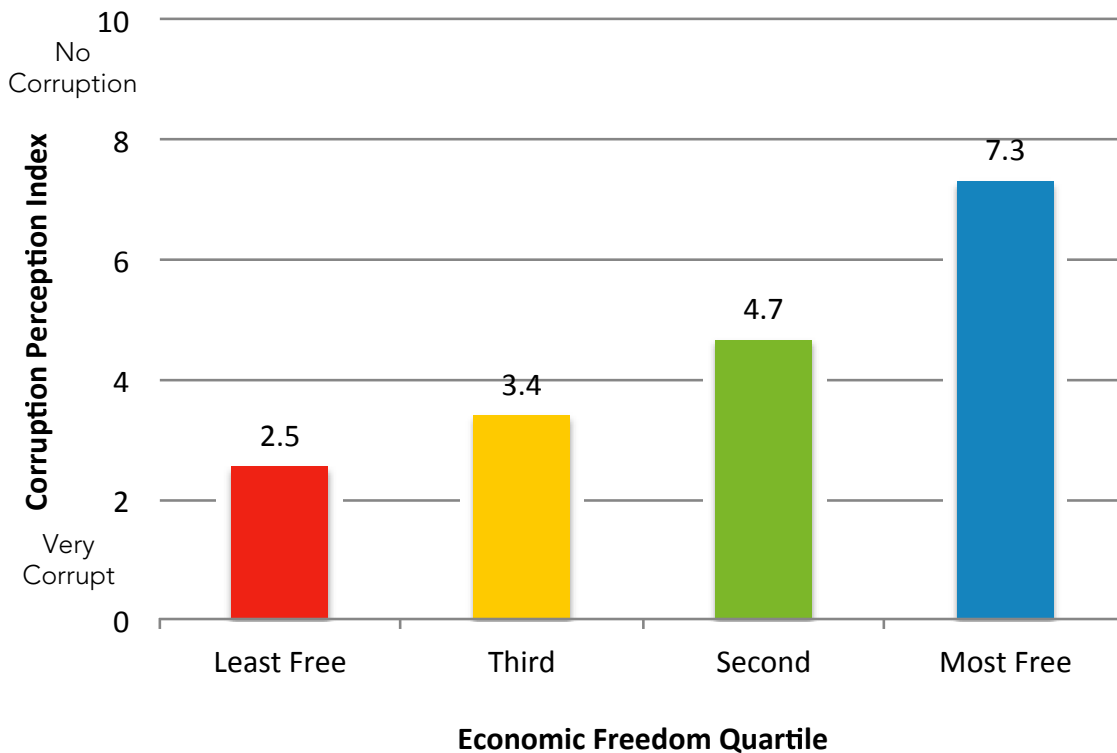


The absence of flourishing is the poverty that many in the developing world face every day. There are many who still try to survive on \$1.25 a day or less. The World Bank defines this as extreme poverty.<sup>19</sup> Those who live at or below this income level cannot get enough food to live healthy, productive lives. This poverty is very different than the poverty known in wealthy countries. This is why the wealthiest countries of the world are not included in Figure 4. The poverty in the developing world is so severe that it should not be compared to the poverty experienced by those in the free world.

The good news is that this type of poverty has been declining since 1980. In fact, from 1990 to the present, the extreme poverty rate has been reduced by half. Figure 4 helps to explain how this happened. Developing countries with the most economic freedom had much lower rates of extreme poverty than those that are the least free. Moreover, economic freedom is strongly correlated with freeing millions from abject poverty and constantly increasing their standards of living. Research in this area finds that the market principles behind economic freedom are responsible for the most rapid decline in global poverty the world has ever known. Related research indicates that countries with the largest increases in economic freedom also had the largest reductions in poverty.<sup>20</sup>

## Corruption Levels

Figure 5: Economic Freedom and Corruption, 2010<sup>21</sup>



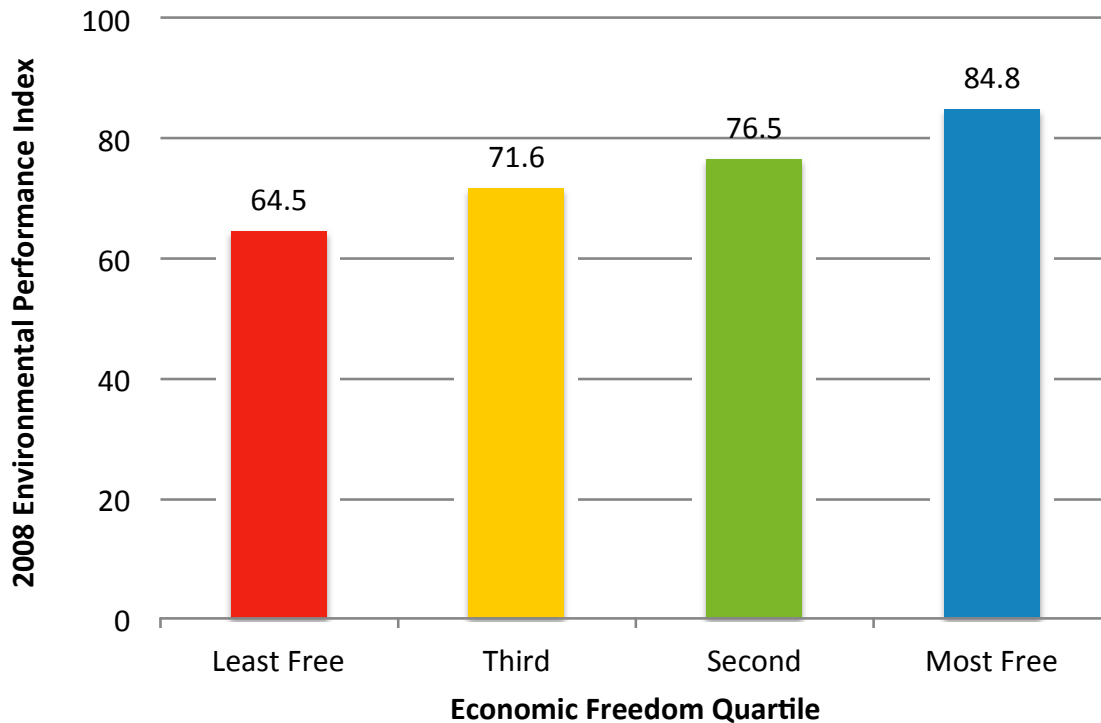
After an encounter with Jesus, Zacchaeus, the tax collector, repented of his corrupt ways.<sup>22</sup> Unfortunately, many in positions of authority in the developing world have not had a similar encounter with Jesus. Corruption, in all its forms, is a major roadblock to flourishing. Interactions in a flourishing society embody honesty, integrity, and justice. However, this is not the case in countries with rampant corruption.

As Figure 5 illustrates, countries with more economic freedom have much less corruption than those that are less free. Corruption at the state level tends to pervade all of society and its inter-workings, making it difficult for people to use their gifts to serve others. High levels of corruption are associated with bribes, blackmail, favoritism, and corrupt regulations. Corruption tends to benefit those who are already in power, excluding the lower-income classes from being productive and caring for their families.



## Environmental Performance

Figure 6: Economic Freedom and a Clean Environment, 2008<sup>23</sup>

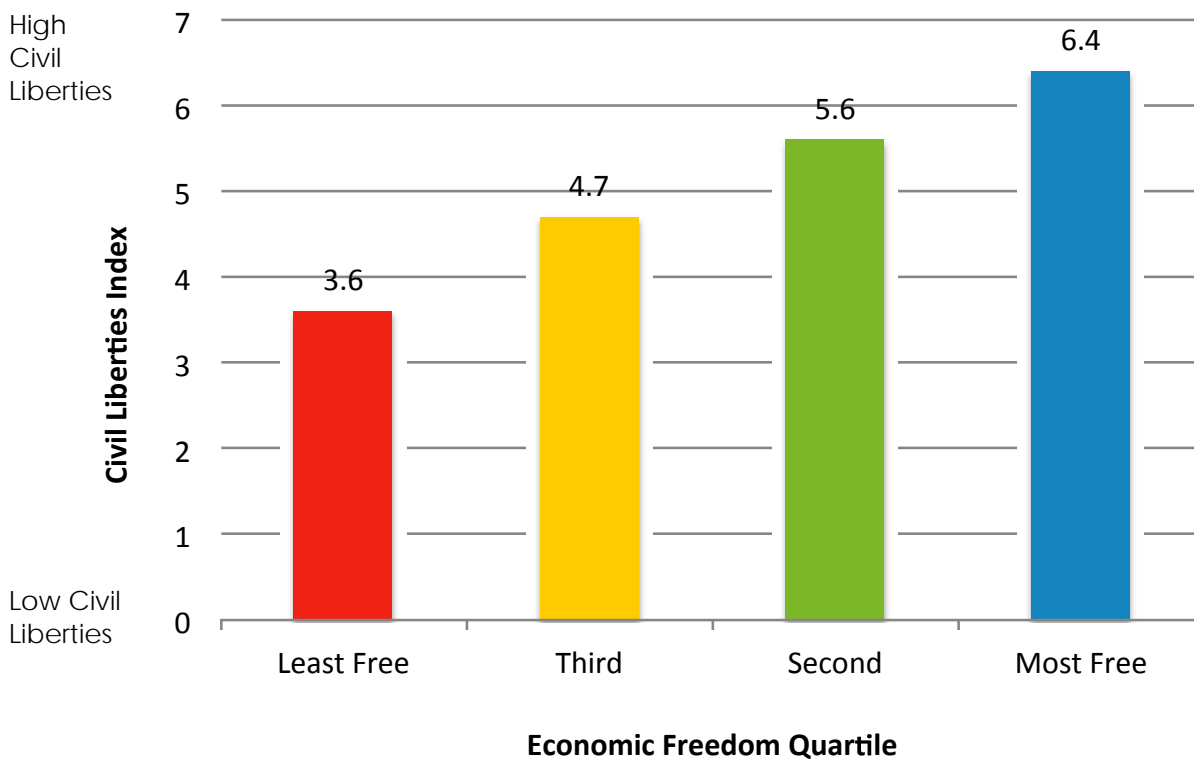


As Christians, we are called to be stewards of God’s creation. Figure 6 illustrates that more economic freedom allows people to be better stewards of the Lord’s creation. Countries with the most economic freedom have cleaner and healthier environments while the environment often suffers in countries that are less free. The existence of strong private property rights provides a key reason for this.

To some, it may appear counterintuitive that countries with less public control of property have cleaner environments. However, the need for private property rights is a biblical, time-tested premise.<sup>24</sup> From John Locke to the present day, many philosophers have stressed the importance of private property rights for maintaining the earth and all its resources for future generations. Private property rights provide incentives for people to cultivate land and resources so as to increase its future value. They also provide protection against the destruction of large amounts of forest. It is in countries with weak private property rights and little economic freedom that one finds the large-scale cutting and clearing of forests. These forests are often critical for the preservation of species, the local ecology, and both local and global weather patterns. Clearly, Figure 6 helps to illustrate that economic freedom provides the type of environment in which people can be better stewards of creation.

## Civil Liberties

Figure 7: Economic Freedom and Civil Liberties, 2010<sup>25</sup>



Civil liberties are an important manifestation of flourishing. They are the liberties for which those that live in oppressive societies yearn. Civil liberties include the freedom of expression and the freedom to worship as one pleases. They also entail equality before the law and belonging to a society where opportunities are available to everyone regardless of race, religion, creed, and gender. Civil liberties mean that everyone has the opportunity to contribute to flourishing without having to belong to a certain group or class.

The promotion of civil liberties is woven into the very fabric of Christianity. The early Christians were deprived of these liberties until the Edict of Toleration in 311 A.D. The freedom to associate and worship the Lord freely, something that many take for granted today, did not exist for the early Christians. With the Magna Carta, nearly one thousand years later, Christians again pushed to expand civil liberties. Today, many Christians throughout the world still struggle to live their faith in countries that trample on these liberties. The plight of the Coptic Christians in Egypt is a good example. These Christians are discriminated against, physically attacked, and are completely excluded from participating in civil society. Their churches are routinely bombed and the only means of employment for many of them is pig farming and digging through trash heaps for salvageable material. It is an existence that makes it difficult for one to flourish. It is more akin to the plight of the Israelites who suffered in slavery on the same land thousands of years ago.

Using data compiled by Freedom House, Figure 7 illustrates the relationship between civil liberties and economic freedom.<sup>26</sup> People who live in the most economically free countries enjoy many more civil liberties than those that live in the least free countries. This aspect of flourishing is more fully realized in countries that are economically free.

## **ATTAINING ECONOMIC FREEDOM**

The outcomes of economic freedom, shown above, are connected to a country's level of flourishing. This flourishing is manifested in the overall opportunities of citizens to live according to God's calling. That is, to not just feel good, but to do good through our work and to trade with others. To attain these outcomes, it is essential to grasp the fundamental elements or pillars of economic freedom. An understanding of these pillars can help Christians appreciate the importance of economic freedom and work to increase it for ourselves and those who live in countries without it. The five pillars of economic freedom are:

- 1) the size of government
- 2) legal systems and property rights
- 3) sound money
- 4) freedom to trade internationally
- 5) regulations

Each of these pillars is essential to economic freedom. Moreover, a great deal of scholarship and empirical research demonstrates that they are integral to greater degrees of human flourishing.

## **SIZE OF GOVERNMENT**

The phrase the "size of government" is a way of understanding the overall role of government in a nation's economy. It is the ratio of government economic activity to that of the nation's overall economy. This economic activity includes government spending, government investments, transfer payments, and the rate at which income is taxed.

Thinking about the size of government in this way illustrates the degree to which economic decisions in a country are made by individuals and families or by those in government. It is a measure of autonomy that individuals and families have over their economic opportunities. When the size of government is large, individuals and families have less autonomy over their economic decisions and hence, less economic freedom.

It is argued that some of the actions of government enhance or support economic freedom. These are often described as the fundamental responsibilities of government, and they coincide with a proper biblical view of government.<sup>27</sup> They include defense of property to protect our rights and freedoms and courts to ensure justice.

At the same time, there are other actions of government that reduce economic freedom. These generally take the form of transfer payments from one group of society to another. Transfer payments reduce the

economic freedom of those from whom the money is taken. The freedom to decide what to do with the fruit of one's labor is reduced when these earnings are taken. The sad irony of transfer payments is that they are ostensibly to provide a safety net for the poor, however; in the United States today, the majority of transfer payments do not go to the poor but are directed at higher income groups and special interests.<sup>28</sup>

When the size of government grows, it reduces economic freedom, meaning that we lose the ability to pursue our gifts and contribute to flourishing. On average, countries with larger governments have slower rates of economic growth. Also, in the U.S. during 1981-2007, state governments that increased their size of government had less upward income mobility and more downward income mobility. In a flourishing society, these data would be reversed. These results suggest that as a government controls more and more of a nation's economic decisions there will be less human flourishing and less of an opportunity society.

## **LEGAL SYSTEM AND PROPERTY RIGHTS**

The importance of a sound legal system and strong property rights for human flourishing cannot be overstated. One of the single defining characteristics that separate prosperous countries from those that are poor is the quality of a nation's legal system and the protection of private property rights. These two components are also essential to a biblical understanding of human freedom and flourishing. The fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth commandments deal with fundamental aspects of protecting our natural rights. The prohibitions against covetousness in the ninth and tenth commandments are also important because if left unchecked they can quickly lead to violations of commandments five, six, seven, and eight. The fact that half of the commandments given to Moses by God pertain to a legal system and strong property rights demonstrate their importance.

A sound legal system and the existence strong property rights are important components of economic freedom because they protect life, liberty, and property from the depredations of others. This means that the fruits of one's labor can be put toward productive uses that serve mankind when property rights are enforced. People will be entrepreneurial with their resources if they know the future return on those resources is protected. These entrepreneurial actions could result in a business that creates a valuable product or service, or a charitable organization that serves those in need. A sound legal system and the protection of private property rights is essential for a society in which each person is free to fulfill his vocation to the best of his God-given abilities.

Unfortunately, many countries around the world do not have sound legal systems or the protection of private property rights. In these countries, corruption is rampant, governments are not accountable to the people, poverty rates are high, and disregard for the natural environment is common. There is little freedom, opportunity, or human flourishing. In these countries, the plight of the people is more akin to the slavery of the Israelites under Pharaoh than to the plenty desired by God at the foundation of the world.

## **SOUND MONEY**

At first, it may be puzzling as to how the conduct of monetary policy relates to economic freedom and human flourishing. For those who have lived through a period of hyperinflation, however, it is not in the least bit puzzling. Hyperinflation occurs when the value of a currency plummets, resulting in a rapid increase in prices. This is caused by a massive increase in the amount of money in a country's economy by the central bank.

The net result of hyperinflation is the theft of real value from those who hold the currency to those who do the printing. For example, if someone were to earn ten dollars in a day in a country with hyperinflation, the value of his wages would have dropped below the value of ten dollars by the time he used the money to buy food. In this way, it is a theft of one's labor and reduces the freedom one rightfully has to use his resources and talents in his vocation.

This pernicious manipulation of a currency is not new; it has occurred ever since man began using money. A Christian condemnation of this practice is not new either. Nicole Oresme, a scholastic writing during the fourteenth century, roundly condemned the manipulation of the currency by rulers of his day. Drawing on Aristotle and Augustine, he recognized that currency manipulation was inconsistent with Christian teaching, because it fundamentally violated one's property rights.<sup>29</sup>

While periods of hyperinflation occur less frequently today than in the past, they are always extremely damaging to the poorest citizens of developing countries. This is because the poor typically do not have bank accounts or the means to convert their money into a different currency. The wealthy typically are less affected by hyperinflation because they have bank accounts and can move their money outside the country or convert it to a different currency. In short, hyperinflation is detrimental to the poorest of the poor and quickly increases income inequality.

## **FREEDOM TO TRADE INTERNATIONALLY**

The ability to exchange goods and services with each other is a key aspect of economic freedom. All people produce something of value with their work and exchange it for money that they then use to buy food and other items to take care of their families. It is so commonplace that they hardly give it any thought.

For example, many wake up each morning and drink orange juice from Florida and eat oatmeal with strawberries, both of which are grown in California. If one were to add milk to the oatmeal it might come from dairies on the west coast, east coast, or from the Midwest. Exchange benefits people in their daily lives. Each individual is free to devote his time to a calling or vocation that he chooses and then exchange the surplus of this labor for his daily bread. Restricting the ability to exchange goods and services reduces economic freedom and makes everyone worse off.

The same is true for goods and services exchanged with people from other countries. The benefits of everyday exchanges are not affected by international borders; in fact, global free trade gives individuals even more opportunities than they had before.

Man has been engaging in trade over great distances for thousands of years. Excavations of ancient civilizations from all over the world reveal the exchange of goods over trade routes that span hundreds and thousands of miles. Our economic understanding of the importance of trade and exchange is slightly more modern. Adam Smith, the founder of modern economics, as well as several prominent economists that followed him, highlighted the benefits of international trade. Their insight was that international trade made the market for goods and services bigger and hence gave people more opportunities to specialize in fields of their choosing. This specialization increased the productivity of each person's labor as well as the surplus of that labor. In short, people became more productive and more prosperous.

Today, the freedom to trade internationally is important for the world's poorest nations. Many people in these countries do not have the freedom to exchange goods with those in other countries. Often, farmers in poor countries are prohibited from selling their produce to international markets. Instead they are forced to sell at below-market prices to agricultural control boards run by their government. These governments then sell the produce on the world market at higher prices and pocket the difference. If the people in these countries had the freedom to access markets directly, they would be able to reap the true fruits of their labor.

## REGULATIONS

The actions of governments in the regulation of industry and labor often have the noblest of intentions and unfortunately the most unforeseen and damaging consequences. Regulations limit the economic freedom of some people because they always come at a cost. However, proponents of regulation argue that this reduction in freedom is beneficial for society as a whole because they reduce certain negative consequences. Unfortunately, regulations with the best of intentions are often hijacked by those with powerful interests. This is not something that occurs only in the United States. It takes many forms the world over and usually works to the advantage of the powerful. In the United States, this hijacking of regulations is called "crony capitalism," or simply "cronyism."

Cronyism can take the form of regulations written by the industry being regulated. Often the implementation of regulations is influenced by large businesses through the appointment of former employees to the regulatory board. This practice is known as the "revolving door" and is a known problem of regulations.

The events surrounding the convicted Ponzi-schemer, Bernie Madoff, provide a notable example of how someone can abuse the regulatory process. While operating his Ponzi scheme, Madoff served on several advisory committees of the United States Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), the very entity that was supposed to be regulating his hedge fund. This scandal illustrates that regulations come to serve powerful interests by maintaining the regulations to their advantage.

For many small businesses, this takes the form of licensing, which occurs when the government forbids a company to operate without a specially-issued license. The motivation for licensing is that it is supposed to ensure a minimum level of quality in a particular industry. Unfortunately, licensing typically serves as a way for people in an industry to keep new competition out. A particularly egregious example is the licensing of florists in Louisiana. Clearly there is no safety concern that warrants this industry to be regulated. Yet to be

a florist in Louisiana, one must complete coursework, pursue practicum hours, and pay fees to take floral licensing exams.

Government regulation often keeps poor in the developing world in poverty. Often, licensing and regulations exist in these countries to give government officials the opportunity to accept bribes. A tedious approval process for a permit can be easily bypassed by a payment under the table. This, of course, favors the wealthy and well-connected in these countries and hurts the poor who do not have connections or wealth.

Countries with a high degree of industry and labor regulation also have high levels of corruption. The most tragic example of the impact of these regulations on the poor was the spark that started the recent uprisings in the Middle East. Tarek al-Tayeb Mohamed Bouazizi was a twenty-six-year-old Tunisian street vendor. He had supported his family by selling produce on the street since he was ten years old.

Bouazizi was often harassed by police because he did not have a permit to sell produce on the street, nor did he have enough money to pay the bribe. However, he persisted because it was the only way that he could make a living. On December 16<sup>th</sup>, 2010, he borrowed two-hundred dollars to buy produce to sell on the street the following day. At 10:30 the next morning, Bouazizi was beaten and harassed by police for not having a license to sell goods on the street. They destroyed the produce that he had purchased the day before and confiscated his digital scales. He went to the authorities and demanded the return of his scales. The authorities ignored him. Out of desperation he got a can of gasoline and set himself on fire in front of the government buildings. “How is a man to make a living?” is the last thing Bouazizi said before lighting himself on fire.

Bouazizi’s death quickly become a rallying cry for the poor and oppressed in the Middle East. Before this unrest was misappropriated to serve various Islamic ideologies, it was the desire of the poor to be free. It was the rising up of a people who wanted to live in a society where individuals and families could control their own economic opportunities.

## **CONCLUSION: WHAT SHOULD CHRISTIANS DO ABOUT IT?**

Christians eagerly await the day when Christ will restore shalom. In the meantime, we should be productive because we are called to work toward shalom in our daily lives. This work brings about flourishing in our families and in society. Flourishing may be difficult to define, but one knows it when he sees it. Mankind witnesses flourishing when people live long, healthy lives, or when mothers and fathers bring new life into the world. Flourishing is enriched by the prevalence of modern medicine that has turned many devastating illnesses into treatable common ailments. It is also the preservation of the forests in which people hike and the quality of the air that people breathe. Our entire lives are enriched when we flourish together as God’s people.

A society in which people have a great deal of economic freedom is one in which people flourish. Many are lucky enough to live in a part of the world that experiences flourishing every day. Because of this, they often take both freedom and flourishing for granted. Placing themselves in the shoes of people who are not as

fortunate helps them to realize the importance of economic freedom. The conduct that merited Bouazizi perpetual harassment by the police is something that millions of Americans enjoy every Saturday at local farmers markets. Bouazizi, and millions of others trapped in countries with little economic freedom, lead lives in which the simple act of trying to sell produce to feed one's family is nearly impossible. People who live on less than \$1.25 a day, the Christians in Egypt, and many others know what it means to be denied the opportunity to flourish. The freedom to worship God and serve him in a vocation is difficult when economic freedom is lacking.

These examples illustrate why we need a sound opportunity-based environment—an environment in which we care for ourselves and others—that promotes flourishing. For Christians, economic freedom is not an end in and of itself; it is a means to an end. The five pillars of economic freedom help us understand the ways in which economic freedom can be increased and flourishing promoted. Christians through the centuries have worked to ensure that many of us have the freedom to serve God and to flourish. They understood that there is no notion of flourishing without the biblical meta-narrative of Scripture. Ultimately, God created flourishing and will bring it to its full fruition in the new heaven and new earth when he makes all things as they should be.

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<sup>1</sup> Hugh Whelchel, *How Then Should We Work?* (Bloomington, IN: Westbow Press, 2012), 94.

<sup>2</sup> Ps. 72:1-7, NIV.

<sup>3</sup> Isa. 57:19.

<sup>4</sup> Gen. 26:29.

<sup>5</sup> Gen. 15:15, Ps. 4:8.

<sup>6</sup> I Chron. 12:17-18.

<sup>7</sup> Isa. 2:4, 11:6, Ezek. 36:35, Am. 9:13

<sup>8</sup> Isa. 9:11.

<sup>9</sup> Barbara L. Frederickson, *Positivity* (New York, NY: Random House, 2009), 17.

<sup>10</sup> British Library, "The Magna Carta," accessed June 1, 2013, [http://www.bl.uk/treasures/magnacarta/translation/mc\\_trans.html](http://www.bl.uk/treasures/magnacarta/translation/mc_trans.html).

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Eccl. 5:19; Acts 20:35.

<sup>14</sup> The Fraser Institute is an independent Canadian research and educational organization which studies the effects of markets and governments on individual welfare

<sup>15</sup> James Gwartney et al, "Economic Freedom of the World 2012 Annual Report," Fraser Institute, 2012, 24.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> James Gwartney et al, "Economic Freedom of the World 2011 Annual Report," Fraser Institute, 2011.

<sup>18</sup> "Economic Freedom 2012 Annual Report."

<sup>19</sup> Ravallion, Martin; Chen, Shaohua; Sangraula, Prem. "Dollar a Day Revisited." *The World Bank Economic Review* 23 (2009): 163–184, doi:10.1093/wberlhp007.

<sup>20</sup> Joseph Connors, "Global Poverty: The Role of Economic Freedom, Democracy, and Foreign Aid," (PhD diss., Florida State University, 2011).

<sup>21</sup> "Economic Freedom of the World 2012 Annual Report;" Transparency International, "Corruption Perceptions Index, 2012," <http://www.transparency.org/cpi2012/results>.

<sup>22</sup> Luke 9: 1-10.

<sup>23</sup> James Gwartney et al, "Economic Freedom of the World 2009 Annual Report," Fraser Institute, 2009.

<sup>24</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. *Ownership and Property in the Old Testament Economy*, Journal of Markets and Morality, Volume 15, No. 1, 2012.

<sup>25</sup> "Economic Freedom of the World Annual 2012 Report."

<sup>26</sup> The measure of civil liberties created by Freedom House, an independent watchdog organization which seeks to promote freedom around the world, is on a scale of 1-7, with 1 indicating the highest level of civil liberties and 7 the lowest. The scale is reversed here for clarity.

<sup>27</sup> J.P. Moreland, "A Biblical Case for Limited Government," <http://tifwe.org/research/a-biblical-case-for-limited-government/>.

<sup>28</sup> Dwight R. Lee, "Redistribution," *Library of Economics and Liberty*, last modified 2008, <http://www.econlib.org/library/Enc/Redistribution.html>.

<sup>29</sup> Jorg Guido Hulsmann, "Nicolas Oresme and the First Monetary Treatise," *Mises Daily*, May 18, 2004, <http://mises.org/daily/1516>.