

FAITH, FINANCES, AND PEACE OF MIND
(2) BIBLICAL WISDOM AND PRACTICAL ADVICE

Proverbs 21:5, 20

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(Including material from Adam Hamilton's "Enough" stewardship program
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November 6, 2011

PROLOGUE

The Bible teaches us to love people and use things. But in our daily living we tend to love things and use people. We need the Lord to help us learn how to live and love as we were meant.

SCRIPTURE

The plans of the diligent lead surely to abundance, but everyone who is hasty comes only to want...Precious treasure remains in the house of the wise, but the fool devours it (Proverbs 21:5, 20 NRSV).

INTRODUCTION

Our nation is experiencing what many have described as the "American Nightmare." Increasing consumer debt, declines in savings, lower income growth, and a volatile stock market are all a part of our economic insecurity. We have lived in a society that tells us "you deserve it now," whether or not we can afford it or really even need it.

All of us have struggled with these issues at one time or another. Their importance is a major reason behind our churchwide emphasis on "Faith, Finances, and Peace of Mind." Today we are considering biblical wisdom and practical advice on how to better handle our finances.

1. WHERE DID ALL OUR MONEY GO?

Where does your money go? How do you spend it? The Bible is critical of three kinds of spenders: reckless spenders, miserly spenders, and wasteful spenders.

The classic example of the reckless spender is found in Jesus' story of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32). We tend to think that the word "prodigal" refers to someone who has wandered away when the word actually means "one who lives in excess." The younger son lived in excess. He was a spendthrift. He was reckless.

The prodigal son thought his life was about pleasure and wild living. So he took what was his and left his father. We can imagine the father saying, "Please don't do this. If you sell the property, you're going to have nothing. I've saved this for you." But his son

would not listen. He was only interested in what he could experience right then. He sold his entire future for what he could have in the moment.

Adam Hamilton comments:

We can relate, can't we? Many of us struggle because we're only thinking about today. We're not thinking about what's going to happen twenty or thirty years from now. Did you know that 50 percent of all Americans have less than \$25,000 set aside for their retirement? "I'm not worried about tomorrow. I want it today. I can have pleasure now." That's what so many of us think, and that's what the younger son thought.

On the opposite end is the miserly spender. Of course, the miserly spender does not want to spend money at all. This person does not even want to buy things that are important or even necessary. I knew a middle-aged couple from Fort Dodge, Iowa. They appeared to be living in impoverished circumstances. Food, clothing and living conditions all screamed poverty. The wife needed medical attention but was unable to receive it. This continued until her husband died and she was shocked to discover that his net worth was over two million dollars! He was not a pauper. He just loved money more than anything else, including his ailing wife.

Money itself is not bad. It is not the root of all evil. According to the Bible, "the *love* of money is a root of all kinds of evil" (1 Tim 6:10b, emphasis added). The problem is in how we view or value money. It can be either good or bad depending on how it is used.

Now perhaps you are not in any kind of financial trouble. Perhaps you are doing pretty well. For you, the question might not be, "Are you heading for a financial crisis?" but, "Are you making the most of everything that you have, or do you find yourself being wasteful here or there because you can afford to?"

I would put the Carlsons in this third category. We are not in any serious financial trouble. We have no credit card debt. We save and we give. But at the end of the year when I look back, I have to ask, "Where did all our money go?" And I have to think that many of you are in the same situation, "Where did all our money go?"

It seems that the more financially secure we become, the less we worry about spending money here and there. We waste a dollar on this or that, and we forget where it went. Money just seems to flow through our fingers. We are not as careful with our money as we used to be and as we should be.

There are many ways we can waste our money but one of the biggest culprits is "impulse

buying.” Something catches our attention in the store or on a TV ad and we say, “I got to have that!” If you are prone to impulse buying here are some tips that may help you:

- Never go grocery shopping when you are hungry.
- Shop for what you need.
- Make a list and stick to it.
- Wait twenty-four hours before purchasing an impulse buy.

2. WHAT’S IT ALL FOR?

In order to better manage the resources entrusted to us we need to ask, “What’s it all for?” You see, we do not exist simply to consume as much as we can while we are here on this earth. We have a higher purpose. We need to know and understand our life purpose and then spend our money in ways that are consistent with this purpose or calling.

Our society tells us that our life purpose is to consume—to make as much money as possible and to blow as much money as possible. The Bible tells us that we were created to care for God's creation. We were created to love God and to love our neighbors as ourselves. We were created to glorify God, to seek justice, and to do mercy. Our money and possessions should be devoted to helping us fulfill this calling. We are to use our resources to help care for our families and those in need—to serve Christ and the world through the church, missions, and everyday opportunities. Like Abraham and Sarah, we have been blessed by God to be a blessing to others.

Hamilton tells this remarkable story:

Barbara Glanz is a motivational speaker who conducts workshops for large companies. One day she was speaking at an event for the employees of a grocery store chain. She talked to them about how they saw their life purpose, suggesting that their work was more than stocking shelves or ringing up customers' food purchases or delivering supplies. She told them that every person they met was an opportunity to bless someone, to live out a higher calling or mission. The employees were inspired by her words, including one nineteen- year-old grocery bagger named Johnny.

Johnny, who has Down syndrome, took her words to heart. He went home and tried to think of ways he could be a blessing to others. Finally, he came up with a plan. Each night he would search the Internet for a positive saying that would encourage people. Then he would print out 300 copies and carefully cut the sayings into individual strips. The next day, he would put one of the sayings in the grocery bag of each of his customers while saying,

"I put a saying in your bag. I hope it helps you have a good day. Thanks for coming here."

A month later, the manager noticed that Johnny's line was much longer than the others. Even when he announced that there was no waiting in lines 2 and 3, no one budged. People wanted Johnny to be their bag boy. He touched them and filled them with hope. Johnny got it. He was pursuing a mission that was bigger than his personal satisfaction.

We have a life purpose that is greater than our own self-interests, and how we spend our God-given resources reflects our understanding and commitment to this life purpose. Being able to accomplish the greater purposes God has for our lives requires some measure of planning. Taking the time to set goals related to our lives and our finances is crucial if we are to become wise stewards of our God-given resources.

Each of us should think about our life purpose and goals and then identify financial goals that are aimed at helping us to accomplish our broader life goals. At least one goal in each category should relate specifically to our faith. As an aid in doing this you may wish to use the "Making Plans" card that was handed out as you entered the sanctuary today.

3. HOW DO WE MAKE THE MOST OF WHAT WE HAVE?

Once we have set some financial goals, we need to develop a plan to meet those goals. A budget is a spending plan that enables us to accomplish our goals. Some people use an envelope system. Some use their computer. There are a variety of different approaches.

Many people find it helpful to seek the advice of a financial advisor. For those who find themselves in the midst of a financial crisis, a financial counselor can help to work out terms with creditors and develop a workable financial plan. Whatever approach you choose, the important thing is to have a plan.

Let's listen to Lee Ann Carter, a credit union manager, who shares with us some of the basic things she tells her members about how to be good financial managers:

[Video Clip: "Finding Financial Stability"

Speaker: Lee Ann Carter, Parthenon Credit Union, Chief Operating Officer

Transcript:

We found over the past few years that many people were living beyond their means and didn't really grasp what was happening. They're juggling payments, maybe paying bills with one credit card to save cash to pay down

another card, maybe making only minimum payments on any of their credit cards. Their total personal debt was rising-compounded by some pretty significant interest rates. So, how do you get out of this? The first thing you have to do is track your spending. Where is the money going every week? Most of us don't know how much we're spending at the grocery store or in restaurants every month. Take a good look at this picture-and then you must set some financial goals. That is the foundation of every budget or every financial plan. What do you want to achieve ... by when? The next is pay off your debt. It is the best way to simplify your life. Use your credit wisely. If you want something, save up to get it. And, then the absolute number-one thing that everybody needs to be doing is create a savings account. Take it directly out of your paycheck. Don't see it. Have it go into an account. I know you know these things. Just like you know you need to exercise and eat right. The challenge is making a plan and sticking with it.]

I agree with Lee Ann Carter. When it comes to physical health, most of us already know we should exercise and eat right. What we need is encouragement. Same is true of financial practices. Most of us already know these things. What we need is encouragement. Let me add my voice to the voices of encouragement.

On the other side of the “Making Plans” card is something called, “Six Key Financial Practices.” These financial planning principles can help us to manage our money with wisdom and faith:

1. Put God first in your living and giving. (2 Corinthians 9:6-7)

Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver (2 Cor 9:7 NRSV).

Put God first in your living and your giving. Give your tithe and offering from the “top” of your paycheck, and then live on whatever remains. We will consider this further next week.

2. Prepare a spending plan (budget). (Proverbs 27:23-24)

Creating a budget is simply developing a plan in which you tell your money what you want it to do. Tracking your expenses with a budget is like getting on the scales: It allows you to see how you are doing and motivates you to be more careful with your expenditures. I have provided a web address for a fun and helpful budgeting calculator from Crown Financial Ministries

(http://www.crown.org/Tools/Calculators/Budgeting_SpendingPlan.asp).

3. Simplify your lifestyle. (Matthew 6:19-33)

“But seek first [God’s] kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (Matt 6:33 NIV).

It is important to live within our means. We will examine this more carefully in two weeks.

4. Provide immediately for an emergency fund. (1 Timothy 6:9-12)

An emergency fund is an account separate from checking or long-term savings that is set aside specifically for emergencies. Dave Ramsey recommends beginning with \$1,000 and building that to three months’ worth of income.⁴ By the way, Dave Ramsey’s Financial Peace University offers a great deal of online information including his approach to reducing debt found at his web site (<http://www.daveramsey.com/home/>).

5. Pay off all credit card debt. (Proverbs 22:7)

As you are building your emergency fund, begin to pay off your credit card debt and start using cash or debit cards for purchases. Some experts suggest starting with the credit card that has the highest interest rate. Others suggest paying down the smallest debt first, experiencing that victory, and applying your payments from the first card to the second, and so on, creating a snowball effect to pay off the cards as soon as possible. If you must use a credit card, such as when traveling or making purchases online, be sure to pay off the debt monthly. If you are unable to do this, then it is better for you to cut up your cards and stop using them altogether.

6. Practice long-range saving and investing habits. (Luke 14:28)

Saving money is the number-one wise money management principle everyone should practice. We do not save merely for the sake of saving. There is a word for that: hoarding. Hoarding is frowned upon in the Bible as the practice of fools and those who fail to understand the purpose of life. Saving, on the other hand, is meant to be purposeful. There are three types of savings we should have: 1) emergency savings, 2) savings for wants and goals, and 3) retirement savings.

⁴ *The Total Money Makeover*, by Dave Ramsey (Thomas Nelson, 2007); pp. 102–08.

CONCLUSION

The Bible offers a great deal of wisdom concerning money and possessions. It also encourages us to have sound financial practices consistent with our life purpose. Most importantly it teaches us to rely upon God in everything we do.

Like last week, I would like to invite you to put your hands on your lap, just extend your hands palm upright on your lap. And I would invite you to say this prayer with me, just quietly under your breath, and then we will close with the Disciples' Prayer:

Loving God, thank you for blessing me. May I be a blessing to others. Help me to think before I buy. Help me to plan before I spend. Help me use what I have in love and service in your kingdom.

Through Jesus who taught us to pray:

**Our Father, who art in Heaven, hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in
Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us
our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us. And lead
us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil; for thine is
the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever.
Amen.**