

LIVING ON THE RAGGED EDGE: COMING TO TERMS WITH REALITY

STRAIGHT TALK TO THE MONEY-MAD

ECCLESIASTES 5:8-20



The Heart of the Matter

There's an old Japanese proverb that says, "Getting money is like digging with a needle; spending it is like water soaking into sand." We all nod in agreement. Who hasn't known the struggle of financial frustrations? And even those who have plenty become disillusioned because money does not satisfy. As Seneca the Roman once stated, "Money has never yet made anyone rich." But on we go, pushing and striving, planning and struggling to earn more so we can have more, then invest more and enjoy more. Fat chance! The more time we spend earning more money to buy more stuff, the less time we have to enjoy our stuff. Solomon addressed this dilemma in the verses we will examine in this message. He not only exposed the issues, he came to some conclusions worth hearing and heeding. But beware! This is not your typical "think and grow rich" advice. God is speaking about money here. We'd be wise to listen.



Discovering the Way

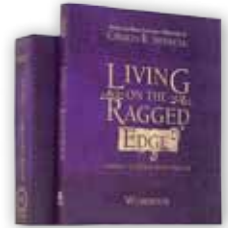
1. Proverbial Principles to Learn (Ecclesiastes 5:8-12)

Solomon's first statements regarding wealth suggest proverbial principles, snapshots of life that illustrate profound truths about the deceptiveness of wealth. These deal in turn with oppression, dissatisfaction, and frustration.

- *Regarding Oppression:* The rich tend to take charge, and their power intimidates and offends the poor.
- *Regarding Dissatisfaction:* Greed and materialism have no built-in safeguards or satisfying limits.
- *Regarding Frustration:* With an increased supply of money and possessions comes an accelerated number of people and worries.



Tools for Digging Deeper



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2. “Grievous Evils” to Remember (Ecclesiastes 5:13–17)

As Solomon reflected on the insatiable appetite for wealth, He reminded us of two evils that a single-minded focus on riches can bring (Ecclesiastes 5:13–17):

- *Those who have clutched riches can quickly crash.* Our material possessions will not last forever, regardless of how well we manage them. We will either lose them because of an unforeseen tragedy, or we will leave them behind when we pass away.
- *Those who have lived high often die hard.* The materialist who lives in earthly opulence quickly discovers that money can't buy happiness, contentment, or peace. In fact, the insatiable drive for wealth usually fills his or her life with futility, resentment, and pain.



DIGGING DEEPER

Is Money the Root of All Evil?

One of the most popular misquotes of Scripture is, “Money is the root of all evil.” An improved — though still deficient — version is, “The love of money is the root of all evil.” You may have heard 1 Timothy 6:10 quoted this way, or you may have quoted it this way yourself.

In the original Greek sentence, the word *rhiza*, “root,” actually comes first for emphasis. Also, the word “all,” *pas*, often means “all kinds” or varieties (Matthew 23:27; 1 Corinthians 6:18).¹ So, although the love of money is not the only source of all evil in the world, it's a major source of all kinds of evil.

What does Paul mean when he says the love of money leads to various types of evil? Just as a weed sends strong roots into your garden soil, choking out flowers and vegetables, the love of riches strangles contentment from our lives. As we examine the problems of sin and evil in society and in our own lives, we will discover that many of our problems are vicious weeds sprouting forth from that single root of greed.

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Starting Your Journey

In Ecclesiastes 5:18–20, Solomon shared the right perspective on money, possessions, and work: they are God’s gifts to be enjoyed, not worshiped. Therefore, there are three “good and fitting” gifts from God to claim:

- First, claim the gift of enjoyment in your life. This is a God-given possibility. Refuse to allow yourself to go in reverse, becoming a grim and negative individual, bound by bitterness and a victim of resentment.
- Second, claim the gift of fulfillment in your work. God is the One who gives riches and wealth, so invest your riches in His work by giving generously; invest your time for His glory; and invest your energy for His purpose.
- Third, claim the gift of contentment in your heart. Whether money comes or goes, Christians must seek contentment in the Lord.

Without Christ at the center of our lives, wealth leads only to disillusionment and dissatisfaction. Are you expending your energy to obtain wealth? Or are you enjoying your job and resources as God’s gifts to you?

ENDNOTE

1. Walter Bauer and others, eds., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 784.