

# MoneyMATTERS

## When does saving become hoarding?

*Wealth accumulation is not always good*

WILFRED HAHN

One of the distressing aspects of our world that always cuts me deeply on my travels is evidence of an enormous wealth gap. The “haves” have more than ever before relative to the “have nots.”

This gap is hard to ignore. Opulence overwhelms the eyes with its luster and grandeur even in the unlikeliest places; poverty rudely interrupting our comfort zone through the direct pleas of beggars and bare-footed children. It is not unusual to see cocooned wealth existing right beside a dirt-bottomed shanty-town.

Granted, my itineraries are usually pretty sheltered — centering in the comfortable hotels of major, modern cities. Even so, in some places — Brazil, for example — the squalor of the poor can meet you at the lobby door of a five-star hotel.

It is a fact of our day: There are no shortage of hoards. The rich continue to get wealthier, the poor ever more burdened. Not only is this true around the globe, it’s occurring at home ... right here in North America. Income and wealth statistics both here and elsewhere suggest that a wealth skew may now be the widest in thousands of years of human history. The prince-to-pauper ratio is far out of whack despite all the work of benevolent organizations such as the World Bank (“Our wish is a world free of poverty” is its slogan) and others like it. Why is this the case?

I don’t pretend to have a full answer. Yet, it’s a pretty safe conclusion that much of the blame can be pinned on hoarding. If it wasn’t human nature to accumulate wealth — given the chance, who wouldn’t? — the world would surely be a better place.

## Spiritual and Material Consequences

Hoarding is destructive in the long run. Economic studies show this to be so. Christian stewards place a high value on the ethic of saving. Indeed, the fruits of capitalism would not be possible without saving. The Bible encourages industriousness and wise budgeting of all of our resources and gifts. But when does saving become hoarding? Where’s the line between virtue and idolatry?

It is somewhere in our hearts. Whether or not we come out on the right side of this line is mostly a personal question, I think. Though the nature of this challenge to the heart is the same, practical applications will differ because each of us are given different positions and roles. Some are employers, others labourers. Some are capital providers and major philanthropists, others borrowers.

All the same, there are a number of attitudes that can help good stewards avoid the destructive snare of hoarding — both spiritually and materially:

- Plan ahead and save for foreseeable needs (retirement, for example.) Practical skills come to bear here — budgeting, balancing wants and needs, and finding good store houses for our savings.
- Free ourselves from the love of money. A hoarder serves money. A faithful steward seeks to have their possessions serve God.
- Remain open to use money in helpful ways to the service of others whether as a lender, employer or giver. *“Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share.”* (1 Timothy 6:18).

If our world were entirely populated with godly stewards, would it look any different? Yes, in many ways, I imagine. Financial hoards would subside even as prosperity for the world would increase. Economic slavery and poverty would diminish though some would probably still be wealthier than others. The blatant wealth gap that we see today would disappear.

Sound too idealistic and unlikely? Not at all. Even if only you alone live out these attitudes with your money, the world is guaranteed to be a better place.

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**If not otherwise noted, all scripture references are taken from the New International Version (NIV) of the Bible.**