

FIGURING OUT YOUR FINANCES: FOLLOWING GOD'S FINANCIAL PLAN

Part 2 of 3 November 11, 2007

A recent cover of a magazine shows a couple buried under credit cards with a headline "Americans are Drowning in Debt: Are you Maxed Out?" It says, "Americans have been borrowing in record amounts as the economy has tanked this year. Home equity debt has soured past 330 billion dollars. Bankruptcies are up 20%. And most people are spending more than they make. So I figured that this week we would look at God's principles of money management.

George Gallup reports that 64% of all couples argue over money. It is now the number one cause of divorce. Till debt do us part. Sixty-four percent argue about it and over 54% of divorces are caused by money. He also reported that 74% are dissatisfied with how they manage their money.

This may seem like a mundane, routine, kind of practical affair talking about money management the next couple of weeks. But there's a far more important reason in dealing with this subject we're going to look at than just relieving the stress in your life.

Just one of the many times He said it is in **Luke 16:11**. Jesus said "***If you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth who will trust you with true riches?***" It's a big deal, folks!

Fortunately in the Bible we have some good advice. The wealthiest man who ever lived actually wrote a book of the Bible. His name was Solomon. He was the king of Israel and he was incredibly rich. He would put Bill Gates to shame. This guy, it says, ate on plates of solid gold. That's how wealthy he was. So when he finished dinner they didn't just have to wash them. They had to polish the plates. He was extravagantly wealthy.

But not only was he the wealthiest man who ever lived the Bible says he also was the wisest man who ever lived. Fortunately he put his principles for financial money management down in a book called the Proverbs. It's in the middle of your Bible. Today and next week we're going to look at Solomon's advice – biblical advice - on money management.

Here are God's five principles of financial freedom.

1. Keep good records.

You need to know where your money comes from and where it goes. The Bible calls this the Principle of Accounting. In **Proverbs 27:23-24** it says this about keeping good records "***Riches can disappear fast. [Does everybody agree with that part of the verse? Yes!] So watch your business interests closely. Know the state of your flocks and herds.***" Today he'd say, know the condition of your stocks. He'd say know your assets. Know your bank account. Know your real estate. Know where your assets are in life.

Keep good accounting. This is the starting point. **Proverbs 23:23 says "Get the facts at any price."** How are we really doing? The Bible teaches that there are four things you need to keep good records on.

1. What I own
2. What I owe
3. What I earn
4. Where it all goes

These are the four things you need to keep good records on. Let me give you a little equation – Ignorance of your financial condition plus easy credit equals disaster. The first step of financial freedom is to write it down.

You say, "I don't have time to do this." Do you have time to worry about your finances? If you did more keeping of good records you'd have a lot less to worry about. The Bible says know the state of your finances – of your flocks.

2. Plan your spending.

This is the Principle of Budgeting. A budget by definition is simply planned spending. A budget is telling your money where you want it to go rather than wondering where it went.

Proverbs 21:5 *“Plan carefully and you will have enough. If you act too quickly you’ll never have enough.”* What is this verse saying? One of the things it’s saying is financial freedom is not determined by how much you make. That’s one of the biggest myths in our society. Some of you think, “If I just make a little bit more then I’d be financially free.” You will not. If you can’t live on what you’re making right now you won’t then. Why? Because your yearnings will always exceed your earnings.

One of the areas we don’t do too much planning is in our shopping. True confessions... How many of you would admit to saying there’s been at least once in my life I’ve bought something impulsively I later regretted. We have all done this. The problem is this. We live in America. America is built on capitalism. Capitalism is built on advertising. And all advertising – 100% of advertising – is built on trying to get you to do impulse buying. You’re never going to see an ad that says, “Think about this for six months. Here’s a really good product. We suggest you go put it in your budget and when you’ve got enough cash come back and see us.” Impulse buying. Impulse buying tends to lead to debt. If you act too quickly you will never have enough.

Some of us need to put this verse on our windshield, on our refrigerator door. We need to memorize it, put it on our forehead when we go to the mall. **Proverbs 21:20** *“Stupid people spend their money as fast as they get it.”* End of sermon – go home! Just Kidding! Ask God for wisdom and say, “God, how do You want us to use our finances?”

3. Save for the future.

The Bible tells us it’s a mark of wisdom to save for the future. So how wise are we? The average family in Japan saves about twenty percent of their income. The average family in Europe saves about eighteen percent of their income. In the United States, we spend one percent more than we earn. We have this live for today mentality. We’re all into this keeping up with the Jones. No matter if the Jones just went bankrupt we’re still trying to keep up with them!

We have to admit that one of the reasons is our heart. One of the things that keeps us from saving is envy. It’s comparison. The envy monster stalks everywhere, never satisfied, always craving more of what people have. In malls, neighborhoods, schools and offices people compare themselves with others and invariably all but the very rich, very thin, very beautiful and very smart fall short in some category. Even for them enough is not often enough.”

4. Return ten percent back to God.

This is the Principle of Tithing. First comes Accounting, then comes Budgeting, then comes Saving, then comes Tithing. Tithing... many of you who have been around Messiah know about this. We’ve talked about it a lot. The first ten- percent of what you make goes back to God.

The Bible says in **Malachi 3:10** *“Bring to My storehouse a full tenth of what you earn. Test Me in this, says the Lord. I will open the windows of heaven for you and pour out all the blessings you need.”*

Why does He want us to do that? Obviously God doesn’t need money. God doesn’t need my money and He doesn’t need your money. So why does He do it?

The Bible tells us three reasons:

1. It’s an act of gratitude that says, “God, I just want to remind myself that everything comes from You and I wouldn’t have anything if it weren’t for You.

2. It’s an act of priority in the present. It says, “God, I want You to be number one in my life and to prove it I’m putting You first in my money.” So I say, God, You’re first.

3. It’s a statement of faith. It’s saying, “God, I know all those promises in the Bible that say if I put You first You’ll bless me. To prove that I’m trusting You I’m going to give to You first.” God says Let’s have a little giving contest. You give to Me and I’ll give to you and let’s see who will win.” There’s no doubt who’s going to win!

When am I supposed to do it? When am I supposed to give back to God? Notice **1 Corinthians 16:2** *“On every Lord’s Day [that’s Sunday the first day of the week] you should put aside something from what you*

have earned during the week and use it for the offering. This amount depends on how much the Lord has helped you to earn.” He says I give the first part of my money on the first day of the week as an act of worship. Let me clear something up. We’re not talking about giving to charity. Charity giving is great. Deb and I give to several charities. But giving to charity is not tithing. Tithing is an act of worship. It says I’m giving it to God on the first day of the week when I come to worship. I come and I give it to You.

I know some of you are saying, “Eric, I’d like to do this. I just can’t afford to.” I would say, you can’t afford not to!

There’s lots of promises in the Bible. One of them is this. **Proverbs 3:9-10 “Honor the Lord by giving Him the first part of all your income and He will fill your barns to overflow.”** Not the leftovers. You put God right on top and God says watch what happens. You’re not going to know if God’s a liar or not till you try that. I challenge you to do that. Keep good records, plan your spending, save for the future, return the first ten percent back to God. The fifth principle is...

5. Enjoy what you have.

This is the Principle of Contentment. That’s the way you enjoy what you have no matter what you have. Sometimes what we don’t have keeps us from enjoying what we do have. **Ecclesiastes 6:9 says, “It is better to be satisfied with what you have than to be always wanting something else.”** That is a principle we violate. It comes in phases.....

The first phase is your yearnings start to exceed your earnings. You start to see things you want and you can’t afford them and you say, “I’m going to go out and get those things.”

Then immediately comes the second phase. You get over extended financially. You have more than you can pay for. Which immediately results in the third phase.

You have to constantly hustle. You have to get extra jobs – both husbands and wife are working. You have to work at night. You have to constantly hustle to make ends meet.

Then because of that the fourth phase. Your home life starts to deteriorate because you’re tired. Everybody’s exhausted. Everybody’s irritable.

The Bible says in **Hebrews 13:5 “Be content with what you have.”**

God wants to work in your life. But there are two conditions. First you have to do all five. You can’t pick and choose.

On your outline, here’s the way most people handle their money. It’s all out of whack. The first thing they do is they earn it. Then the second thing they do is spend it on themselves whatever they want to enjoy. So they earn it then they enjoy it. Then if they have any left over then they start repaying their debts. Then if they have any left over from that they save a little of it. Then if they have any left over from that they give some of it. That’s all out of whack.

Here’s the order that God blesses. First you earn it. Second, you tithe it. You say “God, You’re number one so the first part goes back to You.” Third, you save it. You pay God first and you pay yourself second before you pay anybody else. God first, yourself second. Then fourth you repay it. You set up a repayment plan to pay off all your debts. Then finally, number five, you enjoy it and you spend it on those extra items and things.

God wants to help you get out of debt. I want to help you get out of debt. That’s why we did this message today.

I said this earlier but really the root behind all of our financial problems is one thing – unbelief. Do I really trust God? Do I really think that God knows more about how to handle money or do I think I know what’s best how to handle money. Am I going to do what He says to do with it? Or am I going to use it the way I want to use it? Do I really believe that God will take care of me if I do it His way?

Whatever I trust for my security is my god. ***“If I have put my trust in money and my happiness depends on wealth it would mean that I have denied the God of heaven.”*** Whatever I trust in for my security is my God. So you really need to settle this issue even before you do all the others. Are you going to trust God? Are you going to trust God and do it His way?

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, I want to follow Your financial plan in 2008. Forgive me for the times I've spent more than I've made. Forgive me for unwise purchases. Today I want to commit myself to Your financial plan and principles. With Your help this year I'm going to start keeping better records. I'm going to learn to plan my spending. With Your help I'm going to save some for the future and I'm going to put You first in my finances by returning the tithe back to You. Help me to enjoy what I have. Jesus Christ, I invite You to be the manager of my life. I want to trust You with my finances and my future. In Your name I pray. Amen.”