

What hazards come with wealth and how can you avoid them? (28:11)

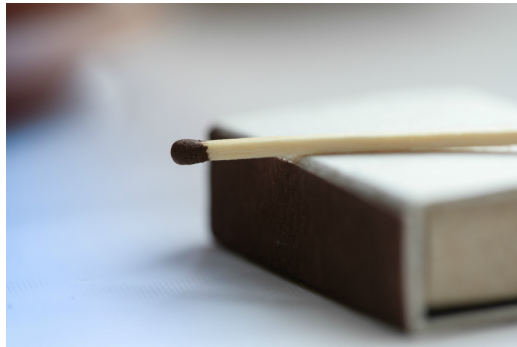
The rich man is wise in his own eyes, but the poor who has understanding sees through him.

THE TEXT (NASB)

The rich man is wise in his own eyes, but the poor who has understanding sees through him.

*The rich man is wise in his own conceit; but the poor that hath understanding searcheth him out.
KJV - Proverbs 28:11*

INTRODUCTION



Wealth is hazardous.

Money, like gasoline, must be handled with care. Gasoline can power many engines or can cause much destruction. Like any other potentially toxic material, control is critical. But there's a danger. Riches make a person **wise in his own eyes**. This expression implies an arrogant self-sufficient smugness. This self-sufficiency can still be dangerous even if a person is not arrogant or smug. Yet not all wealthy people are conceited.

How is it that some avoid this vice while others are caught in it? The answer is related to the word **understanding**. Some have riches and understanding; others just have riches. A possibly greater danger is not even realizing that, although wealthy, we are miserable. Someone once said, "**Poor** is the man whose only wealth is riches."



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COMMENTARY

Translation: *the rich man*

In Hebrew the expression “**the rich man**,” אִישׁ עֲשִׁיר (ʾiṣḥ ʿăšîr, pronounced “eesh ah-sheer”), implies someone who is known for their wealth exclusively. ʿăšîr, is used seven times in the book of Proverbs, usually in an uncomplimentary way. Wealth often tempts us to act independently from God. We are rich enough to be our own boss, and don’t need to ask God for help in any way. Wealth brings multiple hazards.

The First Hazard: Conceit



Early in the Bible God warns His people against smugness and pride once they become wealthy:

Beware that you do not forget the LORD your God...when you have eaten and are satisfied, and have built good houses and lived in them and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and gold multiply, and all that you have multiplies, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God who brought you out from...the houses of slaves (Deuteronomy 8:11-14).

The Second Hazard: Hedonism

James, the half-brother of Jesus, warns believers of the brevity of riches and their associated dangers, “Come now you rich, weep and howl for your miseries which are coming upon you? You have lived luxuriously on the earth and led a life of wanton pleasure.” (James 5:1). In this passage he speaks of God’s punishment for those who abuse wealth for personal pleasure while ignoring the needs of others.

The Third Hazard: Independence



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In the last book of the Bible Jesus gives a similar warning to those who say, “I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing, and who do not know that they are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked.” (Revelation 3:17).

The attitude, “I don't need God,” is a much greater temptation and danger for the wealthy than the poor.

American author Robert J. Tamsay expressed this danger in his article, *Issuing A Declaration of Independence*:

Many people dream of becoming “financially independent,” reaching a point when a regular paycheck is no longer the compelling motive for working... However, complete independence has a downside... Failing to recognize help in climbing the “ladder of success,” as well as support for continued success, fosters false pride—and exposes our vulnerabilities to competitors and opposition.

You may want to read Tamsay’s [entire article](#) to be better informed.

The Horrible Story of Hetty Green

Hetty Green (November 21, 1834 - July 3, 1916) was nicknamed the *Witch of Wall Street*. She was extremely wealthy yet also very miserly, even at the expense of her own children's health. Once her son had a serious leg injury and she shopped around for the cheapest doctor. It took her so long to find a low cost doctor that by the time she finally found one, her son's leg had to be amputated. In her case, her love of money made her wise in her own eyes, but extremely foolish in the eyes of all others.

Never Stop Learning about God's Ways

While most would say, it is better to be rich than poor, the text gives us a warning. Wealth becomes dangerous when it deflects its owner from gaining understanding. If forced to choose between riches and understanding, pick understanding. The Hebrew word for *understanding* (מִבִּין me-bin) is used 15 times in the Bible and appears twice more in Proverbs 28 (Proverbs 28:2, 28:7). In Proverbs 28:7 *understanding* is not tied to the raw intelligence, that is, the ability to grasp information intellectually, but to a submissive spirit which "keeps the law" of God. This is important. *Understanding* can be gained or lost simply by choosing submit to God's



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word or to snub it.

Never stop deliberate learning. That's the message of Ecclesiastes 4:13 to a very successful man. Be extra careful that you are not *always learning but never coming to a knowledge of the truth* (2 Timothy 3:7). Often those in positions of high authority are also wealthy, but if they become unteachable, that is, *wise in their own eyes*, then they are in deep trouble. It's also the most common money mistake. [What is the biggest money mistake?](#)

Self-Reliance vs. Self-Sufficiency



This impulse toward self-reliance and self-sufficiency remains strong throughout our lives. Many people dream of becoming “financially independent,” reaching a point when a regular paycheck is no longer the compelling motive for working. Others yearn to fill the description offered by the hero of “Invictus,” written by William Ernest Henley. In this brief poem, first published in 1888, the central figure declares, “I am the master of my fate: I am the captain of my soul.”

It seems commendable to want to be master of your own fate, to take responsibility for the outcomes of your own actions and decisions. However, complete independence has a downside.

In the Old Testament of the Bible, we read about Uzziah, who, for 52 years, served as King of Judah. We are told, “He did right in the eyes of the Lord.... As long as he sought the Lord, God gave him success,” (2 Chronicles 26:4-5). For much of his life, Uzziah openly acknowledged dependence on God for his prosperity.

However, a time came late in his royal reign when apparently success went to Uzziah's head. Even when confronted about his rebellion, he refused accountability and correction. “...His fame spread far and wide, for he was greatly helped until he became powerful. But after Uzziah became powerful, his pride led to his downfall. He was unfaithful to the Lord his God...” 2 Chronicles 26:16-21. Uzziah had become self-sufficient; he needed no one, not even God.

Job and Abraham stand in sharp contrast to Uzziah. Job and Abraham were both very wealthy but recognized and acknowledged that their wealth came from God (Job 1:21, Genesis 18:27).



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OUR CREATOR, REDEEMER, AND FRIEND

Jesus tells us of a rich man in Luke 12 who suddenly became much richer through a bumper crop. This man then made a fatal error, because he lacked understanding. Rather than acknowledging God's priorities for wealth (assisting the poor and needy), he was entirely selfish. He planned for early retirement and a life of leisure. God called him a fool and terminated his life on earth.

Jesus warned His disciples to beware of every form of greed (Luke 12:15) and of the deceitfulness of riches (Mark 4:19).

Perhaps the biggest lie that riches bring is this: When we're rich, we no longer need God's provision and can ignore His will. FATAL HAZARD !

APPLICATION

- Memorize the text in your favourite Bible translation and think about it often.
- Don't fawn over the wealthy or the super-wealthy as if they were some type of a god or demigod. Remember: To whom much is given, from him much will be required. Increased riches always bring increased responsibilities. The God of perfect justice holds the wealthy to a higher account than the poor.
- Study Proverbs 3:7 and look at the relationship between "the fear of the LORD", "understanding" and "turning from evil."
- Work harder at mastering "principle" for good living than amassing "principal" for capital investment.
- Beware of the arrogant independence attitude that often comes with wealth, power and fame. Consider the sobering story of King Uzziah in the Bible - 2 Chronicles 26:1-21

Which of these steps, if any, does Jesus want you to take first? Ask Him.



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KEY WORDS

abundance, arrogance, danger, humility, pride, rich, understanding, wise, worse life (quality), poor (dāl pronounced “dahl”)

ILLUSTRATION

Who is Self-Centered Sam?



Self-Centered Sam looks out for number one. Who's that? It's Sam, of course! Sam doesn't consider himself to be self-centered. One of his favourite books is [“The Richest Man in Babylon.”](#)

What does Sam do with his income? The cream, the very best goes to his own long-term growth fund. His motto is ‘pay yourself first.’ Some call him Stingy Sam. But he's not stingy; he's just making careful preparation for his own future, comfort, and well-being. He is part of the “me” generation. He typifies the Maslow's hierarchy of needs with self-actualization as apex of all values. Sam is a dedicated humanist. He doesn't recognize any higher power than himself. He's a tough negotiator.

Sam doesn't ignore charity. But how could he possibly help anyone one else unless there was something in it for him? Therefore any and all charitable donations must have full and public credit given to the donor. The more people are aware of his generosity the better. After all, a little bit of advertising is good for business. When his corporation gives a gift it comes as a percentage of profits, not revenues.

His financial hero is the multi-millionaire, whose assets once exceeded the entire US treasury:



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The great Railroad and Steamship Baron [Cornelius Vanderbilt](#).

