
CHRISTIAN MEDICAL & DENTAL SOCIETY



**GOD'S
PRESCRIPTION
FOR YOUR
FINANCES**

DAVID S. TOPAZIAN, D.D.S.

God's Prescription for Your Finances

by David S. Topazian, D.D.S.

**Christian Medical & Dental Society
Richardson, Texas**

Christian Medical & Dental Society
A Fellowship of Physicians and Dentists
P.O. Box 830689
Richardson, TX 75083-0689

Cover Design: Ron Pittman

CMDS President: Robert J. Kingsbury, M.D.

CMDS General Director: Hal Habecker, D. Min.

First edition, 1992

Copyright 1992 by David S. Topazian, D.D.S.

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture references are from the *Holy Bible: New International Version*, copyright 1973, 1978, 1984 by the International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Bible Publishers.

Printed in the United States of America

About the Author

David S. Topazian, D.D.S., MSc., practiced Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery for 28 years in Connecticut. In 1989 he took early retirement to become a missionary in Valencia, Venezuela. While in private practice, he served on 15 MGMs. He has given numerous lectures and workshops on finances and stewardship. Dr. Topazian has been a member of CMDS since 1959 and has served as Delegate, Trustee, and President (1989-1992).

The mission of CMDS is to motivate and equip doctors to practice faith in Jesus Christ in their personal and professional lives. Its ministries and resources are directed towards that goal.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Where Did It All Come From? A Biblical View of Material Things	1
2. Adjusting Our Attitude Toward Money and Material Things.....	11
3. Managing Your Income, Large or Small	17
4. Debt and the “Doctor House”	23
5. Are You Too Young to Think About Retirement?.....	31
6. Investing Your Savings, IRA, or Pension Fund.....	39
7. Avoiding the Traps of Affluence	45
8. More About Giving	51
9. Educational Debt	61
10. For the Married or Nearly Married.....	67
11. Teaching Stewardship to Your Children.....	73
12. What is My Motivation?.....	81
<i>Endnotes</i>	87
<i>Bibliography</i>	89

CHAPTER 1

WHERE DID IT ALL COME FROM?

A BIBLICAL VIEW OF MATERIAL THINGS

What the Bible says about money and material possessions is often disturbing and flies in the face of our culture. But a biblically-based philosophy of wealth and possessions, when put into practice, can bring much happiness, personal satisfaction, and God's blessing. It is the first step toward financial success, God's way.

A Disastrous Example

Consider the sad case of Jack Crenshaw, M.D. In only eleven short years since his residency he'd become one of the most successful surgeons on the West Coast. His weekly routine was the envy of all his peers: three full days of surgery, three half-days. Jack was a member of a prestigious country club, playing golf and tennis on his half days off. He spent Sundays going to automobile shows, adding to his collection of antique racing cars, or sailing to Santa Catalina on his 42' yacht.

It's not clear exactly when Jack got into trouble, or which toy put him completely beyond any reasonable ability to repay all his debt. One thing was clear though, Jack himself was *not* going to be reasonable about his plight. First he lost the sailboat. Then the bank repossessed three of his cars. But Jack

God's Prescription for Your Finances

was obsessed. Instead of focusing on his plight and working with the bank he began to hoard his money and continued to be delinquent on loans. His obsession began to affect his work.

Then the law suits began...

Our Purpose in this Study

Jack's case is an extreme example. But it serves to show us the provocative nature of materialism in our day. We have too many choices and we're bombarded with hedonistic messages from almost every corner of our culture, messages that can tempt us to abandon some of the most basic and simple principles of our faith.

Our purpose in this study is to grasp the Bible's teaching on wealth, material things, and poverty. By the time we're finished, hopefully, you'll be equipped to put into practice some rather simple principles and perhaps avoid a disaster like Jack's.

This first chapter will focus on three of the most important financial themes in the Scriptures: stewardship, the seductive nature of money, and our attitudes toward poverty and the poor.

JESUS' FINANCIAL PRIMER

Let's begin by looking at Jesus' words in the parable of the talents:

Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them. To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more. So also, the one with the two talents gained two more. But the man who had

Where Did It All Come From?

received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.

After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. The man who had received the five talents brought the other five. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with five talents. See, I have gained five more.'

His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'

The man with the two talents also came. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with two talents; see, I have gained two more.'

His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'

Then the man who had received the one talent came. 'Master,' he said, 'I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.'

His master replied, 'You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest.'

Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents. For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' (Mt. 25: 14-30)

God's Prescription for Your Finances

The Parable's Principles

Remember that Jesus' purpose in a story like this is to focus His listeners' attention of the significance of His own ministry and work among men. In this particular parable He seems to be laying down certain principles that should govern the kind of response He expects from his followers in the area of stewardship. A careful look at the passage reveals several principles for us to put into practice:

1. *God owns everything* (v. 14).

In the parable, the master entrusted *his* property to his servants. We then, are managers of what God owns and chooses to place under our jurisdiction.

2. *Responsibility grows with successful stewardship* (v. 21).

When we are successful in managing one asset, God gives us greater responsibilities. Here Jesus is giving a goal to every Christian: to grow in responsibility.

3. *"How much" is less important than "how"* (v. 23).

Notice that the steward who doubled five talents and the steward who doubled two talents received the same commendation. Jesus is telling us that whether we are entrusted with much or little is not important. It is the quality of our management that matters.

4. *Good stewardship of God's resources requires action* (vv. 24-28).

The steward who hid the talent in a safe place was called wicked and lazy by his master. It is not enough to keep money and material things at arm's length, thinking that somehow we

Where Did It All Come From?

can be kept free from contamination. I must involve myself in the responsible management of God's resources.

5. Poor stewardship can make us paupers (vv. 28-30).

Losing what you have by mismanagement is a tragedy. Losing it by having it taken away and given to someone else to manage is pure devastation. Our poverty, in this situation, consists in losing both material advantage, and the commendation of our Master. He condemns the servant's wickedness and laziness and casts him (us!) out with no further responsibility. Weeping and gnashing of teeth are symbolic expressions of disappointment and subsequent grief. What greater disappointment could there be than losing the joy of hearing our Master's commendation: "well done"? What lower state than being cast into darkness?

In I Timothy 6:7 the Apostle Paul reminds us of the fleeting nature of material things and the limited time span during which we possess them: "For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it." We are sojourners in the land. The drive to accumulate temporal things deflects us from our real purpose as Christians.

The act of holding lightly what the world grasps tightly results in a deeply-felt freedom, an emancipating liberation of our souls from the enslaving grasp of material things.

My college roommate came from a high quality family of modest means. He was a deeply spiritual man who brought great blessing into my life. He had a keen mind, a love for learning, a love for God, and a desire to serve Him and his fellow men and women. During medical school he became acquainted with a physician who had built a lucrative practice, but who was an obsessive spender. My roommate subse-

God's Prescription for Your Finances

quently developed an enjoyment of all the toys his role model possessed. He strove to emulate him—even to the point of using alcohol, although he had previously been a man of moderation.

The enjoyment became an obsession as time went by, so that by the completion of his residency he was a driven man, bent only on getting rich. The frustrations and impediments on his road to riches caused him to turn against his faith and all that he had held dear. While still a young man, he committed suicide with a lethal dose of thiopental.

THE SUBTLE MASTERY OF MAMMON

Jesus' conversation with the rich young man, (Matt.19:16-30) reveals the subtle control riches may gain over us.

Now a man came up to Jesus and asked, "Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?"

"Why do you ask me about what is good?" Jesus replied. There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, obey the commandments."

"Which ones?" the man inquired.

Jesus replied, "Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother,' and 'love your neighbor as yourself.'"

"All these I have kept," the young man said. "What do I still lack?"

Jesus answered, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth.

Then Jesus said to his disciples, "I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

Where Did It All Come From?

When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished and asked, “Who then can be saved?”

Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”

Peter answered him, “We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?”

Jesus said to them, “I tell the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first.”

This man wanted to do right and inherit eternal life. He felt that good works were sufficient to merit that reward, and he felt that his own works were good. He was certain that he had kept the law. Jesus offered him the real substance by which he could receive eternal life—abandoning his own desires and following Him. The young man could not resist the lure of his material possessions, so he failed to achieve the goal that he sought.

In His explanation to the disciples, Jesus emphasized the weight that riches exert in dragging us away from the kingdom. Their astonished reply (v. 25), “Who then, can be saved?” vividly implies that all of us are afflicted to some degree with the desire for worldly wealth. Our vulnerability in this area requires constant vigilance and a steadfast determination not to be seduced by money and what it can buy.

But while avoiding the seduction of riches and maintaining good stewardship are two of the primary themes in a biblical view of financial responsibility, there is a third important theme: Our attitudes toward poverty and the poor.

POVERTY AND THE POOR

God calls upon His people to have the right attitude toward poverty and the poor. James reminds us that riches are temporary. Poor people should be glad that their poverty is external and temporary and rich Christians should be glad that their wealth means nothing to the Lord for it is fleeting in character. He says, "The brother in humble circumstances ought to take pride in his high position. But the one who is rich should take pride in his low position, because he will pass away like a wild flower. For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant; its blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way, the rich man will fade away even while he goes about his business" (James 1:9-11). Furthermore, He states that remaining unencumbered with material possessions makes us somehow rich *in faith*, and especially prepared to receive our heavenly inheritance: "Listen, my dear brothers: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him?" (2:5).

The Prophet tells us: "Has not my hand made all these things, and so they came into being?" (Isa. 66:2). This is a reminder that God is the source of all things and that He esteems the humble and contrite person who "trembles" in awe at God's word. Riches can give a person a sense of invincibility, prompting in us a loss of dependency on God for everything. "Better to be lowly in spirit and among the oppressed than to share plunder with the proud" (Proverbs 16:19).

Questions for Thought and Discussion

1. You have just inherited the house in which you grew up. Taking into account your present circumstances (for example your age and plans), to what extent is this house and land yours? Try to imagine to whom it might belong in 50 years, or 75 years. Do you really “own” it? Is there a difference between possessing something and owning it?
2. Read Leviticus 25: 10-24. To what extent does the Jubilee year support God’s ownership of all?
3. The Old Testament contains the Moral Law and the Ceremonial Law. Which is applicable to the Christian and to what extent? Does 2 Timothy 3:16-17 support your answer?
4. Read I Timothy 6:7 in context. What is the trap in wanting to be rich? What are the usual consequences for the Christian obsessed with loving money? Think of examples of Christians who have fallen into the trap. Could it ever happen to you?
5. What was Jesus’ purpose in the Parable of the Talents? Which steward do you most relate to? Have you taken stock of your own “talents” recently?
6. How does being poor make one rich in faith (James 2:5)? Does it mean, also, that being rich makes one poor in faith?
7. Thinking deeply in your soul, now, what would you have done if you were the rich young ruler?

God's Prescription for Your Finances

CHAPTER 2

ADJUSTING OUR ATTITUDE

TOWARD MONEY AND MATERIAL THINGS

Money is fundamentally a medium of exchange. We exchange goods and services for money and vice versa. If we didn't have coins and bills we would use handfuls of beans or corn. So there is nothing inherently evil in money. Nowhere in the Scriptures do we read that earning and possessing money are sinful. But, for a person who desires to please God, money can also be viewed as a tool, as a means to an end. It should never be an end in itself.

We have all read about a young man who vows that he will become a millionaire by the age of 30, and achieves his dubious goal. Any person with average intelligence who is willing to devote sufficient time and energy to the pursuit of money would likely reach such a goal. But for those who love God, especially for the Christian, this is the wrong goal. Increasing numbers of students entering medical and dental and other professional schools are motivated by such goals. For them getting money and the things it can buy has become an end in itself.

DISTINGUISH BETWEEN NEEDS AND WANTS

Money is necessary to this degree; that we should have our *needs* met. Needs, in today's world, are more than just food, clothing and shelter. We need to be educated to use the intellect God has given us to good advantage. We need to keep pace with the changing world around us. For many, a personal computer may be a legitimate need. We may need transportation to the university, to our place of employment, or to various hospitals for rotations. In a country with a low emphasis on public transportation, this often requires the purchase of an automobile. An automobile, in this case, is a need. The type of automobile, on the other hand, introduces another factor.

We also use money to obtain our wants. The media often confuses, needs and wants, especially in our children's minds. If you or I were to give the media control of our minds we would never have our wants satisfied. People never seem to reach the end of wanting another gadget or a more expensive car. They very often want something simply because a neighbor or competitor owns one.

This presents a real danger for the Christian. Once we satisfy our needs, we begin to indulge our wants. The more wants we acquire the more self-sufficient we become. The more self-sufficient we become, the less we need to depend on God. It is tragic to stop depending on God. Our self-sufficiency often reinforces the idea that we have arrived because of our own cleverness and skill. The more things we own, the greater the reinforcement. Yet, the Bible states that "my God shall meet all your needs according to His riches in Christ Jesus" (Phil 4:19).

God Has Provided For Our Real Needs

And what riches those are. The Bible describes our inheritance in Christ in terms like "blessed with every spiritual blessing in

Adjusting Our Attitudes Toward Money

the heavenly places in Christ” (Eph. 1:3), “predestined to adoption as sons” (Eph.1:5), and “heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ” (Rom. 8:17). Many theologians have written about the “riches of His grace” (Eph. 1:7), some of them identifying as many as 33 spiritual blessings as a result of our identification with Him.¹ We’ve already seen the fleeting and addictive nature of material things. If we keep in mind our true inheritance, those things of eternal significance we receive as heirs with Christ, it will help us keep our perspective on material things in sync with God’s clear parameters given in Scripture.

I think if we summarize what the Bible says about money, it would be ideal for every Christian to regard material things merely as necessities to maintain two activities:

1. My service for Christ.

2. My responsibilities as a parent or head of a household.

We need to be reminded constantly of the frivolous nature of most of the things we possess, so that we do not rely upon them for our happiness and fulfillment. Such an attitude frees us to give and to serve, acting as true disciples of our Lord who “came not to be served but *to serve* and *to give* his life...” (Mark 10:45).

Nowhere do our priorities show more than in our buying habits. Our ways of spending indicate what we value and point to the deepest concerns of our souls. If you value your child’s future, for example, your check book register probably shows entries for deposits into a college savings fund. If you value fine furniture, likewise it may show up in your spending habits. Let’s turn now to some guidelines that reflect the two scriptural concerns set out above. These may cause you to do some rethinking of your future purchasing habits; to follow biblical patterns rather than cultural ones.

GUIDELINES FOR BUYING

A few guidelines for buying will stimulate us to sharpen our own philosophy and orientation. Once we overcome the social pressure to be squeezed into the world's way of doing things we can find great satisfaction in buying things we really need.

1. Compare, Compare, Compare

Buy things by comparison shopping, settling for only good quality at the best price. Know the price before you buy, whether it is a new car or a head of broccoli. Maintain non-consumable items well and use them well. Get your money's worth. Consider used things rather than always buying new.

2. Use it up, wear it out; make it do, do without.

This old New England phrase means do not discard things and buy new ones for frivolous reasons. Use appliances, gadgets and items of clothing until they wear out or are not cost-effective to repair. Consider carefully whether the item really needs replacing.

3. Do not buy on impulse.

Women are great impulse buyers of small and relatively inexpensive items. Men are well-known impulse buyers of "big ticket" items like boats, cars and tractors with all the attachments. Never make a major purchase without a "cooling off period" in which to be certain that a need exists and that the price is right. If a month were to elapse before purchasing expensive things we "have to have" or things we have "fallen in love with," either they would not be bought, or we would have discovered a better buy.

Adjusting Our Attitudes Toward Money

Impulse buying leads to overspending. It usually can be avoided by shopping with a list and sticking to it, and, as most financial advisors would suggest, by keeping your husband (or wife) out of the supermarket.

4. Take your time on big purchases, especially cars.

Do not change automobiles just because you feel like it, because you want the latest model, because your accountant says it is good business, or because you need a “doctor’s car.” We waste more money changing cars than we imagine. A car should be maintained and driven until it wears out. As your family grows your needs for the *type* of vehicle you need may change. For example, if you have three or four children you may need a mini-van, to fit everyone in for carpool or vacation. But don’t make such a decision lightly, or just because the neighbors have one.

5. Don’t let slick advertising persuade you.

Resist the temptation to do things that cost money either because “it feels good,” or because you “owe it to yourself,” or because you “may never have this opportunity again.” These are not the Christian’s reasons for using God’s resources, they are marketing propaganda that has brainwashed us.

Questions for Thought and Discussion

1. A family maintained a comfortable home in which they entertained a long list of distinguished guests. They had some items of furniture that had belonged to their parents over forty years earlier. They made them serviceable by repainting, recovering and other forms of camouflage. They were definitely not antiques. Would you be embarrassed to provide hospitality with such well-worn things?

God's Prescription for Your Finances

Would the people in your adult Sunday School class think there was something wrong with you if you used such furnishings? Would they think, maybe, that you weren't a true professional?

2. A graduating medical student and I were discussing \$100,000 in accumulated "education-related" debt. She revealed that she had taken a summer trip with several friends on borrowed money. They chartered a small plane to view the surrounding geography. It had added up to about \$1,250. She repeatedly insisted that the biggest factor in deciding for this venture was that "I probably would never have the opportunity to do this again."

To what extent does this reason for spending limit God? Has God ever brought you anything unexpected or even spectacular? Can you think of Scripture passages that apply here?

What Bible characters experienced the unexpected from God?

3. Do you know any doctors who drive an old car? What is the attitude of their peers? Would you be self-conscious driving a 10 year old compact car to the hospital and parking it next to your colleague's BMW? If so, what is the source of your self-consciousness? Can it be overcome? Should it be overcome?

4. Where does a Christian gain significance? In what he or she does and has or in what he or she is? Discuss Genesis 1:26,27; Psalms 8 and 139; Ephesians 2:10. Is this Christian philosophy at odds with the world system around us?

5. Read Ephesians 1 and 2. What kind of inheritance do we have with Christ? How does it compare with worldly goods? Where is your focus? Why?

CHAPTER 3

MANAGING YOUR INCOME,

LARGE OR SMALL

I have had the opportunity to speak about financial matters with groups of students and graduates and to conduct workshops at conferences. Invariably, during the discussion or in private conversations afterward, it will become clear that some people are “savvy” about managing money and some are not.

Some have a plan for repayment of education-related debt as rapidly as possible. Others will let it drag out for as long as ten years. Some have thought through a careful means of giving to God even though they are living on borrowed money. Others dismiss giving as unimportant or not even germane to their situation since they are currently accumulating debt.

The influences of our families and the manner in which we have been trained usually predict our attitudes toward management of money and material things. Children of immigrant parents or parents who survived the Great Depression, and who have had to work hard, save, and practice self-denial are more likely to follow these influences in adult life. Children of families with a non-interference, non-

God's Prescription for Your Finances

communicative approach to child-rearing are more often at sea, managing their finances by impulse and emotion.

Most medical and dental and other professional schools do not have courses on finance. Graduates are too often left to use trial and error in reaching financial sophistication. But God's Word encourages the Christian to use wisdom in financial matters. Therefore, each of us ought to have a plan for our use of money.

DEVELOPING A PLAN

Why should you develop a financial plan? First, we please the Lord when we have a plan. The parable of the talents (Matt. 25:14-30) implies the aggressive nature of two of the servants who set out to make as much for the master's good as they could. The third servant was wrapped up in an indecisive paranoia, timid about the master's wrath and paralyzed with fear rather than motivated by it. He had no plan. He was driven by emotion. Your desire ought to be to emulate the more aggressive servants. You need a plan.

Second, we need a plan because too many creative manufacturers and advertisers clamor for our dollars. Their products are being pushed on us by the marketing media. We are prey for the glossiest ad, the sexiest presentation, the greatest din, the sight-level supermarket display. Very few of us have the sales resistance to counter the highly developed science of persuasion to buy based on human motivational analysis. Many of us think we can resist, and even boast about it. But "he that boasteth should take heed lest he fall," because in our most confident moment we are most vulnerable.

A third reason for having a plan, is to know where we stand. One of the great dangers in money management is not knowing one's assets and liabilities, how much money is available, how much is committed, and how much is able to flow into the

various parts or compartments of a plan. Without a plan you're less likely to know how much money you've borrowed, what the rates of interest are, and how much borrowing is actually costing in dollars and cents.

First, Set Your Priorities

The most important element in managing matters of money and material things is a Christian idea of how income is to be used. Most Christian financial advisors² will have a listing something like this, in order of priority:

1. Giving and/or tithing
2. Paying taxes
3. Paying debt
4. Buying the necessities of life
5. Saving
6. Investment, business, lifestyle.

Those who are married or contemplating marriage should be in complete agreement on their list. It will go a long way toward fostering marital harmony. Unity will diffuse the most explosive issue leading to marital failure: disagreement about money matters. Let's take a closer look at the priorities.

Giving and tithing are not debatable for the Christian. If God owns everything and if He has taught us that we should give to Him from our firstfruits we either obey or disobey. The question is, where in our list of priorities this should be placed, and how much one ought to give. Giving off the top before taxes or other deductions is the safest and most honest practice for Christians, in my opinion. We don't do this so that God will favor us and make us financially independent. We do it out of obedience to His command. Obedience brings peace and great satisfaction.

God's Prescription for Your Finances

Tithing and giving will cause all other elements to fall into place. If tithing and giving is lower on the list, it runs the risk of being short-changed, and our honesty with God is in danger of being unwittingly compromised.

The second and third elements, paying taxes and paying debt are not flexible options. We must pay our taxes to be good citizens and remain in the work force. If we neglect to pay our debt we begin to lose the things that are necessary for our continued activity, and we might lose the ability to earn income.

The fourth factor, buying the necessities of life, is a great variable as we choose different styles of living and are influenced by an array of forces. But food, clothing, shelter, transportation, insurance, recreation and entertainment, medical and dental expenses, children's education, and miscellaneous personal items all should be included.

Savings is so important, that it might trade places with living expense for some who have been taught to save something from every paycheck. The habit of saving money is good for any individual, family, child or organization and should be taught and modeled by careful parents.

Now, if money is left over, it can go into investments or into a more lavish lifestyle if that is what God calls you to. Some people have a desire to own a business in addition to their profession. Diversion of money into such ventures should never encroach on the first five factors on this list.

Your Spending Plan

We must have a plan. The plan begins with a list of priorities that should remain inviolable. The other elements in the plan are also important, however. They consist of a method of allocation of income and a spending plan.

Allocation is done immediately when wages are received. In many cases, taxes will have been withdrawn. We allocate

money to the various accounts in the spending plan (sometimes called a budget). Various means of accomplishing this simply and quickly are outlined by the writers listed in the bibliography. One suggestion is to use multiple checkbooks for one bank account, “depositing” into them (a bookkeeping transfer) the amounts budgeted, from the master checkbook.

Payments are made out of the various accounts. Any unused money is carried over in that account from month to month, so that an unexpected expense, for example a car repair, will usually find money available in the automobile account.

For married couples, both husband and wife should share the responsibilities of spending and check writing. This encourages constant awareness of the state of the family coffers and acts as a restraint on purchases not included in the spending plan. We exhort one another to be responsible.

God's Prescription for Your Finances

Questions for Thought And Discussion

1. How would you order your list of financial priorities?
2. Have you ever had money earmarked for Christian giving only to spend it for some other necessary purpose? Do you find it embarrassing to admit this to others? What should our attitude be in giving? Study 2 Cor. 9:7.
3. The Apostle Paul has much to say about giving. To determine where giving should be placed on your philosophical list, read 2 Cor. 8:11-12. Discuss the use of the terms "willingness" and "eager willingness" in this passage.
4. What is there about the word "budget" that scares people and turns them off? Do you keep a budget? How much time monthly is necessary to implement a careful allocation and spending plan? Do you know, within a few dollars, what your balance is in checking, savings and other accounts right now?
5. Can you envision the day when you will have enough money to be able to discard financial planning? Is it wise to have such a goal?

CHAPTER 4

DEBT AND THE “DOCTOR HOUSE”

At a recent national convention of Christian Medical & Dental Society I was presenting a workshop entitled, Stewardship of Material Resources: Marital Implications. As the participants were arriving a couple whom I recognized, greeted me and reminded me that they had attended my workshop at a prior convention. With some excitement, they told me that they had returned home, and done some simple calculations.

“We put our house on the market,” they observed with obvious pleasure. “We calculated that we were spending more on interest every month than it would cost to send our two children to a Christian day school for a whole year.” They later revealed that they were paying \$3,300 per month in interest alone. “We had always assumed that we had to have a ‘Doctor House,’” they said, “so as we were building this enormous house that we didn’t need, we just kept adding the priciest appliances, all kinds of extra space, the most sumptuous appointments, and all with no regard for cost.”

The decision to put the house up for sale revealed to them the terrible burden and pressure that such debt had placed on them. They recounted the feeling of emancipation their decision had brought, though the house had not yet been sold (the market for this kind of house is limited to the person looking for a

God's Prescription for Your Finances

“Doctor House”). This young couple had analyzed their situation and had concluded that they could be much happier living in a different part of their community. Living in a debt-free home they could enjoy their freedom from slavery to the lender of money.

This kind of emancipation is good for the Christian. It liberates the mind, opening up all kinds of options for serving the Lord through our profession. Debt limits our futures. It pre-emptly certain opportunities for service. We have to be busy tending what we have bought, rather than being free to tend whatever new challenge God might offer us.

THE DEBT TRAP

How do we fall into the kind of trap described by this family? We first adopt or absorb the world system and adapt to it. On certain moral issues we naturally adopt a Christian perspective. When it comes to money we maintain a compartment of our lives that hasn't been sufficiently “Christianized,” and we forget that God owns it all. He merely calls us to responsibly manage what He has placed in our hands. We don't think differently than the world. So we do what everyone else does, and everyone else thinks that doctors have to live in “doctor houses.”

Lessons from the Apostle James

It is interesting that James tells us that the reason we pray, but don't receive what we ask God for, though He has promised to supply all our needs, is that we ask wrongly. “... You want only what will give you pleasure. You are like an unfaithful wife who loves her husband's enemies. Don't you realize that making friends with God's enemies, the evil pleasures of this world, makes you an enemy of God? I say it again, that if your

Debt and the "Doctor House"

aim is to enjoy the evil pleasure of the unsaved world, you cannot also be a friend of God" (James 4:3b-4. TLB).

Second, the inordinately successful pressure of the marketing media convinces us that we must have and do certain things. Vulnerable is the Christian who prides himself on his "sales resistance," thinking that he is immune to the allure of the media.

Anyone can become an instant victim of an ungodly system when we look, listen, and succumb to the glamour. Our defenses need to be ready constantly. We need to resist, flee, and find our motivation by study and application of the teachings of Scripture.

Third, nothing in our educational process prepares us to handle money wisely and with restraint. I have yet to meet the medical or dental student, the physician or dentist who testifies to being prepared by his or her professional education, to know the real value of money. We have no courses in responsible accumulation and use of money. We were never warned of its dangers specifically related to the life of the doctor.

Fourth, the realities of debt, compound interest, and repayment seem to escape most of us. Debt is enslaving. It is easily accumulated but shed with great difficulty. The miracle of compounding interest, instead of working for us, works against us. Compounding interest is a tool for gradual, effective accumulation of money to meet the needs of our families and our own futures, and as a means of ministry. By mismanagement we enrich the financial institutions. We buy things we do not need, and in many cases we are still paying for them after they have been consumed or depreciated.

A SHORT PRIMER ON DEBT

Debt must always be repaid. Only the wicked borrow and do not repay, according to the scriptures (Psalm 49). Repayment of debt is not easy. By limiting your options debt can become a literal millstone around your neck.

Resolve not to borrow unless all of the following criteria are met:

1. Borrowing is a spiritual decision and should be undertaken only after seeking God's will and after sensing a spiritual peace and rightness about it.

2. If married, husband and wife should agree that they understand the reasons for borrowing and are in complete accord. Unless there is full agreement and full understanding of the "deal" there should be no borrowing.

3. You must have a guaranteed means of repayment such as: a bank account with sufficient savings to repay the debt; collateral, such as the value of the mortgaged home; a life insurance policy that will repay the debt in case you die.

4. Some significant goal such as an educational goal will be reached that can be achieved in no way other than to borrow.

5. You've taken the time to shop for the cheapest interest rate you can get on the loan.

Types of Debt

Four basic types of debt are waiting to consume your income:

1. *Credit Card and Consumer Debt.*

Buying with credit cards and buying anything on "time payments" fits into this category. Automobile payments, clothing bought at department stores, restaurant bills, gasoline and car repairs are other examples. Even if you pay the balance every month without paying a cent of interest, the average

Debt and the "Doctor House"

consumer with a credit card spends 34% more each year than he would without a credit card.

Credit cards encourage impulse buying. Purchased items have often been consumed or severely depreciated by the time the payments are completed. When you pay credit card interest, it's usually the highest interest rate charged, often as high as 21%. Most financial counselors would tell people with problem debt to get rid of their credit cards. An alternative is the debit card which is used like a check to draw on money already in your bank account. You may only spend what you have.

2. Mortgage debt.

This type of debt has historically been a reasonable form of debt to assume. The value of real property has usually increased when held for the long term. The bank secures the loan by the value of the property. If payments cannot be made, the house may be repossessed (mortgage foreclosed) and the invested principal lost, but the individual is generally not left bankrupt. However, when real estate values fall and the mortgage exceeds the appraised value of the house, in some states the bank can seek satisfaction by seizing the personal assets of the mortgagee.

The Home Equity loan has become popular in recent years as a device to borrow against the existing equity in one's home. Christian financial expert Larry Burkett calls this kind of loan "...one of the worst ideas ever pushed on the average family. It encourages them to put their homes in jeopardy and borrow to buy things that they can easily do without, such as new cars."⁴

3. Business and investment debt.

Borrowing to start a business or for investment usually is secured by the value of the property or other investment. It should always meet the standards of the criteria listed above.

God's Prescription for Your Finances

4. Education-related debt.

Most medical and dental school graduates have acquired significant and sometimes overwhelming debt. A word of caution is in order. Borrow only what you need to pay tuition and living expenses and to sustain your physical needs. (See Ch. 9) Restraint in purchasing luxuries will pay rich dividends when the difficult task of escaping from the bondage of debt begins.

A Final Caution: Watch Gift Giving

An example of borrowing that needlessly incurs greater debt is gift giving. Gifts remind us of significant occasions. Most of us are touched, grateful and satisfied by the remembrance. It is inappropriate to give lavish gifts when one is in debt. Lavish gift giving may be a subtle response to a guilt trip that the advertising media lay on us. The subtle message might be summarized: "One must be generous. Merely appropriate gifts are not a sign of true generosity. Therefore, buy what you can't afford to prove that you can be generous in spite of your indebtedness."

Christians can resist this kind of pressure by knowing where their significance comes from, by an overriding sense of responsible stewardship, and by a confidence that others do not judge us by the lavishness of what we give, but by who we are.

Questions for Thought and Discussion

1. Name some items you have purchased in the past 6 months that have increased your indebtedness. When will you pay for those items? Will they still exist? Will they have appreciated or depreciated in value? Name some that were needs. Name some that were wants.
2. Proverbs 22:7 says: "The rich rule over the poor, and the borrower is servant to the lender. In what ways are borrowers slaves to lenders?"
3. Romans 13:8 tells us to "Let no debt remain outstanding except the continuing debt to love one another." What does this imply about the face we present to the world when they see us involved in monetary debt to other Christians? How can we meet the needs of other Christians other than by lending them money?
4. What is surety? Proverbs 11:15 says: "He who puts up security for another will surely suffer, but whoever refuses to strike hands in pledge is safe." (Read also Prov. 6:1-5.) What is the modern equivalent to "striking hands in pledge?" Why are Solomon's warnings so unequivocal and severe?
5. An investment of \$265.80 per month at 12.5% for 40 years would yield \$3,641,550. What kind of monthly payments are you now making? When does the phenomenon of compound interest work against you rather than for you? What are the alternatives to paying a bank this kind of money?

God's Prescription for Your Finances

CHAPTER 5

ARE YOU TOO YOUNG

TO THINK ABOUT RETIREMENT?

A successful surgeon in his early fifties, knowing about my interest in financial matters, confided in me that he was teetering on the edge of bankruptcy. He had earned a large income for many years and had seen a fortune pass through his hands. He was facing a perilous and insecure future.

When I inquired about his pension plan he said, "I decided that I would invest for my retirement with after-tax dollars." And when I asked how much he had accumulated, he stated that he had never gotten around to starting that self-conceived pension plan.

I was left wondering where this highly intelligent committed Christian man had acquired such wisdom. He was confident that, going against all conventional wisdom regarding retirement, he had found a better way. At a convention of my specialty group I met a colleague who was not a Christian, but to whom I had recommended a walk with Jesus Christ many years before. Having heard about my impending early retirement he recounted his own financial woes that had left him penniless and deeply in debt at the age of 57.

God's Prescription for Your Finances

Divorce, bad business deals sold to him by “friends,” and gambling on his golf game had consumed his earnings of nearly thirty years. When I inquired about his pension plan, he remarked ruefully, “I have no pension plan. I go to work every day because I have to work. I hate every minute of it.” (I wondered briefly what it would be like to be operated on by a surgeon who hated his work!)

The surgeon above, a Christian, was “a poor businessman” who had ill conceived concepts of finance. The other, not a Christian, was paying the price of a profligate lifestyle. The results were similarly tragic from a financial point of view, and both had enriched many people along the way, because of their ability to earn a substantial income. The Christian’s story was, in fact, the more tragic because of his inability to give money to the cause of Christ, money which would have returned incalculable spiritual dividends. The Christian is required to be a good steward. Our heavenly reward will depend on how we have managed God’s resources.

PLANNING FOR A PENSION

Tax deferred pension plans have been allowed by the government in order to motivate people to lay money away for their retirement years. The tax advantage is an incentive to save. Saving money with *before-tax dollars* means that less money must be earned to save a given sum. Furthermore, within certain limits, the amount of money contributed to the pension plan may be deducted as a business expense. Therefore the net taxable income of a person’s practice is reduced by the amount contributed to the pension.

The second tax advantage is simply that all income earned by the pension plan, whether by dividend, interest, or capital gain is not taxed as it is earned, but only as it is withdrawn

Too Young To Think About Retirement?

during retirement. The deferment of taxes allows all the money accumulated to keep on compounding interest.

The simplest form of pension plan is the Individual Retirement Account (IRA), which may be started in the years of lower income. As a rule, the earlier it is started, even though retirement is far from your mind, the more productive it will be because it will compound interest over a long period of time. It should be funded to the limit allowed by the law. It is an ideal form of savings for those in training, though it requires discipline and lifestyle adjustment. You must understand that your access to the money thus saved is restricted.

Other forms of pension plans have such names as Keogh, Defined Benefit, Defined Contribution, Target Benefit and 401(K), which refers to the governing law in the tax code. When in private, corporate or institutional practice, a person ought to choose the type of plan best suited to his or her situation at the earliest opportunity and fund it to the limit allowed by law.

Pension plans may prove even more valuable in the future than they are today. Social Security benefits may or may not be available to retirees when the time comes to collect. Big government has an insatiable appetite and has a way of dipping into any available funds, yours or mine! The Social Security system is not even immune to raiding by government spenders.

When economic times are bad, and when one suffers financial reverses, retirement plans may be protected from bankruptcy attachment, depending on applicable state law. Some states also protect pension plans from invasion by liability claims. Pension plans can provide great security in times of financial hardship.

PRINCIPLES OF RETIREMENT PLANS

We can make several generalizations about retirement plans. Your application of these will depend on your own circumstances.

God's Prescription for Your Finances

1. Start Accumulating Early.

The earlier you start to accumulate retirement benefits, the better. Biblical wisdom supports the notion that accumulating money slowly over a long period of time is the best way to provide for a financially secure future Proverbs 13:11 says: "Dishonest money dwindles away, but he who gathers money little by little makes it grow." (See also Prov. 28:20,22).

2. Make maximum contributions.

A plan that is appropriate for your individual circumstances should be funded to its limit if at all possible. Once a year has passed without a contribution to a plan having been made, the opportunity is lost forever, and the contribution not made will never earn tax deferred income for your future.

3. Check your account's "roll-over" rules.

For individuals employed by institutions or in corporate practices, contributions should be made to the limit allowed provided that all money may be moved ("rolled over") to a different account if you should change employers. You must be certain that you're "fully vested" in order to claim all of the money in a retirement plan account. A corporate plan that is not structured in such a way as to be immune to raiding in times of corporate financial difficulty is generally too risky.

4. Save funds for future giving.

Accumulation of a retirement fund is good Christian stewardship. It allows you to take care of your own needs in retirement, rather than being dependent. Properly planned and invested, it should allow tithing and giving during retirement on a scale similar to that during your earning years.

Too Young To Think About Retirement?

5. Evaluate risk factors by age.

Money accumulated in a retirement plan should be invested in low-risk financial instruments. With younger investors prudent risk may be taken as, for example, by investment in “total return” mutual funds which have averaged high return with safety of capital over the long term. As retirement years approach, the risk should be minimized, investing in even more conservative instruments which produce the highest income possible with no potential loss of capital. Insured bank certificates of deposit, U.S. government guaranteed securities, and high grade corporate bonds are good choices.

We should be neither obsessed with retirement nor contemptible of the concept. Plan ahead and set some goals. Develop other skills during your practice years with an eye to doing useful work, possibly with a Christian service emphasis, during your retirement years. Financial independence at that time will be an important factor in the options for service that are available. Serve wholeheartedly in your local church because the ministry skills you acquire and develop could be part of your preparation for a broader career in retirement.

Finally, consider a restrained lifestyle as a real expression of spiritual vitality.⁵ Your retirement needs will be more easily met. You will develop the habit of curbing your drive to consume. You will be able to consider a broader range of options in the future if you are not bound down by the “things” you have bought simply because you could afford them or because your peers have them. You will raise children with a world and life view that is realistic, one that will prepare them to be “world citizens,” one that conserves limited resources, and one that will prepare them for a broad range of life experiences.

Questions for Thought and Discussion

1. Why is it so hard to save money?
2. What are the advantages and disadvantages to having saved money which cannot be touched without payment of a significant penalty? Does it make sense to leave money untouched when one could use it, for example, to make a down payment on a home rather than postponing a home purchase?
3. One philosophy of stewardship says that we should not hide money away to grow and use for the future when it could be used today to spread the Gospel. Do you agree or disagree? Are there *scriptural* arguments to counter this philosophy?
4. Do you, personally, see any wisdom in Proverbs 13:11; 28:20, 22. Does this sound like an outdated concept?
5. The tax advantages of the IRA or pension fund are:
 - a. the expenditure is treated like a business expense so, in effect, the government is subsidizing your savings by foregoing taxes on the amount saved.
 - b. the money accumulates free of income tax on dividends, interest and capital gains.

Discuss the impact of these advantages over a time span of 30-40 years of saving.

6. 1 Cor. 4:1-5 reads:

“So then, men ought to regard us as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the secret things of God. Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful. I

Too Young To Think About Retirement?

care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself. My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me. Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God."

Could this passage refer to stewardship of material as well as spiritual matters?

God's Prescription for Your Finances

CHAPTER 6
INVESTING YOUR SAVINGS,
IRA OR PENSION FUND

Having observed many professionals and their management of money, I can safely say that most of them would have done well to put their hard-earned dollars in a bank account paying 5 and 1/2% compound interest. Most financial advisers would call this short-sighted and stupid. But at least our colleagues would not have lost significant amounts of principal. Once principal is lost it can never again be available to earn compound interest for you.

Avoid Risky Investment Schemes

Doctors often fall for wild and risky investment schemes. This usually happens because they consider themselves “adventuresome” investors. Making an income well above the average, they feel that they can afford to lose some money. But Christians can never afford to lose money. Remember that the servant who was to administer one talent hid it in the ground, knowing his master to be a hard, demanding person. But even keeping it safe (no loss of capital, only loss of interest) did not win a word of commendation for him. He was called “*wicked and lazy*” and what he had was taken away from him (Matt. 25:24-30).

God's Prescription for Your Finances

We will be judged in eternity on our stewardship of God's resources. Therefore, savings and investing decisions are spiritual decisions.

Those who sell schemes that will lose your money are usually without accountability for the investments they offer. They may be gurus, brokers, financial planners, money managers, friends, or relatives. You can complain when you lose money by following their advice, but usually their response will be a remorseless offer of a better deal. As financial adviser Ron Blue has said, no deal is ever presented as a bad deal. They always package schemes to look reasonable and safe.

GUIDELINES FOR SAVING AND INVESTING

I would propose several guidelines for saving and investing that will make it a satisfying and profitable experience. They should be implemented from the earliest earning days and become habitual.

1. Avoid the Most Common Investor's Mistakes.

Fabian lists the most common mistakes investors make as follows:⁶

- * Investors have no financial goals.
- * Investors do not understand the laws of compounded growth.
- * Investors follow complex investment strategies entirely unsuitable for them.

Investing Your Savings, IRA or Pension Fund

- * Investors are greedy, impatient, and unwilling to work for long-term results.
- * Investors are influenced by, and act upon, what they read in the financial press.
- * Investors rely on unqualified people who have a product to sell for their investment advice or account management.
- * Investors chase investments, acting emotionally rather than rationally.

2. Tithe and give with integrity.

This, a principle of saving and investing? Yes. I have never heard a Christian testify to the fact that being honest and scrupulous in what he or she had decided in their heart to give back to God, had ever resulted in financial hardship. On the other hand, many Christians testify to the fact that after tithing, God has given them the wisdom to use and multiply what was left in such a way as to provide them with enough for all their needs and, in many cases, much more than enough.

3. Set goals based on a sound financial plan.

Whether young or old, high income or low, good stewardship demands financial planning. A good plan will not only include allocation and spending plans for the short term, but will also include long-term financial goals that provide for the components of education, leisure, lifestyle, giving and retirement.

4. Save something from every paycheck.

This should be done, of course, after giving, payment of taxes, and payment of debt. But if one has developed a financial plan,

God's Prescription for Your Finances

he or she will know how much can be saved, and it should be put into its investment vehicle immediately so as not to be available for impulse buying.

5. Actively manage savings and investment.

Manage, but do not become obsessed with money. Money should not be left in a bank account paying minimal interest, but should be transferred to money market mutual funds where the maximum rate of interest can be obtained (often 2-4% above that of bank savings accounts). As of this writing, no investor has ever lost money in a money market mutual fund.⁷ A sufficient amount of cash should be available for emergencies and this should be kept in a money market fund which allows check-writing withdrawals. A sum equal to 3-6 months' expenses is often suggested.

6. Invest in marketable securities only.

Some types of stock cannot be traded and in some cases there is no market for certain stock. Restricted stocks are not appropriate investments.

7. Avoid heavily leveraged investments.

Leverage consists of borrowing against the value of an asset to make a further investment. Interest must be paid ("margin" accounts). When the economy is booming, leverage provides rapid, sizeable gains. Problems arise when the pledged assets lose value, when interest rates are very high and increase the cost of borrowing beyond the gain obtained, or when the lender "calls" the loan and assets must be sold to pay up. These are the circumstances that cause financial wizards to jump out of office buildings on Wall Street.

Doctors are generally not sophisticated investors with the ability to monitor market trends and interest rates on a daily

basis. They are often “whipsawed” by market forces and timing beyond their control, thereby losing principal. The “whipsaw” occurs when securities are bought at high prices, then sold when prices decline, either because of the need for cash or nervousness at having invested in a down market.

8. Use mutual funds for safety and growth.

Using no-load mutual funds, a mix of “aggressive growth funds” and “total return funds” with proven long-term records provides professional money management at low cost. It gives you a hedge against inflation that is not provided by simply keeping money in interest-bearing accounts. Younger investors with more time over which to spread risk should include a higher percentage of aggressive investments for long-term growth. As time for retirement nears, a more conservative approach is indicated to preserve income and minimize risk. “Total Return” or “Growth and Income” funds provide the latter. Information on these investments is readily obtained from publications such as Money magazine or Mutual Fund Forecaster newsletter.

9. Avoid recourse loans and pledging surety (assuming liability for another's loan).

A doctor invested in an apartment building with several colleagues. The bank insisted that each one personally guarantee the entire mortgage. A recession with high unemployment caused the occupancy rate to drop steeply, lowering the value of the property. The Bank had the option of taking back the property by foreclosure, but they had craftily guaranteed their own position by assuring their access to the personal assets of each partner. Letting the property go by foreclosure was not an easy option for the partners because of their personal liability.

God's Prescription for Your Finances

At the time such agreements are signed it seems completely unlikely that the guarantee would ever be enforced. But learn by our mistakes and by the mistakes of others. Never guarantee another person's loan. "He who puts up security for another will surely suffer, but whoever refuses to strike hands in pledge is safe" (Proverbs 11:15). "A man lacking in judgment strikes hands in pledge and puts up security for his neighbor" (Proverbs 17:18).

The stresses of our demanding professions are such that we need to protect ourselves from extraneous forces that drag us down and preoccupy us. Careful, stress-free investing can be an enjoyable and productive diversion when a patiently crafted and careful plan is followed. When our colleagues start talking about the "killing" they have made in oil wells, we need to ask God to renew our patience so that our stewardship might reflect our commitment to Him and that our commitment to Him might be reflected in our stewardship.

Questions for Thought and Discussion

1. How is the Christian uniquely equipped to resist the impulse to "get rich quick?"
2. Discuss the implications of Hebrews 13:5 with regard to conservative investing. With regard to security. With regard to contentment.
3. Is the Christian more vulnerable as she invests successfully and increases in wealth? Read Psalm 62:5, 10b. What does it mean to "set your heart" on something. Is it something to be avoided? How?
4. Review the most common investor mistakes. How do these reflect lack of commitment to Christian financial principles? Are you vulnerable to or experienced with any of these?

CHAPTER 7

AVOIDING THE TRAPS OF AFFLUENCE

A young couple with higher than average income often expressed their sincere devotion to the Christian faith and its practice. They were confident of their utter commitment at every level. However, the casual observer could see what they could not see. Their affluence was a serious block to their Christian faith. Affluence preempted their use of their considerable gifts for the glory of God.

From expensive vacations, expensive cosmetic surgery (and this was a highly attractive couple), lavish gifts of the most popular toys and games for their children, to the latest in designer clothing and sportswear (frequently changed to reflect the currently popular accoutrements), this couple had lost perspective. They did not notice that acquiring and caring for the luxuries of life drew them *away* from their Christian calling.

Their attendance at worship was spotty. They often expressed an impulse to serve in various ways in which they were gifted. Usually when offered an opportunity for some specific task they would delay in deciding, and often use some minor ailment or anticipated activity as an excuse. They would keep their options open until the last minute then decline. Usually they opted for leisure activity or "shopping." The pity

God's Prescription for Your Finances

is that they were blind to the inconsistency between what they professed and what they practiced.

THE MINEFIELD OF AFFLUENCE

Affluence is like a minefield. It is seeded with traps that are often expressed in various ways:

- * “Look, I didn’t work this hard for this long and achieve this much so that I could live like a pauper!”
- * “We make a lot of money, so we might as well enjoy it.”
- * We are sufficiently well off that we shouldn’t have to watch every penny.”
- * “I can afford it; I might as well go with what turns me on.”

The Trap of Self-Sufficiency

Even though one might agree that these statements are valid, they express a kind of self-sufficiency that draws us away from the claims of the gospel, and from a biblical view of material things. James says, “this kind of self-confidence never pleases the Lord” (James 4:16, TLB).

“A man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions,” Jesus said. “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Luke 12:22b,34). “But Godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing we will be content with that” (1 Timothy 6:6-8).

Even though our incomes are above average, many of us are burdened with debt, making our affluence an illusion. The attitudes expressed above keep us from using restraint in our consumption and spending, and too often, instead of using

excess income to pay off debt, we consume the excess. Thus, our so-called self-sufficiency leads to further indebtedness, perhaps even insolvency.

The Trap of Self-Worth Based on Possessions

At a medical society dinner being held at a local yacht club, I introduced a newcomer to a colleague, saying, "Art owns that beautiful 39-foot boat docked below." Art shot back, "I own two boats," not facetiously, but indignantly. He felt slighted at my omission. He received his significance from what he owned, and I had thoughtlessly reduced his self-worth by 50%. But even Art is incapable of sailing more than one boat at a time!

The Trap of Acquiring for the Wrong Reasons

Competitiveness can drive us to desire things because others have them or because we are convinced that some innovation has made the gadget we own obsolete. Anyone can succumb to the desire to look successful as promoted by the media. Advertisers cleverly entice even highly-educated, independently minded high achievers to seek image over substance. The strategy is to make you feel cheated because you don't possess the very latest or the very best.

But this is a trap. The Lord doesn't call us to an image, but to substance, to character, to principle, and to relationship. Image is fine as a by-product of a deeply-committed character, but it's not our primary goal. We must prepare to avoid the trap.

HOW TO AVOID THE TRAP OF AFFLUENCE

The following principles can help you avoid a life of style without substance, of pursuing image and affluence over significance and character. They are not easy steps.

God's Prescription for Your Finances

1. Know your worth.

The Christian receives significance from who he is, rather than from what he owns or accomplishes. We are not medical and dental students, residents, psychiatrists, orthodontists, or surgeons who are also Christians. We are Christians who happen to be practicing these professions. We are sinners, saved by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, justified in the sight of God, reconciled to God, and assured of spending eternity in the presence of God. Because of our position "in Christ" we can find no greater significance or identity. Our confidence and hope are in things which will never perish, spoil, or fade. It isn't to be in our money and possessions.

2. Tithe and give with integrity.

Giving immediately upon receipt of any money will make you a more careful manager of what is left. It will impose certain constraints upon you to live an ordered life, financially. Even students living on borrowed money can give. Learn to give proportionally, increasing your percentage of giving as your income rises.

3. Have a lifestyle and lifestyle expectations that are in harmony with our times.

The earth's resources are limited. As Christians we must be concerned that we do not over-consume, pollute, or otherwise contribute to the spoliation of God's creation, of which we are to be responsible stewards. Having decided on a lifestyle philosophy, buy only what you need. Impulse buying and "shopping" only lead us to expend resources wastefully, and to no logical end.

4. Look for the right kinds of role models.

Often, the "rich and successful" doctor is living on a precipice of insolvency. In the 1980s a famous surgeon made the

Avoiding the Traps of Affluence

newspapers. He had assets of \$95 million, but was in the process of filing for bankruptcy because his debts totalled \$135 million. This is not the kind of role model we're looking for. Seek out the doctor who gives effectively to the work of the Lord. Look to those who serve faithfully in the church of Jesus Christ or in foreign or domestic missions. Pattern your life after those who have a heart of compassion for the sick, the suffering, and the lost of our world.

Be bold to ask such men and women about their motivation. Ask them about the life-journey that has caused them to achieve a God-honoring lifestyle. Ask to spend some time with them, so that you might find the deeper streams that flow through their souls. Such mentors are not that easy to find nowadays in our profession, but they are there.⁸ Look in the right places. Finally, resolve to model this kind of life yourself, so that your God-directed influence may be effective in the lives of other doctors.

God's Prescription for Your Finances

Questions for Thought and Discussion

1. What is the significance of the teaching of Matthew 6:25-33 in the context of North American affluence?
2. What significant elements go into the condition and the promise of verse 33?
3. Read 1 Timothy 6:6-10 and discuss the pitfalls of affluence which Paul mentions to Timothy.
4. Affluence and busyness are often linked. Read Luke 14:16-24. How can the trap of busyness rob Christians of spiritual feasting?

CHAPTER 8

MORE ABOUT GIVING

A serious financial need had been presented to a group of 17 doctors and a medical student who were challenged to find a way to meet that need. During the discussion there had been suggestions and supportive statements as to how the group might start the ball rolling to raise the money. The chairman suggested that the group lead the way by contributing what they were able, as God led, by a certain date, keeping a modest goal in mind. Although most of the doctors were committed donors to various ministries, *not a single one gave to this project*. The medical student sent a sacrificial offering before the date had past.

Doctors do not like to be told how to spend and give their money. In their independence of mind, they interpret, as do many Christians, any suggestion for giving as “telling me how to spend my money.”

Giving vs. Tithing

Should we be defensive about giving to the Lord? Giving can be one of the most joyful exercises the Christian practices. When it is done with a light heart it evokes praise, worship and thanksgiving to “the God who is sufficient for all your needs.”

God's Prescription for Your Finances

Tithing is defined as “giving a tenth.” Some state that “giving” begins after the tenth. The terms “tithing” and “giving” will be used interchangeably in this study guide and will connote any method of giving described below.

A committed Christian man who served with me on the Board of Elders of a large church said, “Pray for me. I cannot tithe. I try, but I am afraid to suffer financial loss. I am afraid that I won’t be able to pay all my bills. I know that God requires it, but I just can’t do it.”

If mature Christians and even leaders in the Church struggle with giving, what hope is there for the ordinary believer, especially a student in debt or someone just starting in practice? We would do well to discover how the fear and defensiveness can be overcome, how the giving habit can be established, and what we can expect God to do to show us that we are giving in a way that pleases Him. God cares about what we give and how we do it. We should never feel accountable to any person or institution about our giving. But we are accountable to the Lord.

When the collection plate is passed, we are usually careful not to stare at those around us to see what they donate. Jesus was not so inhibited. Luke 21:1-2, records the story of the widow’s offering. “Jesus *saw* the rich putting their gifts into the temple treasury. He also *saw* a poor widow put in two very small copper coins” (emphasis added). He was looking. He is looking.

FOUR TYPES OF TITHING AND GIVING

The Scriptures suggest four types of giving, which range from a legally prescribed percentage of income to a freely suggested form of giving based on the subjective judgement of the extent to which one has been blessed.

1. Storehouse Tithing.

If you were to carefully search the Old Testament teaching on tithing you might conclude that the tithe started with a basic 10% of income and ranged to as much as 38% or more. The whole tithe was to be brought into the storehouse (the temple) so that the priest and his family would have food to eat, and so that the needs of the poor in the community would be met (Malachi 3:10,11):

“Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,” says the Lord Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it. I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and vines in your fields will not cast their fruit,” says the Lord Almighty.

Proponents of this method of tithing suggest that the whole 10% be given to the local church to fund its ministries and that any secular giving, parachurch ministry donations, or responses to relief agencies be made above the 10%.

Notice that God asks that we put Him to a test. He promises abundance and intervention in the things that would spoil our productivity. This is not a promise of perfect health and great wealth, but it is a promise of discernible blessing.

Some may argue that this form of tithing is legalistic, and meant for an age when God’s people were under the Law. Others have found it a useful starting point for their giving, one that simplifies accountability and record-keeping which are so important where God’s money is involved.

2. Proportional Giving.

Acts 11:29 records the response of the early Christians to the physical needs of their brothers at a time of famine: “...the disciples decided to send a contribution, each in proportion to

God's Prescription for Your Finances

his prosperity...“ (Phillips). Their response to the need was based on their own evaluation of their prosperity. Other translations state that they gave as much as they could.

This is not a legalistic standard for the Christian. It certainly implies that for one who has prospered, or for one who is able, a 10% gift would be exceeded in many instances and the *percentage* of earnings tithed will increase as earnings increase.

3. Generous Cheerful Giving.

2 Corinthians 8 describes the giving of the Christians in Macedonia for the relief of the suffering church in Jerusalem. Paul says that “Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity... they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability” (8:2,3).

In 2 Cor. 9:6-8 we see that giving ought to be generous, and individually determined; not reluctant or compulsory, but cheerful:

Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.

4. Faith Promise Giving.

This form of giving started in the independent missions movement to raise funds for foreign missions. It is based on the phrase in 2 Cor. 8:3, where they gave “...even beyond their own ability.” An individual promises to give more to God than he has previously given or can afford to give. He then trusts that

God will supply what has been promised, even though no obvious source of that supply exists.

A plethora of testimony exists to God's miraculous ways of rewarding this kind of faith by providing the means for the promise to be kept.

SUGGESTIONS FOR GIVING

From the Scriptures, and from the experience of many cheerful givers, some helpful suggestions will organize and enhance the joy of giving.

1. *Give and tithe according to your own agreement with God.* This is your prerogative and responsibility. Having decided on what you will give, do it faithfully, keeping good records and reviewing the process periodically. Let nothing stand in the way of complete honesty with God.

Record-keeping is important, because many people are convinced that they are tithers but do not keep records, and the tendency is to err on the short side. The tax laws that encourage charitable giving should be exploited to the full, and good records must be kept to substantiate your charitable tax deductions.

2. *Tithe first and tithe the whole.*

Develop the habit of writing your check for giving as the first check of the pay period. Tithe on the before-tax salary you receive. You will find that this method of giving allows you to adjust to living on a post-tithe income without any sense of strain. You will become a better manager of what is left and that, in itself, will be one of the blessings that comes with sincere giving.

God's Prescription for Your Finances

3. Begin tithing as early as possible.

Parents should teach children how to tithe so that giving to God will become a habit. The easiest time to develop the habit is when you have the least money.

Don't wait to begin to tithe for a time when you think you will be able to afford it. That time probably will never come. The lifestyle adjustments will be too severe, and one may already be burdened with things that make giving seem impossible. The seductive nature of money and the ease with which debt is acquired in our day make giving difficult if it has not become a habit. The Christian cannot afford *not* to tithe.

4. Be involved in your giving.

Be responsible in your giving. Investigate the organizations to which you give. Your tithe should be given to the work of Jesus Christ. Giving to secular causes is to be encouraged and is laudable but should be beyond what you have promised to the Lord.

Do not give to institutions that refuse to be accountable. Ask for financial statements. Look for the emblems of councils that have been established to monitor financial accountability of Christian organizations. Do not give to those that spend more than 20% of their receipts on administration, salaries, and fundraising. Close involvement in giving will keep expanding your interest in projects that merit your support, and will afford many opportunities to enrich your prayer life as you follow your gifts with the prayer that God will potentiate their impact.

5. Maintain the ideal to slowly increase the percentage of your giving.

R.G. LeTourneau, the Christian industrialist, gave God 100% of his income, and then asked for 10% back on which to

live. Many Christians find that they can give up to 65% or more of their income, especially as their children complete their education.

Lifestyle must be adjusted to accomplish this. You probably won't be able to afford two boats and two homes. But you will be making an investment in things that last eternally, while boats and gadgets and excessive leisure activities will pass and be forgotten.

6. Never use your tithes and offerings as a weapon.

Many sincere Christians, under the guise of "good stewardship," follow their gifts and try to dictate their use. All too often Christians will say, "If you don't do it this way; build it the way I suggested; hire this or that person for the job; paint it my color; use this translation of the Bible, I will withdraw my financial support." This is not Christian giving. Give and let go. Follow the gift with prayer. See how God blesses.

7. Keep a balance in your giving.

Give a proportion to the support of evangelization overseas. Don't let a major part of your giving go to payment of interest on mortgages or for big building projects in affluent North America. Designate your giving to meet the acute needs of people. Keep some of God's money in reserve so that you will be able to quickly respond to emergencies and disasters.

8. Remember to give yourself first.

Regardless of the great importance of giving money, we need to be willing to undergo some sacrifice of our affluence and comfort for Christ's sake. The health needs of the domestic poor and the suffering masses overseas cry out for our participation with our lives, our bodies.

**GIVE IN SPITE
OF EDUCATION-RELATED DEBT**

Many medical and dental students, overburdened with debt which can range up to \$150,000 or more by the time they graduate, dismiss out-of-hand the possibility of tithing. They lose great blessing in the process. Worse, they lose the habit of wise management of money by neglecting to designate part of it for God's kingdom.

It is not unreasonable to set apart for giving a percentage of each borrowed amount. The remainder is almost certain to be used more responsibly. I have analyzed the debt of individual students and found many expenditures for non-necessary items, some of them "big ticket" items ("well, we have to live, don't we?"). We should live comfortably. But if giving is neglected in the process, an important principle of Christian management is lost. God will lend wisdom to the cheerful giver in how to manage borrowed money and he or she will probably borrow less in the long run. His promise is that the faithful person will not be in need.

The best suggestion I've heard on this topic comes from a fourth-year medical student who attended a CMDS National Student Conference. "I live on 100% borrowed money. I budget very carefully and avoid impulse buying by making a list each time I shop. As I am shopping, considering the necessity of each item, I will either cross off something on my list or put something back on the shelf and say, 'here, Lord, this is yours.'"

Questions for Thought and Discussion

1. Look in the Bible for the word firstfruits. What are firstfruits and how do they figure in Christian giving?
2. Our idea of worship is often a feeling we get from God. In what ways do the following Scriptures speak of worship as being costly, something we bring to God: John 12: 1-8; I Chronicles 21: 18-24; Genesis 22: 1-5; Romans 12:1. Is true worship costly? Tithing is an act of worship. Do you agree or disagree? Why?
3. Does tithing make sense to someone who is not a Christian? To the nominal Christian? To the committed Christian? Why?
4. Considering the promises in Scripture, what should the person who tithes and gives honestly expect from God? Any more than the person who does not practice tithing?
5. Review 2 Cor. 9:6-8. Should debt make any difference in our giving?

God's Prescription for Your Finances

CHAPTER 9

EDUCATIONAL DEBT

The reality and scope of debt assumed by today's students during the years of undergraduate study and medical and dental school are not fully appreciated by many practicing doctors. Because of the ease of acquiring such debt, most students do not consider its suffocating character.

Some Case Studies

I received a letter from a fourth-year medical student on the verge of graduating. He had gone into medicine several years later than his contemporaries in medical school because of a struggle with career choice. Ultimately he realized that only in medicine could he express his compassion for the suffering and his idealistic need to help the helpless. He had accumulated \$154,000 in debt. He had suddenly realized that the borrowing, which had come easily, preempted his option to work in a small community family practice with modest income. He was exploring the possibilities of entering a high-paying specialty. Analyzing this student's debt led me to conclude that he had spent nearly \$14,000 annually on living expenses after tuition. He lived in a very low-cost area of the United States. Although I was not privy to his lifestyle I did have recent personal

God's Prescription for Your Finances

experience in educating a doctor and found this amount to be excessive for a person living on borrowed money.

I have analyzed the debt of many medical and dental students. A fourth-year student with \$100,000 of debt listed the purchase of a \$22,000 car. Her reasoning? "I was already deep in debt anyway, so I figured I owed it to myself to go with what turned me on." (This occurred at a time when a top compact car cost about \$8,000.) Another student took a trip to Hawaii with friends, then a private airplane trip around the islands. It added debt of \$1250. The reason? "I figured I would never have the opportunity to do this again, so I went with it."

The economic realities of our day mandate lifestyle constraints that are counter to all we have come to expect as we consider the financial rewards of our professions. The time to begin exercising those constraints is during the borrowing years. Develop a lifestyle that will require as little borrowing as possible. These are matters for prayer and seeking God's wisdom, because lifestyle decisions are stewardship decisions and are, therefore, spiritual decisions.

It is often necessary to borrow. But borrow as little as possible. Every dollar borrowed will narrow your future choices. If God leads you to serve in foreign or domestic missions, your progress might be delayed and even deflected by the necessity to repay debt before a mission agency will accept your application. If you are compelled to go into a high-paying specialty because of the need to repay debt you may not be using your medical and spiritual gifts to their greatest potential.

Once in practice, the temptation to allow one's self-interest to influence the kinds of services provided may be difficult to resist. One's ethical system, therefore, becomes contaminated as a direct result of the pressure to repay debt as quickly as possible. Services may be prescribed that may not be in the

patient's best interest because of the doctor's need to make as high an income as possible. Heavy debt can make for poor practice. Let's look at how we might keep our debt lower.

HOW TO MINIMIZE BORROWING

To borrow only what is necessary, the following steps may prove helpful:

1. *Start by projecting the costs for the entire educational period.* This will help you to have a long-term goal in mind, an idea of how much will be borrowed, how much will be spent, and where supplemental income will come from. Such a plan should be reviewed and adjusted regularly as costs increase and as you restrain your lifestyle.

2. *Develop a spending plan that will list all expenses, even the most trivial items consumed.*

Include an appropriate amount for gift giving, and an appropriate amount for Christian giving.

3. *Avoid buying anything that you have not included in your plan.*

Grocery lists, for example, will restrain impulse buying while in the supermarket. If married, the spouse most able to exercise discipline should do the shopping.

4. *If you "must have" something not in your plan, allow a cooling off period before the purchase.*

A week of delay for small items, a month for larger ones, will often allow the impulse to mature. The result will be either a decision against purchasing or a confirmation that the purchase was really necessary.

God's Prescription for Your Finances

5. Help destroy the myth that you have to look like a doctor to be successful.

A caring, compassionate Christian, showing the love of Christ to patients and co-workers will be successful despite the brand name of the clothing, car or entertainment he or she uses.

6. Remember: debt must ultimately be repaid with after-tax dollars and with interest.

Therefore, you may have to earn \$125-\$140 or more to repay each \$100 borrowed. Borrowing is expensive. It is also necessary for most of us. Therefore, borrow as little as possible.

7. Don't rationalize for non-necessities or luxuries.

To borrow and spend because "this is the only chance I will ever have to do or get this," severely limits the God who is active in our lives. God has promised not to withhold anything good from one who loves and fears Him. He will supply all that we ought to have.

Repayment Of Debt

As a rule, debt should be repaid as quickly as possible. The principal at work in compounding of interest is in your favor when you are saving, but in the lender's favor when you borrow. A physician left medical school with considerable debt and planned to repay it over a ten-year period. This is poor management. While that debt lasts, interest compounds against him. He mentioned putting off short-term missions service until he was able to repay the debt. His income was adequate to repay the debt in two to three years but he had not even considered restraining spending to get out from under the burden. He and his wife just assumed they should be living like a "doctor family". Most disturbing, however, was the fact that

Educational Debt

he had cut back on his giving because he couldn't afford to give as much while he was in debt.

Relief may be on the way for those in debt who wish to serve in missions either foreign or domestic. CMDs and other agencies are attempting to raise an endowment to pay education-related debt for missions service. Repayment will only be made for education-related borrowing, such as tuition and fees, books, equipment, and reasonable costs of food and housing.

Remember, borrow only what you really need.

Borrow as little as you can.

Pay your debt as soon as possible.

God's Prescription for Your Finances

Questions for Thought and Discussion

1. Discuss lifestyle in the context of the financial status of a person who has to borrow for educational expenses.
2. Look at Luke 14:28: "Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it?" What does it mean to "count the cost"? Jesus is talking here of the costs of following Him. Is there a sense in which a professional career and how it develops is involved with the costs of discipleship? How does this relate to borrowing?
3. How does managing debt fit into the idea of stewardship you learned from studying the Parable of the Talents (Mt. 25:14-30) back in chapter one? Is debt always prohibited for the Christian?
4. Have you ever been paying for something after it was consumed or not functioning? Are you hesitant to give gifts of modest cost for fear of being thought of as "cheap"? Share such things with your group.
5. Proverbs 22:26 says: "Do not be a man who strikes hands in pledge or puts up security for debts." 2 Kings 4:1-7 tells a story of the prophet Elisha and God's marvelous provision for a widow who needed funds to pay her debt. In both Prov. 22:26 and 2 Kings 4:7, the words for debt (different Hebrew words) both have the meaning of "biting interest." Discuss the nature of interest and the widow's provision.

CHAPTER 10

FOR THE MARRIED OR NEARLY MARRIED

As a bride or a groom, you arrive at the altar with a lot of differences between you and your spouse-to-be. Your different ideas regarding the uses and purposes of money may be just as profound as the personalities and other emotional and cultural variables we bring with us.

One may come from a penny-pinching family that has made it through hard times by working at earning and saving. Such a family has often preserved its assets through carefully planning each expenditure. The other partner may have come from a family in which there has been a liberal flow of money, one that has used high leverage in investing. Such families have often seen times of boom and bust with liberal spending during both. It is not uncommon for one or both marriage partners to have come from homes in which there was great conflict about money that has left them confused, ambivalent, and insecure about earning, managing, and using material resources.

The principles discussed in this study guide range from the importance of setting long-term financial goals to caution in using credit cards. When applied, these principles will go a long way toward building and preserving marital harmony. The key words here are *when applied*.

God's Prescription for Your Finances

But, I think additional goals should be set: to become united in attitudes toward money and to understand the sources of marital conflict about money. These also can be critical in the success or failure of marriage. Studies show that as many as 80 percent of divorces stem from problems related to money.

Differences in Spouse's Attitudes

Russ Crosson has isolated a number of differences between husbands and wives in attitudes toward financial matters.⁹ Let's look at seven of them:

1. Husbands have a greater tolerance for risk and rejection as, for example, in the loss of a job; wives emphasize security and a stable family environment.
2. Husbands are more centered on things and ideas; wives focus on sensitivity to people and process.
3. Wives satisfy ego needs by receiving support and encouragement from others or by activity in the marketplace (when not supplied by the husband); husbands need to be esteemed and admired, receiving a continual vote of confidence.
4. Wives think short-term about family and career needs; husbands have a "provision" mentality looking toward retirement and long-term payoff on investments.
5. A husband gets to the core of a matter without worrying about how he got there; wife focuses on details and "how-to."
6. Wives tend to be intuitive about money matters, for example investments, and can tell when something "feels

right”; husbands place emphasis on analyzing the details of an investment.

7. A wife’s identity centers on who she is as a person and how others perceive and treat her; a husband derives his image from what he does, how he provides.

Obviously these generalizations cannot be applied to every individual. But holding these cursory generalizations in mind will lend understanding of differences to either husband or wife, and may allow quicker resolution of conflict should it occur. In preparation for marriage, couples should discuss such issues and take care to understand the other’s attitudes toward the specifics that apply in their situation. Early understanding will lead to future harmony that in most successful marriages is a result of growing closer and closer in attitude.

BASIC ELEMENTS IN MARITAL FINANCE

The basic elements in financial tranquility among couples are accountability and unity. Accountability results in discussion and trust. Neither partner should have the misguided notion that their income, expenditures or assets are no concern of the other. Unity in financial matters may be as significant in the lives of a Christian couple as the spiritual and physical union described in the Scriptures: “the two shall become one flesh”(Genesis 2:24).

Every couple should discuss and agree upon decisions to borrow, invest and spend. They should either be in complete accord or they should postpone such decisions until they can make them unanimously. They can agree more easily by considering the following suggestions:

God's Prescription for Your Finances

1. Setting Goals.

Long-range goals should be discussed, agreed upon and put in place. Goals will provide a baseline to which a couple may refer for accountability and review.

2. Setting up Accounts.

All accounts should be joint accounts. There should be no his/hers accounts, credit cards and investments. An exception may be made for estate planning where certain assets are best registered in one name.

3. Managing the Checkbook.

The checkbook should be reconciled monthly by the partner most adept at performing this function.

4. Setting up Financial Controls.

Couples should adopt and adhere to a financial control system which has:

- a. a spending plan for how income is to be apportioned;
- b. an allocation plan, for actually placing money into accounts to be spent.

The wife and husband should design the plan together. They will adhere to it if it is kept simple, straight-forward and efficient. Any digression from the plan should be jointly decided. They should divide the responsibility for payment of bills, with one partner writing certain checks, the other partner the remainder. Active involvement in the mechanics of family finance management will foster prudent spending, will prevent conflict, and will stimulate conversation and accountability.

Instead of resulting in restrictions and limitations, such planning brings real liberty from debt, from the devastating effects of impulse buying, and from the conflicts that money and its mismanagement can generate in marriages. Observing

the financial boundaries and limitations within which a couple have decided to live will bring harmony and teamwork in reaching desired goals.

GUARANTEED FINANCIAL SUCCESS

If there is such a thing as a guarantee of financial success most couples would like to have it. The discipline of following common-sense Christian principles in financial matters will more than likely insure success. Ron Blue has suggested three principles for financial success to which I add two more. These are:

1. Recognize God's ownership of all our material possessions. The stewardship mentality applied to what belongs to Him will put life in healthy perspective.
2. Recognize the role of money as a tool to achieve goals and satisfy obligations. Money itself is not the goal.
3. Tithe and give with integrity. Meeting our obligation to honor God with our firstfruits will coach us into an effective money management mode. We obey His invitation to put Him to the test.
4. Learn to deal with postponed gratification by adopting a stewardship lifestyle. Years of professional training may lead to a pent-up pressure to buy all that you have been "denied." The pressure can result in a spree of unnecessary spending and habitual overspending and debt when a couple finally earns a substantial salary. Use the years of "privation" to learn the satisfaction of living a reasonable, low-consumption lifestyle.

God's Prescription for Your Finances

5. Spend less than you earn and do this for a long time. The habit of saving money, contributing as much as possible to a pension plan, and the effect of compound interest will assure financial security.

Questions for Thought and Discussion

1. Do you agree or disagree that husbands and wives have some basic differences in their attitudes toward money and financial issues? Are women and men “wired differently” on some money issues?
2. Discuss some insecurities you have about money. Any idea how they developed? Can you prevent your children from adopting the same attitudes? How?
3. A stereotypical statement is that women have the tendency to be impulse-buyers. The only difference between men and women is that men are impulse buyers who go for the “big-ticket items.” Can you think of examples? How is the “cooling-off period” effective in checking impulse buying?
4. Read Psalm 49:16-20. Discuss the awe we feel for someone who gets rich. How can one resist the competitive urges when it comes to lifestyle?

CHAPTER 11
TEACHING STEWARDSHIP
TO YOUR CHILDREN

I boarded a plane for a business trip to Chicago and a dour orthodox Jewish rabbi sat next to me. He was so orthodox that he refused to eat his special meal during the flight, claiming it wasn't really kosher. This opened a discussion during which I expressed my high regard for the Scriptures. I quoted Psalm 133, which I had memorized in Hebrew. He became very friendly and our discussion ranged over several topics, including child rearing. I told him that my wife and I liked Proverbs 22:6 as our guide to child-rearing: "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." While he excitedly taught me this verse in Hebrew he could not help but point out that Gentiles do not appreciate the real meaning of the verse.

BIBLICALLY INFORMED CHILD TRAINING

Christians traditionally teach that if parents bend the twig right (our way), it will grow into the tree we intend. If the child has enough truth pounded into him or her, the result will be a model child. We know that it doesn't always turn out that way.

God's Prescription for Your Finances

The rabbi insisted that the verse should be translated, "Train up a child according to his own way..." You might protest that this smacks of permissiveness, a lack of boundaries and guidelines. What it really means is that each child has an inclination, "bent," or predisposition that is unique. We do well as parents to tailor our teaching of basic principles to each child's ability to develop according to his or her inclination. Any parent of multiple offspring can attest to the fact that each is different; each processes differently the information that comes from the same parents modeling the same principles in the same household.

Chuck Swindoll has pointed out that the training should not only be individualized, but also parents should actively stimulate the child's need for training that should be carried on to marriageable age. Furthermore, the term "when he is old" refers to maturity, not to advanced age. The results of the training should be evident in our young adults if we have taken seriously our responsibility to train them.

Of course, we must get to know our children very well if we are to learn their inclinations and conform our methods of teaching to their "bents." We need to teach them the basics about money, its value, and its uses without arousing in them the qualities of greed, impatience, and obsession with material things that can lead to their ruin.

Our goal should be not only to impart factual knowledge, but to train our children. Training awakens the *need* to behave in a certain way, rather than conditioning them to respond automatically, like robots. Training imparts to the child an understanding of the *reasons* for desirable behaviors. Training requires time and discipline. It employs different methods such as granting rewards and withholding rewards, exposure to risk, allowing failure without intervention, and encouragement and

analysis of both successes and failures. The mix of these methods that parents employ with each child will vary according to the child's individual "bent."

What Children Need To Learn

Simply put, children need to learn the same basic principles of money management that adults need to learn, as outlined in this study guide. Just as Christians have a unique view of morals, the way to God through Jesus Christ, creation, self-image, marriage and eternity, it must be emphasized that they also have a unique view of money and material things.

At each stage in the child's development, the principles can be taught at the level he can understand and absorb. As the child matures, more information on the same general or specific theme will be fed into their experience. Parents who take seriously their responsibilities in the area of teaching about money will find that the principles they are teaching will carry over and reinforce their teaching in non-financial matters.

Among the basic principles are:

1. Christian Stewardship.

We are managers of what actually belongs to God. He has placed material things in our hands for proper administration and we are accountable to Him. We do not derive our significance from what we possess, but from who we are, created in His image, bought at a price.

2. Material things are the fruit of our labor.

We should expect proper return for the labor expended. We should expect to work for what we earn. Different kinds of work, depending on different skills, knowledge and training produce fruit of varying worth.

God's Prescription for Your Finances

3. Giving is an act of worship.

It should be done honestly, habitually, from our firstfruits, and joyfully, whether from want or from plenty. God desires that we acknowledge our dependence on Him and our awe of Him by giving to Him. When a child learns to give early, he or she will develop the lifelong habit of Christian giving.

Children also ought to be taught the value of gift-giving as an expression of love and friendship. Gifts given should be *within the means of the giver*. Lavish gift giving can be harmful, causing one to forget that the sentiment is of greater worth than the monetary value of the gift.

4. Start the savings habit early.

Saving puts the long-term value of money in perspective and reduces the tendency to trivialize material things. The value of compound interest and accumulation in a slow, steady manner can be demonstrated in a bankbook, reining in the inclination to gamble.

5. Teach careful spending habits.

Spending carefully is necessary because we are spending God's resources. Spending is planned, and is kept within our means. A spending plan and an allocation plan should be introduced as early as a child can understand the principle. Prices vary and comparison shopping, though taking time and effort, can bring better value. Buying by impulse uses up resources and often results in poor choices that bring regret. Buy now, pay later is a costly philosophy. Buy only what one can pay for from his or her savings. Some children will be inclined to be spendthrifts, others will be hoarders of money. Each must be coached to have a balanced view of spending.

6. Borrowing is usually an undesirable result of poor management.

One should borrow only under specific criteria. Borrowed money must be repaid with fair interest to the lender. Borrowing is expensive. Until repaid, the borrower is a “slave” to the lender.

7. Teach them to set long-term financial goals.

Long- term financial goals and estimates of income and expenditures will bring stability and enjoyment of their possessions. Children in their early teens can make a yearly estimate of income and expenses. Parents will supply their needs. You should be responsible for purchases of your childrens’ “wants.” When there is no money for such things, adjustment must take place in income or by restraint on lifestyle. Children can earn income in various ways.

8. Set limits on your teenagers’ work schedules.

Working part-time to satisfy desires should never be allowed to interfere with family priorities. Keep the traditions of eating at least one meal a day together, spending holidays together, celebrating significant events, and regular worship free from work schedules. Children obsessed with earning will too often choose work over family events, resulting in the tragic loss of the habit of these “traditions.” Reserve the Lord’s day for worship and praise, rest, leisure, renewal, and family communication. Christians have allowed this principle to be eroded because of the secular pattern of our culture, thereby losing family traditions and solid memories of family “togetherness.” The need to earn money can quickly turn into an obsession, replacing principles of family life.

God's Prescription for Your Finances

9. Give young children a reasonable allowance.

It is better to err on the low side than to be unrealistic about what a child should earn and spend. Children begin to understand the need for the family members to function for the common good. At this point, increases in the allowance can be tied to the performance of household chores.

Two Essential Teaching Aids

Teaching our kids involves more than just knowing *what* to teach them. It also entails *how* we teach. It's just as important to keep two essential practical realities in mind as you train your child to manage money.

1. Children will mimic what we model.

As parents, you must present a united attitude toward money matters, and consistently live out the principles you want to pass on. Reasons for doing or not doing certain things should be openly discussed before, during, and after any financial decision, so that children are aware of the process involved. How we use a credit card, or preferably a debit card, for example, is very important in modeling responsible behavior.

2. Develop a family "system" for money management.

Various devices for carrying out the mechanics of the family philosophy should be attempted and adopted or modified. For example, Christian money managers have suggested the use of envelopes for the allocation plan.¹⁰ Envelopes marked "Giving," "Savings," and "Spending" receive certain percentages of the child's allowance or earnings. The Giving envelope can be emptied to be given in a lump sum or it can accumulate funds for a certain project, for example, a missions emphasis. This teaches responsible, involved giving. The Savings envelope can

Stewardship and Your Children

be periodically turned over into a savings account or money market fund account. This provides an opportunity to teach the value of compound interest: money put to good use will earn more income.

The Spending envelope can be used to prove the value of accumulating money before making a purchase. "Saving up" is a valuable principle that is difficult to teach in an age of borrowing for instant gratification. When the spending envelope is empty, nothing can be purchased. Wise are the parents who have the fortitude to refrain from lending money to their children, so that they will learn the lesson well. If a vital necessity moves the parent to lend, they should charge reasonable interest so that children will learn the realities of finance.

God's Prescription for Your Finances

Questions for Thought and Discussion

1. What were you taught about the management of money by your parents? Has their example helped or hindered you?
2. Have you known a person who was a spendthrift? Do you think they valued their purchases? Did spending money bring them freedom? Satisfaction?
3. Review Proverbs 22:6. What principles of child training should Christians follow according to this verse.
4. Studies show that children will ultimately form a family that closely resembles the one in which they grew up. Discuss the ways in which children mimic family habits. Why will they engage in behaviors that they abhorred during their youth?
5. How can the work habits of children affect the quality of family time?

CHAPTER 12

WHAT IS MY MOTIVATION?

Ask yourself: Why did I choose medicine or dentistry as a career? What are my expectations of this profession? Are they idealistic? Practical? Realistic?

These questions may be answered either glibly or thoughtfully and honestly. Most of us would suggest a mixture of idealism and pragmatism. Most would probably be comfortable with a mix of the drive for service and the drive for material rewards commensurate with the effort invested. The Christian has a high standard for his or her motivation. Despite the mix of service and reward, the Christian's motivation should be for service and stewardship. We work for the Master; we serve the Master.

STEWARDSHIP'S FIRST STEP

We've already looked at "the parable of the talents" (Mt.25:14- 30). You'll recall from that lesson that a man went on a journey and entrusted his property to three servants. It all belonged to him. He gave them responsibility over varying amounts. Two of them gained a similar good return on their investments. Likewise, they received similar commendation and rewards from the owner: the promise of greater responsibility and a

God's Prescription for Your Finances

share in the master's happiness. The third servant, you may recall, hid the money out of fear of risking its loss. He earned no gain and no interest. The owner was displeased with this servant, called him "wicked and lazy," took his charge from him, and ordered him thrown out.

When we serve, we do it to please the Master. The successful servants in this parable lacked other motivation. Their job was to serve, to enrich their master. They directed their efforts to take the prudent risks that responsibility demanded, not to enrich themselves but to enrich him.

Where's *Your* Reward?

When, as Christians, we anticipate rewards for our labor they are not the conventional rewards. They consist in greater responsibility and sharing in our Master's happiness. I know Christians who don't want this kind of reward. They are looking for ways to shed responsibility, not to assume more. They want more money to make them happy instead of the fulfillment that comes from seeing Christ honored.

In order for one to be motivated by Christian service and to be happy with Christian rewards one must know Jesus Christ as Savior and as Lord. Can you point to a time when you actually admitted that you were a sinner in need of being made right in God's sight? When you realized that no amount of good works, charitable donations, going to church on Sundays, or claiming the heritage of a Christian family was going to do the job? Remember, the Bible tells us the penalty for sin is death (Rom.5:15-19). And, all of us have sinned (Rom.3:23). If you claim only the validity of Christ's death on the cross as your substitute, you were born anew into the family of God. You became a Christian in the true sense of the word.

Some of us cannot point to when we made the decision to

What Is My Motivation?

claim Christ's righteousness for our own, but we can point to when we realized that we had done just that.

Jesus As Lord

You may have taken a big step further. You may have said, "I am giving up the throne (control and ownership) of my life and giving it over to Jesus." In doing this Jesus Christ has become Lord of your life. Your motivation, your fulfillment and your desire have become what He wants, what He directs, what brings Him happiness.

I lectured to a group of doctors on Christian ethics in medicine. A learned professor from the university attended and commented to me that there was no such entity as "Christian" ethics. He being my intellectual better, I pointed out to him as humbly as I could that those who have placed Jesus Christ on the throne of their lives follow a call to a higher standard than the situational ethicist or the Hippocratic ethicist. That standard is to obey the two great commandments that embody all the teachings of Scripture: "Jesus replied: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments" (Matt. 22: 37-40). That standard is to please the living God in the practice of profession and to glorify His name. I could think of no other way to resist the contamination of self-interest in any ethical system.

It is popular to equate Christianity with feelings (good) or with what we may get out of it (health and wealth). These are not teachings of Scripture. If we worship and serve God for what we can get from Him we make Him our servant. If we make Him our servant, He cannot be our Lord. When Jesus Christ is our Lord, our happiness derives from what makes Him happy; we "come and share our master's happiness!"

CONCLUSION: GOD'S PRESCRIPTION FOR A SATISFYING LIFE

I want to conclude this study with a story. It illustrates well all of the principles of biblical stewardship we've covered together. God's prescription for happiness and satisfaction in the Christian life should be evident.

My wife and I flew over the thick Venezuelan jungle that obscured the small streams and rivers forming the headwaters of the mighty Amazon river. The pilot of the Mission Aviation Fellowship plane pointed out the mountain ridge that formed the divide between the Amazon and Orinoco rivers.

We landed on a rough runway that dominated the town of Mahawaña, a settlement of the Sanuma tribe of the Yanomami nation. These last aborigines in the Western hemisphere are a stone age people. We treated their oral surgical needs, promoting preventive health development and supporting the local church of over 200 believers in Jesus Christ. We ate roasted Lapa (the hindquarter of a large rodent) supplied by the hunters, the men of the village, and plantains grown by the agriculturalists, the women. We slept on crude beds and fought off aggressive mosquitos. We drank and bathed in river water.

The plane came back for us after a few days and we left with a sense of elation that no fees or material rewards could have provided. We had paid our own way, and we were happy. We were confident that we were doing what God wanted us to do and we had experienced sharing in our Master's happiness.

Questions for Thought and Discussion

1. Is a person of higher than average intelligence more or less likely to believe what the Scriptures teach about sin and salvation? Give reasons for your answer.
2. Read Romans 3:23; 6:23; 10:9-13; John 3:3,16;14:6. Why is it necessary to be able to point to a time when one realized his or her salvation was real? If such a time is not identifiable, why not ask Christ to take control of your life right now, by simply asking Him to do it.
3. How can a Christian be sure that his or her sins are forgiven and the future is secure in Christ? Read the promise of Scripture in 1 John 1:9.
4. What is the relationship between knowing God and obeying or serving God (I John 2:3)?
5. To what extent does our culture's emphasis on self-fulfillment and individual satisfaction run counter to the message of the Gospel?
6. Think of examples of the rewards that Christians receive as they share in their Master's happiness. What is a biblical definition of success and prosperity? Comment on Joshua 1:8-9, "Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go."

God's Prescription for Your Finances

7. From South Sudan in an area with an influx of 20,000 starving refugees and no physician: "We need urgently a male medical doctor, single or married, without children, who could come for a minimum of three months but preferably for 6-9 months. This man needs to be a committed Christian and experienced in tropical medicine. He must be willing to live in hard circumstances, see a lot of misery, work long hours and risk his life. *He* will be on an international team in which intercessory prayer plays a major role..."

Could you respond to such an appeal? What would have to motivate a person to go and serve?

ENDNOTES

Chapter 2

1. L.S. Chafer, *Systematic Theology* Vol. VII (Soteriology): 234-266 (Dallas, TX: Dallas Seminary Press, 1948).

Chapter 3

2. See Ron Blue, *Master Your Money* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1986); or Larry Burkett, *Your Finances in Changing Times* (San Bernardino, CA: Campus Crusade for Christ, 1975)

3. Russ Crosson, *Money and Your Marriage* (Dallas, TX: Word Publishing, 1989)

Chapter 4

4. Larry Burkett, *Debt-Free Living* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1989).

Chapter 5

5. See Richard M. Swenson, M.D., *Margin: How to Create the Emotional, Physical, Financial, and Time Reserves You Need* (Colorado Springs, Co: NavPress, 1992). Swenson provides a compelling argument for stewardship as an expression of spiritual vitality.

Chapter 6

6. *Fabian's Investor's Quarterly*, Spring 1991.

7. *Donaghue Moneyletter* Special Report 35 (1990):2, "The Top 28 Conservative Investments."

Chapter 7

8. For excellent insight into mentoring, see Robert Clinton and Paul Stanley, *Connecting: The Mentoring Relationships You Need to Succeed in Life* (Colorado Springs, Co: NavPress, 1992).

God's Prescription for Your Finances

Chapter 10

9. Crosson, *Money and Your Marriage*.

Chapter 11

10. Charles R. Swindoll, *Growing Wise in Family Life*, Bible Study Guide (Fullerton, CA: Insight for Living, 1988).

11. Ronald W. Blue, *Helping Your Children Learn to Master Money* (Atlanta, GA: Ronald Blue & Co., 1987).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Blue, Ron. *Master Your Money*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1986.
2. Blue, Ron. *The Debt Squeeze*. Pomona, CA: Focus on the Family Publishing Co., 1989.
3. Blue, Ron. *Helping Your Children Learn To Master Money*. Atlanta, GA: Ronald Blue & Co., 1987.
4. Burkett, Larry. *Your Finances In Changing Times*. San Bernardino, CA: Campus Crusade for Christ, 1975.
5. Burkett, Larry. *Debt-Free Living*. Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1989.
6. Burkett, Larry. *The Complete Financial Guide For Young Couples*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1989
7. Crosson, Russ. *Money And Your Marriage*. Dallas, TX: Word, 1989.
8. *Donaghue Moneyletter* Special Report 35-2 (1990), "The Top 28 Conservative Investments."
9. *Fabian's Investor's Quarterly*, Spring 1991.
10. Friesen, Garry. *Decision Making And The Will Of God*. Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1980.
11. Swindoll, Charles R. *Growing Wise in Family Life*, Bible Study Guide. Fullerton, CA: Insight For Living, 1988.
12. Yancey, Philip. "Learning to Live With Money," *Christianity Today*, December 14, 1984.

Other Study Guides Available in this Series

Biblical Perspectives in Clinical Ethics: Abortion, Euthanasia, and Aids

by David Schiedermayer, M.D.

The Christian Doctor: Vocation or Career?

by David F. Allen, M.D., M.P.H.

The Doctor's Marriage and Family

by Merville O. Vincent, M.D., F.R.C.P.(C)

Educating the Christian Doctor

by Edmund D. Pellegrino, M.D., Tony Atkins, Ph.D., Nassif J. Cannon, M.D., & interview with John Payne, M.D.

Grand Rounds with Dr. Luke

by David Biebel, D.Min., Doug Knighton, M.Div., Bob Kohlbacher, M.D., and Rob Samsky, Th.M.

Health Care for the Poor

by Donald Givler, Jr., M.D., Kenneth Hurst, M.D., Robert LaFleur, M.D., Robert Little, M.D., & Robert Schindler, M.D.

Making Christ Your Role Model in Health Care Ministry

by Hal Habecker, D.Min.

Medical Missions: The Adventure and Challenge

by Thomas Hale, M.D., & Cynthia Hale, M.D.

OTHER RESOURCES

Books/Booklets:

Codes of Medical Ethics, Oaths and Prayers: An Anthology

ed. by Lewis P. Bird, Ph.D. & James Barlow, Th.M.

Evangelism for the Medical & Dental Professions

Good News For Patients: Evangelism to Medical & Dental Patients

by Dr. Phil Stillman

Opinions on Ethical/Social Issues

submitted by the CMDS Ethics Commission

Ten Fingers for God (the biography of Paul Brand, M.D.)

by Dorothy Clarke Wilson

Videos:

Cocaine: The Broken Promise

David F. Allen, M.D., M.P.H.

Opportunity: To Grow and To Serve

(representing the work of CMDS)

Share The Vision

(Health Care For The Poor)

Domestic Mission Commission

These resources may be ordered from:

Christian Medical & Dental Society

P.O. Box 830689

Richardson, TX 75083-0689