

# How does wealth deceive us? (18:11)

**A rich man's wealth is his strong city and like a high wall in his own imagination**

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## THE TEXT (NASB)

**A rich man's wealth is his strong city and like a high wall in his own imagination**

*The rich man's wealth is his strong city, and as an high wall in his own conceit. KJV - Proverbs 18:11*

## INTRODUCTION



Our imagination is very powerful, but it is also very limited.

Our three-year-old son will cling to his teddy bear for comfort and protection.

How much security does the teddy bear really provide?



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## COMMENTARY

Security is all in the toddler's mind. The ragged teddy bear does its job, soothing him to sleep. He gives up the tattered bear, only when he finds something better. Likewise, the wealthy loosen their grip on their tattered treasures, only when they find a better source of comfort and security. We all want security. Where do we find it?

### Translation: *a rich man*

The Hebrew term for “a rich man” is a single word: עשיר (ʾā•šîr, pronounced “ah-sheer”). It's typically translated, “the rich” or “rich person.” ʾā•šîr is first used in Exodus 30:15 to contrast the rich and poor in a temple ceremony, and it points simply to the possessor of wealth, with no further implications about that wealth being good or evil.

Yet riches have an invisible danger. Wealth brings a sense of security. Financial instruments like bonds and stocks are even called “securities.” But is the security real or imagined? Clearly money can be used for the construction of a high wall, like a gated neighbourhood. This is protection in a physical sense, but the text speaks metaphorically. Wealth gives us a sense of confidence and courage, like a castle.

### Translation: *strong city*



The first half of this text is identical to Proverbs 10:15, “the rich man's wealth is his fortress.” In Proverbs 10:15 the Hebrew is translated fortress; in Proverbs 18:11 it is translated as strong city. It is unfortunate that the NASB translates the same Hebrew expression differently. Most literal or essentially literal translations handle such identical phrases consistently. Still, the point is this: For the rich man, his wealth is like a fortified city, a citadel, or a bastion, giving him comfort and security. Independence.

## Contextual Security

The context of this proverb also deals with the topic of security. The preceding verse, Proverbs 18:10, “The name of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous runs into it and is safe,” contains the same Hebrew modifier “strong.” One speaks of a strong tower and the other of a strong city. A tower is primarily a military installation, more austere than a city. The tower (Hebrew: Migdal) referred to in Proverbs 18:10 is first used to describe the tower of Babel. It implies a



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commanding elevation.

A city is for living, but a tower is for protection and defense. Theaters, restaurants, shops, and amusement parks are not found in forts. Fortress life is more like warfare than entertainment. I believe there is a subtle implication here that the Name of the LORD provides true safety, but not necessarily luxury and entertainment.

## Riches are Risky

The righteous seeks security in the LORD. The wealthy get a false sense of security from their wealth. But is it wrong to be rich? When do riches cause us trouble? According to the text and context, riches cause trouble when we look to wealth for comfort and security, like a teddy bear, and stop looking to God. When our riches diminish our trust in God, they change from an asset to a liability.

How can this change in attitude be detected? The migration of trust is personal. When does acceptable admiration of our neighbour's property turn into sinful coveting our neighbour's property? It's a shift in attitude, a change in focus.

## Testing our Trust

When does using our wealth become trusting our wealth? Here are three tests:

- If our sentiments fluctuate up and down as our financial resources fluctuate, that's a sure sign we trust our money;
- If we're annoyed when we're asked for a donation, particularly one without any tax benefit or public recognition, that's a sure sign we trust our money;
- If we are unwilling to risk any financial loss, or demand guarantees or insurance for any investment decision, that's a sure sign we trust our money.

We must guard against an unhealthy dependency on wealth.

## Rich but Lonely



Wealthy people can often be lonely, since they've put a wall around themselves. They may



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distrust the affection of others, suspecting their motives. They may have only superficial friendships, or prefer the company of minions who grovel for their crumbs. Suicide is not uncommon among the very rich. This is not true of all the wealthy, but only those who look to money for comfort and security.

Our three-year-old son will give up his teddy bear very easily under one condition. When mommy or daddy come to pick him up, he abandons the inanimate comfort for a living, loving, powerful parent. Similarly the rich will readily release their wealth, when they feel the comfort of an omnipotent, loving God. Dependency on God is not a sign of weakness, but of wisdom.

## OUR CREATOR, REDEEMER, AND FRIEND

Jesus said, "Not even when one has abundance, does his life consist of his possessions," Luke 12:15. Even great wealth cannot protect our most valuable treasures—our health and life itself.

For many of us, our wealth becomes a counterfeit God. The ancient pagans made idols from gold, because gold was valuable, and more, because they knew they'd made the idols themselves.

As an idol, not only is wealth itself lifeless, but it is also unable to give us life. We cannot even give ourselves life, so something we made by our hands certainly won't.

## APPLICATION

- Memorize the text in your favourite Bible translation and think about it often.
- Treat wealth like your DOG, not your GOD. [Listen to this podcast on wealth as a counterfeit God.](#)
- Think long and hard about the power and love of God.
- Review "Testing our Trust" in the Commentary.

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



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## KEY WORDS

assets, imagination, insurance, liability, LORD, rich, risk, security, suicide, taxes, trust, vulnerability, wealth, worse life (quality), bf saving

## 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](#).

