

How hard should you work to get rich? (23:4-5)

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THE TEXT (NASB)

Do not weary yourself to gain wealth. Cease from your consideration [lit., “understanding”] of it. When you set your eyes on it, it is gone. For wealth certainly makes itself wings, like an eagle that flies toward the heavens.

Labour not to be rich: cease from thine own wisdom. Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not? For riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven.
KJV - Proverbs 23:4

INTRODUCTION



Wealth is a moving target: The more you get, the less you appreciate, and the more you want.

Wealth itself brings no lasting satisfaction; while it is a fine thing to be rich, this proverb warns us not to pursue wealth simply for its own sake.

Do not burn up your life in grabbing for riches, when infinitely finer ambitions are possible.



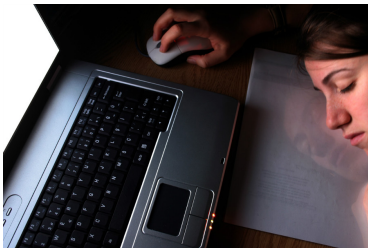
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COMMENTARY

This proverb is one of the most important nuggets of financial wisdom in all of Proverbs. It puts a spike through the heart of the vulgar materialism that possesses our culture. So let’s begin by noting what the text does not say. Ready? It does not tell us to avoid hard work!

Translation: *weary, labour*



The Hebrew term employed in the expression, “do not weary yourself,” יָגַח (yā•gāh, pronounced “yah-gah”) points primarily at “working until one is worn and exhausted.” It is used twenty-five times in the Bible, but appears only once in Proverbs here. yā•gāh is first used in Joshua 7:3, when, following the conquest of Jericho, Joshua is advised against making his people toil up the hill to the city of Ai. The term emphasizes the bodily exhaustion and spiritual weariness of labour, becoming worn out physically and emotionally.

Translation: *gain wealth*

Hebrew uses one word for the expression “to gain wealth,” עָשָׂר (ā•šār, pronounced “ah-shar”). ā•šār appears seventeen times in the Bible, including six times in Proverbs, including 10:4, 10:22, 13:7, 21:17, and 28:20. It points to riches, material assets, and cash: Things, especially financial things. So the text here does not dismiss hard work for the sake of other goals. It’s similar to Proverbs 28:20, warning us against all “get rich quick” strategies.

Guidance in the Gaining of Wealth



When we join this text to the warning of Proverbs 28:20, we get this overall message: Do not work fast and furiously, just to get wealthy. Instead work consistently (10:4), without pretense



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(13:7) and without extravagance (21:17). There is nothing inherently wrong with wealth, or God would never give us riches as a blessing (10:22). But we should look to the LORD as the true source of real wealth, enjoying it free of any sour aftertaste.

Paradoxically, but truly, the text warns: “When you set your eyes on it, it is gone.” We become focused on acquiring more, so that the all wealth we don’t yet have, blinds us to the real wealth we do have. Very often we sense that we’re misguided, yet it seems like everyone does it. So we need to focus on something more than simple profit maximization by studying this text: [How can you get God's full reward?](#)

Classic Comments

In his classic Commentary (1746), John Gill says that when wealth is our primary pursuit, it becomes an illusion:

Do not be always laying schemes, forming projects, inventing new things in order to get money... They [riches] are not lasting and durable; in a little time they will not be; they are perishing things, they have no substance or solidity in them; they are not satisfying; they do not make them happy; they are rather nonentities than realities; and therefore the eyes of the mind and the affections of the heart should not be set on them.

Contemporary commentator Charles Bridges makes a similar point: “The man who concentrates all his wisdom, talents, and energy, who sacrifices all his peace; will ‘rise up early, to retire late (Psalm 127:2), in gaining riches, and he has often been at one stroke deprived of all, just when he supposed himself to have it all in his grasp.”

How Much is Enough?

Financial Advisor Ron Blue tells the story of a rich man who was asked, “How much money does a man need to be satisfied?” The answer? “Just a little bit more.” Even success can create the tragedy that there’s “never enough.” Thus this proverb: Wealth pursued remains out of reach. Riches fly ever higher. To learn more about a powerful solution to this difficult question, see: [How much is enough?](#)

Money Myopia

The second part of this proverb’s opening statement assumes we’re obsessively pre-occupied with pursuing wealth, so it tells us to STOP. Stop thinking about money all the time. The old



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saying put it rightly, “Poor is the man, whose only wealth is money.” And, as my good friend, John Flanagan once said, “There is nothing that bothers a rich man more, than to see a poor man who’s happy.” The following cartoon by Charles Schultz show’s what happens when people want more, more, more. “More stuff” is not “more life.” Often it’s “more death.”



OUR CREATOR, REDEEMER, AND FRIEND

Jesus said something similar about the pursuit of wealth, but Jesus’ words were much more radical.

In his famous “Sermon on the Mount,” Jesus tells his followers to “seek first God’s kingdom and his righteousness and all these things”—all the necessities of life, food, and clothing—“will be added to you.” Those who pursue righteousness before riches are raised far above those who blind themselves to God, who “eagerly seek” only coin (Matthew 6:19-34).

Jesus reminds believers that we have a Father in heaven, who knows what we need and certainly provides for us. Some would say, “Impossible! Wishful thinking! Dream on.” But those who live it confirm, “God does provide, often in unexpected, humorous and miraculous ways.”

APPLICATION



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- Memorize the text in your favourite Bible translation and think about it often.
- Accept wealth as a *by-product* for providing goods/services to others. Do not chase it as your primary goal. View wealth as a reward, not *the* reward.¹
- Don't take on a new job just for the money, no matter how much it pays.
- Identify the six goals which surpass wealth². Pursue them with passion.
- Pay more attention to calculating your growth in righteousness than to your material worth, or as some people describe it: Your net worth.

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



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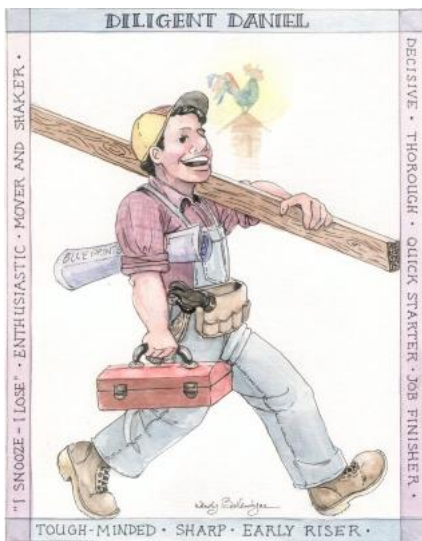
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KEY WORDS

blessing, diligence, contentment, excellence, focus, laziness, more assets (quantity), wealth

ILLUSTRATION

Who is Diligent Daniel?



Diligent Daniel is a friend of Steady Eddie. Whereas Steady Eddie is known for his staying power, Diligent Daniel is known for his decisiveness and thoroughness. He is an early riser, a quick starter, and a job finisher. There's no room for procrastination here.

Daniel is tough-minded and sharp. He tells himself each day, “I snooze- I lose.” He pushes himself and calls himself lazy. He is tough on himself—not rough.

He’s the one Benjamin Franklin was thinking about two hundred years ago when he came up with the maxim, “Early to bed, early to rise makes a man healthy, WEALTHY, and wise.” Daniel’s also the one the author Oswald Chambers described with the words, “The heights by great men reached and kept, were not attained by sudden flight, but they while their companions slept, were toiling upward in the night.”

Daniel is more of a thinker than Steady Eddie, but is known for his enthusiastic work capacity, not his brilliance. He’s a mover and a shaker. He’s not afraid to get his hands dirty and is in good physical condition. He’s a builder. He starts the job right away and gets it DONE. He doesn’t flip-flop in this thinking. He is not double-minded. He remains humble while exuding confidence.



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One of his favourite financial tools is the Registered Education Savings Plan (RESP).



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FOOTNOTES

1. *"You should not strive so much for wealth as for contentment... 'Godliness with contentment is great gain.' (1 Timothy 6:6) 'If you can learn to be equally happy and content with little or plenty, and trust in God to give you what He wants you to have, then you will be more blessed than every billionaire in the world.'"* Generation Family Devotional July 11, 2022. I would modify the last sentence to say, not every billionaire but perhaps most billionaires. There may be some billionaires who are both rich and content, God knows. But the point is this: Contentment with the basics, is better than great wealth. Within this website study the keyword [contentment](#).

2. Six Goals Surpassing Wealth:

2.1 [Wisdom](#)

2.2 [Understanding](#)

2.3 [A Good Reputation](#) [Good Morals](#)

2.4 [An Excellent Wife](#)

2.5 [Knowledge](#)

2.6 [Life and Health](#) [Riches, Honour, and Best of All](#)

