Frustration over wealth—how's that possible? (24:1-2)

Do not be envious of evil men, nor desire to be with them; for their minds devise violence and their lips talk of trouble.

THE TEXT (NASB)

Do not be envious of evil men, nor desire to be with them; for their minds devise violence and their lips talk of trouble.

Be not thou envious against evil men, neither desire to be with them. For their heart studieth destruction, and their lips talk of mischief. KJV - Proverbs 24:1-2

INTRODUCTION

Others have it, and we don't. **Evil men** can be very rich, and their wealth can make us **envious.**

When we contemplate the wealthy, especially the very rich, it's easy to want what they have. We might **desire to be with them,** to enjoy their treasures and pleasures.

We need to look beyond what they have, and see where they're going. Who wants to climb inside a Rolls Royce limousine, for all th delights and diversions... just before it plunges over a cliff?

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COMMENTARY

Money is good for us, only if we can enjoy it without tragic consequences. A sick and bedridden millionaire is much worse off than a poor, but healthy, lad playing in the dirt. When our ability to enjoy our wealth vanishes, the wealth itself becomes useless. The text does not reveal the consequences of evil, but other texts in Proverbs make it very clear that “the deeds of a man’s hands will return to him,” Proverbs 12:14. **Violence** and **trouble** will bring more grief than the wealth brings fulfillment.

Stop and Think

The lesson: If we are frustrated over others’ wealth and our own—only comparative—poverty, we must stop and think. Did they earn it honestly or dishonestly? Often it’s hard to tell. Dishonest wealth is contaminated and eventually causes more trouble than the riches are worth. If it’s been gained honestly, then we should admire their diligence and skill. In either case, we should not be envious. The tenth commandment (Exodus 20:7) forbids “coveting our neighour’s goods.” We will sometimes feel envy, but we must not nurture that feeling, or it will dominate our lives.

What is Envy?

Envy is an emotion, feeling disatissfied with ourselves, from comparing our achievements with someone else’s status or possessions. Envy of “what someone else has” is closely related to jealousy of “who someone else is.” Both are ways of making another person the measure of our own lives. But whenever we do that—whenever we turn another, merely mortal human being into our standard of excellence, it’s just another version of school-yard “peer pressure.” Whether we’re resentful or worshipful, we are heading for disaster. In the 1930s, millions of German citizens looked to a new leader by the name of

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Adolf Hitler as their measure of human greatness—someone with ambitious idolatry, someone with resentful envy. Few saw the evil looming. Very soon worshipping a man would turn Germany into hell on earth.

Translation: *Evil*

The Hebrew word for "evil," **רעה** (r?•??h, pronounced "rah-ah"), is used in the Bible first at Genesis 2:9, when God commands Adam and Eve to abstain from "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." This word is used over six-hundred times in the Bible, often translated as bad, malignant, disagreeable, or wicked. There is no hidden or subtle meaning here. It means *bad* as opposed to *good;* life-killing as opposed to life-giving. Here's the problem: Evil can often *look* life-giving. And while it's been said, "All that glitters is not gold," even real gold, though refined by fire, undergoes an invisible, moral, and spiritual contamination when it's gained by evil.

Evil Pollutes from the Inside Out

Note the progression of evil from **their minds** to **their lips.** Evil starts on the inside and moves outward—thought, word, deed—mind, mouth, muscle. The text implies that violence and trouble pollutes whatever is being envied. The violence and trouble are not trivial, like being overly aggressive in soccer or hockey—though breaking the rules brings penalties, even in sports. Sometimes the pleasure from wealth, even dishonest wealth, blinds the thief to what's ahead. They don't know that the wickedness they dole out to others will come back on them.

Why?

You might ask, if these men are evil and if God is good, why does He allow evil men to enjoy good things that we might envy? This quesion is answered at the end of Psalm 49:16-20. God allows people to make choices, even if the choices are foolish. God has a father's respect for our personal freedom. He wants us to love him, to "choose life," but we can only do that if we do it freely. If our love is not free, it cannot be real love. He designed us. He gave us the freedom to choose whatever we want to treasure and whomever we want to idolize. So, like any good parent, He often challenges us to "grow up" and resist "the peer pressure." Many of the Proverbs stand by themselves and do not need to be read in context, but this text is understood better with the message of Proverbs 24:3-4. Refer to the question, "How do you build with success?"

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OUR CREATOR, REDEEMER, AND FRIEND

Jesus never displayed envy.

He had few or no concrete assets, yet He was never envious of anyone. From all reliable historic documents, Jesus showed an amazing contentment and complete self-control.

He obeyed this Proveerb perfectly. He never sinned (Hebrews 4:15).

APPLICATION

- Memorize the text in your favourite Bible translation and think about it often.
- Study Psalm 73 and learn what it says on handling ENVY.
- Don’t let yourself be intimidated by wealth or by wealthy people.
- Rather than focusing on what you feel you lack, thank God for what you already have.

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

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KEY WORDS

envy, contentment, integrity, worse life (quality), wicked, violence, trouble, satisfaction, success, contamination, bf spending

ILLUSTRATION

Who is Tax-Driven Ted?

Death and taxes: The only things we can be sure of! Certainly that's the way Tax-Driven Ted sees it. Whereas others pay some or little attention to taxes, he is consumed by tax minimization. Ted is tax obsessed. Why? For many Canadians, if left unmanaged, taxes eliminate over 50% of income. In Canada tax freedom day falls in July.

Tax freedom day is the day of the year when you have paid all your taxes and can now keep the rest of the money you earn. Tax-Driven Ted will spend money just to get a write-off. He fails to seriously evaluate the underlying economics behind the decision and chooses to focus on the tax consequences. He loves to borrow money to invest simply because he can write off the interest costs of amount borrowed. This investment technique is called leveraging and is commonplace.

Ted doesn't believe he should pay any taxes. After all, the government wastes money. It's extremely inefficient. He uses every angle to reduce taxes. He's always looking for loopholes, credits, or write-offs. *His focus is not on customer satisfaction but on tax reduction.*

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He goes on trips and conferences so that he can take the tax write-offs. He loves limited partnerships investments and other tax shelters. For some investors tax considerations are secondary, but for Tax-Driven Ted, they come first.

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