

GOD'S MONEY



A LESSON IN
STEWARDSHIP

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An Educational Publication by Trinity Debt Management • MMXI
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The Bible explains WHICH God-given resources shall be managed through stewardship and WHY. This informative, easy-to-follow book shows you HOW.

— Gary Vosick

Introduction

In recent times, the American people have been facing dire financial conditions. Our nation's fiscal and business failures have been as frightening as they are deplorable. And yet, our country is the sum of its parts; and the larger problems are only a reflection of our inability as individuals to say no to ourselves.

As a people, we have forgotten how to delay pleasure. After all, we are living in a society that microwaves everything. Why? Because we must have it and we must have it now!

There are those who believe that finance is merely an exact mathematical science. This is what we are taught in school. In fact, finance is an exact mathematical science, until humans become involved. Personal finance is who we are. The personal, philosophical, and emotional weaknesses and strengths we possess will be reflected in our use of money.

The late Larry Burkett said that money problems are normally not the real problem but, rather, only the symptom of a personal shortfall.

We have all seen people become rich overnight through a lottery or inheritance; and because of their immaturity, they often squander the entire fortune in the twinkle of an eye. On the other hand, we have seen people who grow more as individuals during a financial crisis than at any other time in their lives. Martin Luther King said, "The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in the moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands in times of challenge and controversy."

The Morality of Money

Having a proper view of money and possessions, and managing them scripturally, are serious challenges that face all Christians. By God's providence, people are in varying financial situations, but we all have to deal with the same questions:

What do we do with our resources?
 How should we spend our money?
 How much should we save and invest?

Sixteen of Christ's thirty-eight parables speak about how people should handle earthly treasure. In fact, our Lord taught more about stewardship (one out of every ten verses in the Gospels) than about Heaven and Hell combined.

The entire Bible contains more than two-thousand references to wealth and prosperity, twice as many as the total references to faith and prayer.

God Owns Everything

God is the sole proprietor of everything we have – our clothes, our houses, our car, our children, our computer, our investments, and everything imaginable (1 Chronicles 29:11-12; Psalms 24:1).

Since God owns everything, we can never really acquire anything new; because it is already His. Embracing this fact is crucial in attaining a Biblical attitude of contentment.

God Controls Everything

It follows that if God owns everything, He also controls everything (Isaiah 46:9-10; Daniel 2:20-22).

God owns all resources and controls every circumstance so that He is able to provide for every need of His people (Philippians 4:19).

Jehovah-Jireh — The Lord who provides (Genesis 22:14). God's provision for those who trust in Him is so characteristic of His nature that it is one of His names.

We may never doubt most of God's attributes.

We may, at times, wonder whether or not he will provide for our needs. God's word tells us not to worry (Matthew 6:25-34).

Warnings About Money

From advertising and mass media, money has become a powerful element in our lives. Such all-consuming concern for money is what drives most people. It is wrong to have this as our primary vocation motivation. Everyone should strive to excel in their vocations and let the rewards come (Ephesians 6:5-7; Colossians 3:22-24).

Contrary to the clear teaching of God's Word, many of us simply seek the money we earn from our vocations, rather than pursue the excellence of a job well done (1 Timothy 6:17).

Jesus equated our attitudes toward money with the genuineness of our relationship to God. If we fully understand this, we will likely avoid the idolatry of materialism.

Essentials of Biblical Stewardship

A steward is one who manages the resources of another. Each of us is a manager, not an owner. God is the owner, and we are to manage according to His plan.

The most important thing about a steward is that he serves his Master faithfully (1 Corinthians 4:2). When he looks at all the riches around him, the steward must remember that this wealth belongs, not to him personally, but to his Master, and must be used in a way that will please and profit Him.

All of the promises God has made regarding our finances are predicated on the principle that we relinquish ownership to Him. If we refuse to do this, we can never experience God's plan for our money. As a consequence, our lives will be characterized by constant turmoil and anxiety as we struggle to understand and manage the complexities of our finances.

The Book of Ecclesiastes discusses stewardship and a principle that Solomon found valid.

Regardless of our situations in life, we accumulate nothing. Our wealth and possessions will amount to nothing upon our deaths.

This is reinforced in the New Testament. God admonishes us not to lay up treasure on Earth, but in Heaven (Matthew 6:19-20).

Just as Christians cannot experience the fullness of the Holy Spirit until we surrender ownership of our lives to Christ; so too, we cannot experience peace until we surrender total control of our finances to God and accept our position as stewards.

The *Wall Street Journal* quoted an anonymous wit who defined "money" as "an article which may be used as a universal passport to everywhere except heaven and a universal provider for everything except happiness."

Christian stewardship goes beyond paying God a tithe of our income and then using the rest as we please. True stewardship means that we thank God for all we have and use it as He directs (Deuteronomy 8:11-18).

Giving God 10 percent of our income is a good way to begin our faithful stewardship, but we must remember that God should control what we do with the remaining 90 percent as well.

This is why we must look beyond the money we give in offerings and realize that everything comes from God and belongs to Him. If we are faithful stewards over all of His resources, He will reward us generously and bring glory to His name.

The Foolish Steward (Luke 16:1-2)

The foolish steward ignored his responsibility and began to act as if he was the owner. He became a "prodigal steward" who wasted his Master's wealth. Upon hearing this, his Master immediately asked for an inventory of the foolish steward's goods and an audit of his books.

The Wise Steward (Luke 16:3-8)

The wise steward knew that he would lose his job. He made friends with his Master's creditors so they would take him in when his Master threw him out. He then gave each of them a generous discount. Even his Master complimented him on his clever plan (Luke 16:8).

Jesus did not commend the steward for robbing his Master or for encouraging others to be dishonest. Jesus commended the man for his wise use of opportunity. The children of this world are experts at seizing opportunities for making money and friends, and getting ahead. God's people should take heed and be just as wise in managing the spiritual affairs of life.

The Application (Luke 16:9-13)

Jesus gave three admonitions based on the experience of the steward:

One – He admonishes us to use our opportunities wisely (Luke 16:9). One of these days, life will end and we will not be able to earn or use money. Therefore, while we have the opportunity, we must invest our money in making friends for the Lord. This means winning others to Christ, who will one day welcome us in Heaven. Our lives will eventually come to an end, so it behooves us to use our resources wisely.

Two – He admonishes us to be faithful in the way we use our material wealth. Why is our Lord so concerned about how we manage our money? Because money is not neutral, it is basically evil "unrighteous mammon" and only God can sanctify it and use it for good. Paul and Peter called money "filthy lucre" (1 Timothy 3:3; Titus 1:7; 1 Peter 5:2). By its very nature, money defiles and debases those of us who love it and let it take control of our lives.

If we are unfaithful in the way we use our money, we are also unfaithful in the way we use the true riches of God's kingdom. God will not commit His true riches to individuals or ministries who waste money while giving a dishonest accounting to all those who have supported them.

Three— The Lord admonishes us to be wholly devoted to Him and single-minded (Luke 16:13; Matthew 6:19-29). We cannot love or serve two Masters. If we choose to serve money, we cannot serve God. If we choose to serve God, then we will not serve money.

If God is our Master, then money will be our servant; and we will use our resources to honor the will of God. But if God is not our Master, then we will become the servants of money; and money is a terrible Master.

Jesus said, "Make money your servant and use today's opportunities as investments in tomorrow's dividends." Be a wise steward! There are souls to win for the Savior, and our money can help us get the job done.

The Wrong Use of Money (Luke 16:19-31)

The Pharisees professed to trust God; but they measured life by wealth and possessions, just as the non-believing worldly crowd had done. Jesus gave them a vivid description of what would happen if they continued in their covetousness and non-belief. The account focuses on an anonymous rich man and a beggar named Lazarus ("God is my help."), and it warns us against covetousness by presenting several contrasts.

In the rich man's lifetime, God had spoken to him in many ways. God had permitted him to have riches; and yet, the rich man had not repented. Lazarus had witnessed to the rich man and so had the Old Testament Scriptures, but the rich man remained a non-believer in his heart.

The rich man was not condemned because of his wealth, nor was Lazarus saved because he was penniless. For example, Abraham was very prosperous, and yet, he was not condemned to torment in Hades. Sadly, the rich man trusted only in his treasure and did not trust in the Lord.

(Mark 8:36)
Jesus asked the question.
What is your answer?

All Things Richly to Enjoy

God provided lavish riches in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:8-14).

When we combine the richness of the Earth with mankind's God-given ability to cultivate, to enjoy limitless tastes and smells, and to extract richness, we have the fulfillment of God's purpose for us to enjoy. Earth's wealth and beauty are here for just a short time; but God says we must enjoy it, while it lasts.

As with everything else, however, the Earth's goodness and our enjoyment of it have been seriously marred by sin. Sin is not in enjoying Earth's bounty. The sin is overindulgence and waste – flaunting wealth with self-centered, compassionless consumption.

Scriptural, Godly approach – The right attitude in partaking of God's many material blessings. If we enjoy them, give Him thanks, and become willing to share generously with others, we have made the righteous use of the wealth God has entrusted to us.

God — Honoring Ways of Acquiring Money

Acquiring Money Through Work — Primary Way
and Commanded by God (Exodus 20:9-10)

Not Stealing but Labor — (Ephesians 4:28)

Virtue of Work — (Proverbs 28:19)

Laziness — Scandalous and Sinful
(Proverbs 6:9-11; 19:15; 21:25; 24:30-34)

Acquiring money through savings — A wise person lays aside some of his wealth for the future (Proverbs 21:20). Save for the unexpected (injuries or illnesses, job loss, retirement). A key element in saving is to invest (Matthew 25:27).

Acquiring money through planning — To learn how to meet our obligations and save for the future, it's essential that we plan (Proverbs 27:23-24). This will require that we stick to a carefully crafted budget and outline a set of spending priorities, while operating faithfully within those boundaries.

To be a wise planner of our personal finances, we need to ask ourselves:

- Are we exercising some form of a carefully considered financial self-control?
- Are we merely spending money carelessly and impulsively?

Our culture makes it hard for us to maintain good financial self-control while being bombarded with advertising and marketing appeals.

Our culture over-emphasizes image. Unfortunately, people with minimal credit-worthiness can obtain plastic cards and use them to buy almost anything. Experts say that once we accumulate eight-hundred dollars or greater in credit card debt, the lender will have us for life. We will then be in a state of financial bondage to the credit card companies. The Lord wants us to plan well enough so we are not paying large sums of high interest debt. Exercise self-control and use credit with restraint. If we comply with this, we will be able to give more to the Lord and set aside money for savings, investments, and wiser spending opportunities.

Attitudes About Money

Our relationship with God is determined in great part by our attitudes. Having the right attitude means more than learning to live on a budget and tithing to the Lord.

Here are some examples of positive attitudes:

Commitment — God calls us to a radical lifestyle. One of total faithfulness to Him.

Counsel — We must rely on the counsel of others to find God's direction.

Contentment — When it comes to finances, contentment does not mean complacency. It means we understand that our circumstances, for better or worse, are simply God's will. The secret of a happy life is learning how to deal with both the good times and the bad.

Fairness — Determined by our regard for others and the way in which we treat them.

Honesty — We should never allow ourselves to be trapped into anything that is unethical, immoral or dishonest, no matter how inviting it seems.

Humility — Having humility means we can accept God's blessings without feeling superior to any other individual.

Financial Forgiveness — Put aside a wrong that has been suffered, never to be remembered again, even if another has deceived or cheated us financially.

Obedience — Finances are one of the most often discussed topics in the New Testament. It would seem obvious that God would use that area to test our obedience to Him. We must come to the point that God's approval is more important than the world's riches.

Obedience means being willing to do what God's word says, regardless of the cost. Then, and only then, will the full measure of God's provision, peace and power be experienced.

Thankfulness — Are we grateful for the things we have, rather than resentful for something we don't? When we look around, there will always be others who possess more. It's easy to ask, "Why did she get that instead of me?"

Satan will nurture our discontentment causing us to compare ourselves with others. The way to counteract this is to praise God for our blessings and ignore the material wealth of others.

Thankfulness is not based on an accumulation of assets, but rather a positive attitude toward life.

Trust — Are we willing to put God in total control of our finances?

Wisdom — When we have problems, the first thing we should ask for is wisdom, not money, not power, but wisdom.

Here are some examples of negative attitudes:

Bad Counsel — There is great good in many counselors, but it's better not to depend wholly on their counsel. We should look to God to learn His plan for our lives and then follow it.

Covetousness — God is not opposed to His children having wealth. He is opposed to their being desirous, selfish and greedy.

Deception — Trickery, fraud, double-dealing, lying and cheating are all practices of one who deliberately deceives. This destroys trust and leads to hypocrisy and a critical spirit. No one is immune to this temptation, particularly where money is concerned.

Dishonesty — To be dishonest means that we have gone outside the structure of God's word in making financial decisions. We have cheated another person, and in reality, we have cheated God.

Disobedience — If we are disobedient to God's word, which never changes, we will be disobedient to the Holy Spirit as well.

Envy — The desire to achieve based on observation of other people's successes. In God's word, the sin of envy is always grouped together with malice, deceit, strife, hatefulness, greed and wickedness. These have no place in the lives of a Christian.

Fear — Our anxieties and worries usually are not related to the lack of things, but rather to the loss of things. One of Satan's favorite tools is the question, "What if?" Dedicated Christians get trapped in fear – the "What if" of retirement, disability, unemployment, extended illness or economic collapse. God wants us to consider these things and even plan for them. But a Christian must consciously reject the attitude of fear. Fear is the antithesis of trust; therefore, if we live in fear of the future, financially, we suffer from the problem of not putting our trust in God. This doesn't mean we shouldn't plan for the future; but if we live in fear, it means that we have taken on a responsibility that belongs to God. If others see us living in fear, we lose our witness.

Futility of Riches — Poverty is not God's norm, but neither is lavishness. It is clear from God's word that affluence presents the greatest threat to our walk with the Lord. Where our treasure is, there our hearts will be.

Perhaps nothing in our society reflects the futility of riches more than very wealthy people who, at the end of their lifetimes, look back and decide their entire lives have been spent in true futility. Howard Hughes, one of the world's wealthiest men, was a good example of this problem. He ended up starving himself because he feared dying. Truly the futility of riches is a lack of trust in God.

Greed — Avarice tells us we want more, we want the best, and we will not be satisfied with anything less.

Partiality — When we esteem people on the basis of material process, we begin to equate riches with spirituality. Therefore, those who are not materially successful are deemed less spiritual.

Pride — Pride is the major sin in Christendom today. It is deceptive because it's so normal. Many of the wrong attitudes are products of sin and pride. God says that the tug of this world, and its pleasures, will be the greatest threat to our walk with Him. "Love not the world, nor the things in the world."

God will give us the opportunity to recognize and correct our pride. The best way to deal with this attitude is to consciously put others first.

What Is Wealth?

For people of the Christian faith, wealth is that which God entrusts to each of us. For non-Christians, wealth is the pursuit of money and possessions. The ability to create wealth is both a gift and a talent. Not everyone is blessed in this way. For some, acquiring wealth is easier than it is for others; but it is possible for anyone who is willing to sacrifice and to achieve by setting and reaching goals.

Gathering wealth as an end in itself is a very poor investment in life. This requires a great deal of time, while

sacrificing your family, friends, hobbies and relaxation. There is no correlation between wealth and happiness. God's word sets forth a foundation for how to attain wealth without worry (Proverbs 10:22).

Attitude About Wealth

The correct attitude toward wealth is to seek God's purpose for that which is supplied to us. It is important to trust God in every circumstance and believe He really loves us and will give us only the amount of money we can handle. If we live without worry, we can then experience perfect peace in our finances.

Why do we find difficulty in trusting God with financial issues? We really don't believe that He will do only the best for us. For this reason, we have a tendency to withhold a part of what we have. Until we have experienced freedom in the area of money, we will never understand God's total plan for our lives.

Common Misconceptions and Folklore

Poverty is next to spirituality. — Wrong! There is no inherent virtue in poverty. There are the dishonest poor just as there are the dishonest rich. God never impoverished anyone because of spirituality. In Job's case, God allowed his wealth to be removed as a testimony to Him. When Job stood true to God, Job's wealth was restored twofold. God condemns the misuse or the preoccupation with money.

Money brings happiness. — False! There is no relationship between money and happiness (1 Timothy 6:17). If riches could bring happiness, then the wealthy among us ought to be the most content; instead, there are many frustrated wealthy people. Anxieties over what they are going to do with their money, how they are going to leave it to their children, and what affect it will have. Few children are appreciative of the large amounts of wealth their families leave them.

Money is the root of all evil. — Untrue! In the Bible, Paul shows us that the love of money is the root of all sorts of evil (1 Timothy 6:10). Christ relates this attitude to the rich young ruler (Luke 18:18-22). Christ knew

this man loved his money and had obeyed the commandments. Despite this, his attitude was wrong. Attitude is always God's concern. Christ's statement about the rich young ruler was based on the ruler's attitude, motivation and purpose regarding money.

God does not ask believers to sell all of their Earthly belongings; although for some, this may be His will. He does, however, ask us to cast aside anything that has become more important to us than God.

To be wealthy is a sin. — Not so! Having money is not a sin. Many times, when God finds someone with the proper attitude, he blesses them with great riches. God bestowed riches on Abraham. When Solomon prayed for wisdom, God responded by granting him wisdom and great wealth. This is God's stewardship over us and everything on Earth.

How God Works Through Our Finances.

God uses money to strengthen our trust in Him. Matthew 6:32-33 emphasizes our position as stewards.

Develop trustworthiness — Our lives revolve around the making, spending and saving of money (Luke 16:11).

Prove His love — We remain outside of God's will because we are afraid to yield our lives and resources to Him. Matthew 7:11 gives us the answer. God assumes the responsibility of providing the basic necessities for everyone who trusts in Him.

Provide direction for our lives — There is no faster way for God to direct our lives than through either the abundance or lack of money. Too often we believe that God will direct us only through abundance, and so we keep searching. However, through the lack of money, God will steer us down His path just as quickly (Galatians 6:9).

We should never give up because we face difficulty. God will supply the direction we seek. One of the best ways He gives us insight into His will is by providing or withholding money.

Satisfy the needs of others — Christians who hoard money and never plan for their financial lives cannot experience this area of fulfillment. Christians often say, “How can we give? We have only enough to barely meet our needs now.” If we never learn to give, God can never give back.

Attitudes of Self-Control

Here are several guidelines that clearly define those times when God is not in control:

Never to worry us — If we are concerned about money, God is not in control. God says, “Wealth without worry is His plan” (Matthew 6:25).

Never to corrupt us — Many have fallen into Satan’s trap and become corrupted.

Never to build our egos — Most people, Christians included, cater to the wealthy people in our country. The admonition in the Book of James makes it very clear that we should not bow down to the wealthy.

Never to allow Christians to hoard money — There are distinct differences between hoarding and saving (Psalm 49:10-11).

Never to use money to satisfy our every whim and desire — God neither wants us to live in poverty, nor does He find sin in the accumulation of wealth. However, Christians should not live lavishly while His work goes unfunded and other Christians go without food and clothing.

God does not supply money to satisfy our every whim and desire. His promise is to meet our needs and provide an abundance for helping others.

What Is Financial Bondage?

Scripture indicates that excessive debt is, in fact, bondage. There is physical bondage. In Matthew 5:25-26, the failure to pay debt was equated with dishonesty and mental bondage. Physical bondage has been replaced by mental bondage.

Here are the symptoms of Financial Bondage:

- Overdue Bills
- Investment Worries
- A Get-Rich-Quick Attitude
- No Employment
- Deceitfulness
- Greediness
- Covetousness
- Family Needs Unmet
- Christian Needs Unmet
- Over-commitment to Work
- Money Entanglements
- Financial Unfairness
- Lack Of Commitment to God's Work
- Financial Superiority
- Financial Resentment

The Danger of Borrowing — Borrowing is the most common path into bondage. As Christians, we often become trapped in the system because we violate scriptural principles (Proverbs 22:7). The scriptural definition of credit bondage is the excessive use of credit. Likewise, the scriptural definition of debt bondage is the inability to meet our obligations.

Buying something on credit isn't necessarily considered a debt, but rather a contract. However, when payment is not made, the terms of this contract are violated resulting in scriptural debt. Luke 12:15 tells us that when we borrow without the ability to pay, our attitude falls into the category of deceit and greed.

Proverbs 21:17 warns us that if we are unwilling to make sacrifices or deny impulses, but are always indulging our desires, we will live in bondage and be forever frustrated.

When we habitually spend more than we earn, we once again suffer the constraints of financial bondage.

Financial Bondage Through Wealth

We can experience financial bondage for reasons that go beyond poverty. Financial bondage can also exist through an abundance of money.

Some people have been supplied with a surplus and have hoarded or misused it.

The accumulation of wealth and the material pleasures of life can be an obsession that will destroy a Christian's health, fragment family unity, promote separation from friends, and block God's will (Job 31:24-28).

God's Promise

If we really trust God with everything we have, He will satisfy all of our needs as promised in Luke 12:30-31.

One of the greatest scriptural references to attitude can be found in the story of Abraham. God asked Abraham to sacrifice his most important possession — his son Isaac. Abraham was a wealthy man, but nothing meant as much to him as his son. Abraham could have argued with God concerning the logic of this sacrifice, but he did not.

As Abraham raised his knife, God stopped him saying, "Abraham, I know that you are a true man and you have withheld nothing. Because you withheld nothing, I will make your seed as abundant as the sand upon the shore. And I will bless you beyond every nation on Earth." (Genesis 22:16-17)

As a result of Abraham's obedience, God entrusted to him stewardship of His kingdom on Earth.

Giving

The most important principle as a steward is giving to God a portion of what he has given us. Giving is a matter of faith and obedience. If you give, you demonstrate your trust in God's promises. If you don't give, you sin against Christ in the sense that you have no faith in what He promised about the blessings of giving.

Tithing is the starting point of our giving. The tithe is one tenth of your income. If you don't tithe, you are robbing God because it belongs to Him (Malachi 3:8). Many people ask the question: Should I tithe 10% of my gross earnings or 10% of net after taxes? The answer is, if you want a gross blessing, you need to tithe

on your gross earnings. You should give the Lord the first and best of what you earn. When you give from the top, you are giving to God what you have and believing in Him for what you don't have.

Voluntary giving should be done in addition to the required tithe. Remember "He who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully" (2 Corinthians 9:6).

If you are generous according to the biblical model and characteristics of giving, you will never lack what you need (Psalm 37:25); but you have to exercise faith and manage your resources. If you give lavishly, you will reap a rich reward.

God's Plan for Financial Freedom

A Christian must be able to recognize financial bondage, but also know how to find freedom. Financial freedom manifests itself in every aspect of a Christian's life, such as relief from worry and tension about overdue bills, a clean conscience before God and others, and absolute assurance that God is in control. This is not to say that a Christian's life will be devoid of difficulties. No matter what our circumstances may be, God promises peace. We are still human beings who are subject to making mistakes. For even when we understand God's principles, it is still possible to step out of His will. As soon as we admit the error and let God resume control, we return to His guidance.

Freedom from Debt — We, as Christians, should become debt-free altogether. Debt exists when any of the following conditions occur:

- Payment is past due.
- Total debt exceeds total assets.
- Family needs are not met.

Steps to Becoming and Remaining Current

Written Plan — Developing a written plan is an absolute necessity for a Christian who is in financial bondage. Make a list of all expenditures in the order of their importance. Be sure to differentiate between needs, wants and desires.

Living Essentials — A Christian who is in debt must stop making expenditures that are not absolutely essential for living (Proverbs 21:17).

Think Before Buying — A Christian who is in debt (and even those who are not) should think before every purchase (Proverbs 24:3).

Practice Saving — A Christian should practice saving money on a regular basis. This includes those who are in debt. Even if we only save \$5.00 per month, we must develop the discipline of saving.

Discontinue Credit Buying — We must cut up our credit cards and begin buying only on a cash basis.

Establish a Tithe — No matter what financial circumstances we may find ourselves in, every Christian should establish a tithe as the minimum testimony of God's ownership. After all, how can we give ownership to God if we never give testimony to this fact? Remember, it is not our prerogative to sacrifice God's share.

Finding God's Plan

Extra Income — We can seek extra money from a second job; but before taking on the added responsibilities of this, we must ask ourselves whether the real problem is a lack of money, or rather the wrong spending attitude and the harmful effects that can result.

Ask God First — Before making any purchase, regardless of the amount, give God the opportunity to provide the item first.

Limit Time Involvement — A Christian must also control the time devoted to business affairs when family involvement suffers. Many Christians are trapped in a cycle of over-commitment to business or monetary pursuits (Psalms 127:2).

Avoid Indulgence — Christians must avoid indulgence in order to achieve financial freedom (John 6:27).

Christian Counseling — When in doubt, it's important to seek Christian guidance (Proverbs 15:22).

How to Plan a Financial Program

Planning is an essential element of any financial program, but it is especially important for Christians. Some Christians argue that God does not expect us to plan, but rather to rely solely on Him for everything.

Others create plans that are so inflexible, they are no longer responsive to God's leadership. The answer lies somewhere in between. If we are stewards and God is the owner, then it is His wisdom that we should seek.

Here are a few Budget Planning Guidelines:

- Learn to practice patience and moderation in every financial decision.
- Maintain a positive attitude when making tough decisions.
- Never make instant financial decisions; instead, allow God to take His course.
- Maintain plans as long as you have peace about them.
- Be flexible.
- Develop a written plan.

A written plan provides us with an objective standard to work toward. It is all right to have mental goals as well, but a written plan will help us to better measure our progress. It allows us to refer to the original objectives and stay on track. It is also important to revise and update the plan periodically so that it reflects new insights based on ever-changing circumstances..

A good example of a written plan is the family budget. A family budget has many functions. It will show us where we stand financially; how much we are currently spending; and how much we should really be spending, based on our current incomes.

Very few families who suffer from financial difficulties have a written plan. Consequently, their financial

lives are in chaos. They have little idea how much they owe or where their money is going. At the end of every month, the predictable reaction is, "We don't know where all the money goes, but we know it doesn't cost us that much to live." This is why a written plan is essential for every family. Set goals and do both short- and long-term planning.

Creating a Budget

We've provided you with three useful forms for tracking your income, planning a budget, and comparing your actual budget with the recommended guideline percentages in each category.

Start by tracking your cash, debit card and check spending for a three-month period. It takes a few months to establish your spending habits and determine the averages.

Transfer your expenses to the monthly *Income & Expenses Worksheet*. This worksheet will help you compute surplus income and excess expenses. Many people show surplus income on their worksheets, but somehow lack money at the end of each month. This is largely a result of impulse spending on non-essential items, like coffee, cokes and donuts.

Use the *Income & Expenses Worksheet* to create a budget. Continue tracking your expenses during the month. Once the amount budgeted for a given category has been reached, spending should cease. An example of a category that is easy to exceed is entertainment. Compare your actual budget to the *Guideline Budget*.

The *Guideline Budget* reflects family spending that has been broken down into percentages in order to help you determine the proper balance in each category. The primary function of a budget is to uncover problem areas. Remember, a budget is not absolute.

Purpose of the Guideline Budget

The *Guideline Budget* should be developed to help you set standards against which you can compare your present spending patterns. It will serve as a basis for

identifying areas where overspending is causing problems. In addition, it will help you decide where critical adjustments should be made. If you are spending too much, the guideline percentages can be used to set new goals for your actual budget.

Although the percentages shown in the *Budget Percentage Guidelines Form* are not absolute, they will help you establish better spending habits as you go along. For example, a family that spends 40% of their net spendable income on housing will likely have difficulty balancing their budget. Most family incomes lack the flexibility to absorb relatively high spending categories like housing or transportation.

Budget Planning Summary

Here's a review of the fundamental steps for planning and meeting a budget:

Step 1:

Determine what you make and how you spend and record the numbers from both categories on the *Income & Expenses Worksheet*.

Step 2:

Transfer the information from each category to the *Guideline Budget Worksheet* and compare your "actual" spending to your "desired" or "guideline" spending.

Step 3:

Use the *Budget Percentage Guidelines Form* as a reference for determining your *Guideline Budget*.

It may appear to be complicated at first, but with a little practice, you'll soon learn that taking control of your finances is not only easy, but rewarding as well.

Should you require assistance, Trinity has certified counselors who are standing by with answers to your questions. Please call us any time at 1(800) 758-3844. We look forward to hearing from you and helping you begin your exciting, new life as a wise and faithful steward of *God's Money*.

Income & Expenses Worksheet

Income:	Amount	Percentage
Take-Home-Pay		
Total Income:		
Expenses:		
Housing		
Utilities (Water, Gas, Electric, Phone, TV, Internet)		
Automobile		
Child Care		
Health Care		
Insurance		
Food		
Clothing		
Personal Care		
Entertainment		
Credit Cards		
Cash Expenditures		
Total Expenses		
Difference (INCOME VS. EXPENSES)		

Guideline Budget Worksheet

Category	Actual	Guideline
Gross Income:		
Tithe		
Taxes		
Net Spendable Income:		
Housing		
Food		
Automobile		
Insurance		
Debts		
Entertainment/Recreation		
Clothing		
Savings		
Medical/Dental		
Miscellaneous		
School/Child Care		

Budget Percentage Guidelines
(Family of Four)

Gross Income:	\$15,000	\$25,000	\$40,000	\$50,000	\$60,000
Tithe	10%	10%	10%	10%	10%
Taxes	8%	17.5%	18%	19%	21%
Net Spendable Income:	\$12,300	\$18,125	\$28,800	\$35,500	\$41,400
Housing	35%	38%	30%	27%	25%
Food	15%	12%	12%	12%	10%
Automobile	15%	15%	12%	12%	12%
Insurance	5%	5%	5%	5%	5%
Debts	5%	5%	5%	5%	5%
Entertainment/Recreation	5%	5%	7%	7%	7%
Clothing	5%	5%	5%	6%	6%
Savings	5%	5%	5%	5%	5%
Medical/Dental	5%	5%	4%	4%	4%
Miscellaneous	5%	5%	7%	8%	8%
School/Child Care	10%	8%	6%	5%	5%

