

# God, Man, & MAMMON

Navigating the tension between  
the material and the spiritual.

Chapter 1



*with*  
Mitch  
Anthony

## IN THIS CHAPTER

### IF YOUR EYE IS EVIL

Money begs for our focus, an all-consuming focus, if we allow it. Jesus warns of the dire spiritual consequences of adopting such a focus.

### ISAIAH 55:1–3

God wants to be our sole source for fulfillment. When we look elsewhere, especially to the material, the results are empty and disenchanting.



## IF YOUR EYE IS EVIL

By Mitch Anthony

*“The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!”*

— Matthew 6:22-23, NIV

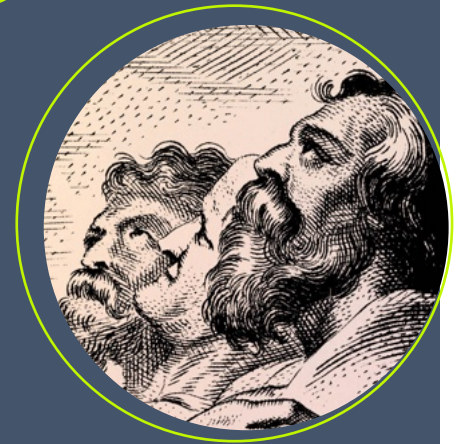
In Jewish culture the “evil eye” was the personal perspective that envied others’ positions, coveted their possessions, and wished harm upon them. This is the bad eye Jesus was referring to, but with an ironic twist: what if the things people were looking at to light up their lives were instead filling them with darkness? Jesus addresses the timeless fact that so many look to money, possessions, and position to fill them, but come away empty. Another bible translation records the phrase, “if your eye is bad” as, “If your eye is greedy, your whole body will be full of darkness.”

Today, the focus of “making a life for ourselves”, which on the surface sounds noble, can migrate to a place where it fills our being with darkness. Have you ever felt empty after getting something that you thought would make a real difference in your life? Jesus posits this question to expose potential deception we may have allowed to take root in our hearts—his point being, that if and when money becomes our main focus, darkness is not far behind. Disappointment awaits those who have made money their central focus in life...and how great is the darkness that they experience!

Jesus offered an ultimatum: choose between God and mammon. Make a decision as to which you will love more. The preface for the God/mammon ultimatum was the above passage about our eyes being “good” and the result being that if our eyes are good, we are filled with light. We are all aware of this challenge with our eyes—the ever-present struggle to maintain discipline to keep them focused on what matters most. It is about choosing a source for fulfillment. Will we look for a source that is spiritual or material?

Jesus’ admonishment is to be fully aware of our focus because the object we focus on becomes our source—for light or for darkness. The thing we value becomes our reservoir for fulfillment. Before we allow our attention to be consumed, we ought to be asking, “What can this really do for me? Can it give me what I need

THE THING WE  
VALUE BECOMES  
OUR RESERVOIR  
FOR  
FULFILLMENT.





to be a better person? Can it make me proud of my behavior and of who I am? Can it fill me with joy? Where will this object I value ultimately lead me?"

Jesus says that if we continue gazing upon and pondering money as a source for fulfillment, we will eventually be filled with darkness. This darkness has a very specific name: insecurity. Let me explain. The more focused we become on money, the more we worry about doing the "right" things with our money. This concern can become a source of constant stress. The more we focus on money, the more cognizant we become of what we lack and how much more others have. There is no end to this hierarchy of insecurity. The more we focus on money, the higher our expectations—thus tying our security in life to how much we have. This emotional anchoring in the material becomes a never-ending quest because money can only do so much, and personal acceptance and spiritual contentment are not on the list of things it can do.

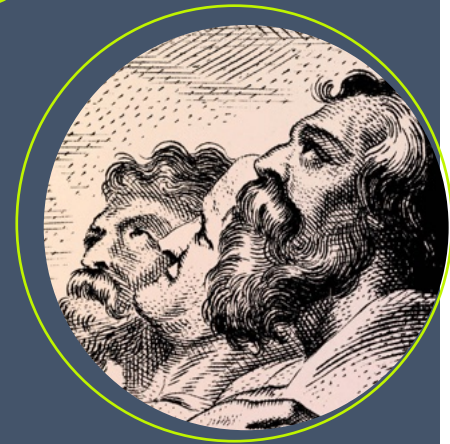
The implied, underlying message in our culture is that "rich" covers up all that is lacking. In our world, money offers a mask: Get enough money and nothing else really matters. People will stop questioning you and start admiring you. Philosopher Jacob Needleman told me of the time he asked a very wealthy man what the most interesting thing about being wealthy was. The man replied, "People assume that I'm smart because I have all this money. I just happened to prosper in one isolated business, but now I'm asked to sit on university boards and corporate boards and people want my opinion on things I know nothing about."

Our culture is convinced that money is the good housekeeping seal of merit. What we have is an indicator not only of our abilities but of our "worth" as well. "What is your net worth?" is a question that contains a deep irony. The answer to this question fosters a deception, leading many to believe that all their doubts can be concealed by the presence of money. People are quite susceptible to sophistic logic around money—logic that sounds plausible but is based on shallow or dishonest thinking. Even if we get the money, we know we're not all that. Down deep we know who we are and understand our shortcomings. The idea that money can solve an identity issue is only a temporary deception, and when it fades people are left with uncomfortable truths about their existence. Money can create a shroud of the finest fabrics around our identity issues, but the shroud conceals more than it displays.

Jesus is warning us of the darkness of insecurity, disappointment, and disillusionment that enters our souls when we follow the mammon trail of logic. Money-centered logic introduces an



PERSONAL  
ACCEPTANCE  
AND SPIRITUAL  
CONTENTMENT  
ARE NOT ON THE  
LIST OF THINGS  
MONEY CAN DO.



interesting sort of darkness—one that fascinates us while it plays endlessly upon our insecurities. Who of us hasn't entertained these thoughts?

- "If you were really as smart as you think you are, you'd be making more money."
- "If you're really better than he is, why is he making more than you?"
- "We all know how success is measured."
- "Money doesn't lie."

These are the echoes of money's influence upon our minds. The idea is to center our focus on having more, because having more will make us something more. This blatant lie is gospel in our culture—a line of logic appealing to many, to the point that they entrust their life pursuits to it. How many people do you know who order their lives around the pursuit of more, and who look to money for identity, for security, and for a meaningful place in the world?

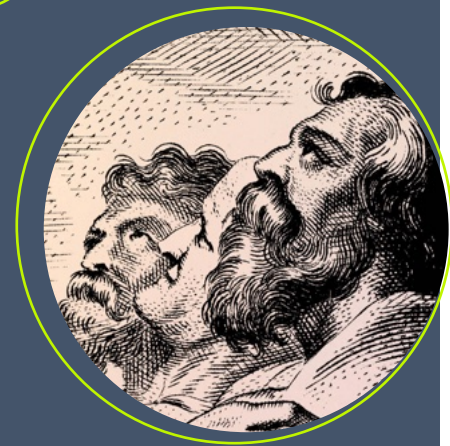


Vanity is often fueled by having money and makes one want to advertise to the world, "I am somebody." My wife and I were chatting at a local restaurant when someone we knew walked in with a local businessman and sat next to us. I had no acquaintance with this businessman, although I knew who he was. Upon introduction

I greeted him as I would any other person, and shortly after, my attention was drawn away by someone else. I overheard this businessman tell our common acquaintance (in a perturbed tone), "Tell him who I am...he doesn't know!" His money made him somebody, which I had failed to recognize and consequently did not move obligingly into the pandering dance that he was expecting. To him, the fact that he had money was not to be missed.

His obsession for recognition might have had something to do with the circulated notion that he was born into the lucky sperm club. Could it be that his vanity—his bent on everyone knowing who he was—existed only because so many people had dismissed and disqualified his personal successes, because he happened to be born into wealth? Whatever the case might be, one thing was obvious: the hocus focus of money had sealed him. In his mind, money made him somebody important. How much sweeter is the compliment of being somebody when it comes unsolicited and comes for who we are, not for what we own or what we inherit. I was saddened that he was burdened with this weight in life. This special brand of insecurity is an example of the darkness that money can infect us with.

MONEY CANNOT  
KEEP ITS  
PROMISES.



Those who live with these visceral expectations of money will one day discover that money cannot keep its promises. This discovery comes when the darkness crowds in on them and, in that moment, they realize they are lost—hence the verse, “If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!” This darkness can extend to the very meaning of our lives.

Jesus understands that the discussion of money is not complete unless the spirit of money (mammon) is included in the conversation. He introduced a discussion of money that is internal in focus—a discussion encompassing the emotions, rationale, hopes, and disappointments tied to the fabric of money. Jesus’ concern was not so much our degree of wealth as it was our degree of focus. It is a delicate balancing act with both temporal and eternal consequences.

### ISAIAH 55:1-3

*Come, all of you who thirst,  
come to the waters;  
and you without money,  
come, buy, and eat!*

*Come, buy wine and milk,  
without money and without cost!*

*Why spend your money on that which is not bread,  
and your labor on that which does not satisfy?  
Listen carefully to Me, and eat that which is good,  
and your soul will delight in the richest of foods.*

JESUS  
INTRODUCED A  
DISCUSSION OF  
MONEY THAT IS  
INTERNAL IN  
FOCUS.

