

LIVING WITHIN YOUR INCOME

INTRODUCTION

Money is important! I learned a long time ago that whether you are rich or poor, it always helps to have a little money around. It surprised me to learn just how much the Bible says about money. There are approximately 500 verses on prayer, fewer than 500 on faith, but more than 2,350 verses on how to handle money. Not only that, but Jesus said more about money than any other subject. How much money we have, and how we use it affects our feelings of success or failure. How much money we have also affects our relationships with others, both within the family and outside it, and, to some extent, the things we will be able to achieve in a life-time. So let's spend some time together learning to live within our income.

First we must develop a Biblical view towards finances. We need to develop a wholesome attitude toward finances.

I. DEVELOP A WHOLESOME ATTITUDE TOWARD FINANCES

It's easy to start thinking about money the wrong way. We overestimate our own strength and abilities and start saying things like, "**my** money," and "**my** house." I'm not saying it is wrong to use those words. The issue is not that simple. It has to do with our way of thinking, our attitudes. If a father comes home from work and his three-year-old daughter comes running up to him and says, "Look Daddy! I made a dress," he will be thinking, "Wow; my wife must have been busy all day!" It is only the child who doesn't understand that not only did she not make the dress; her mother could have done it much easier without her "help." God wants to take the childishness away from our brains so we can see the world as it really is. He wants to give us real success in the real world, not make-believe success. We need to start by asking Him to give us the right attitudes. The most reliable source to learn about these attitudes is the Scriptures.

A. Acknowledge rightful ownership.

The first attitude we need to learn is to understand that God owns everything. It all belongs to Him. The Bible is clear on this point.

1. **God created everything.**

The very first thing we read in the very first pages of the Bible is that God made everything. All throughout God's Word that idea is seen. In many places [like Col.1:16] it talks specifically about that fact, but in others it is simply taken for granted. It is the fabric from which all Scripture is woven.

2. **God claims everything.**

But more than just *the fact that He created everything*, *He clearly claims that it all belongs to Him. Let's look at Ps.50:10-12: "For every animal of the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills. I know every bird in the mountains, and the creatures of the field are mine. If I were hungry I would not tell you, for the world is mine, and all that is in it."*

Coming from a human's lips, those words would seem audacious, unbelievably prideful. But when we understand they were said by God we can only stop in awed humility and recognize how utterly fragile and insignificant we are. How can it be that we think twice about putting an extra few dollars in the offering?

3. **God controls everything.**

God is not a distant landlord, finding His Creation too insignificant to be worth His concern. It is important to Him. He Himself takes care of even the smallest details.

Col.1:17 says, "He is before all things, and in him all things hold together."

B. Understand that responsible stewardship is required.

You would almost think that God would feel like a boy feels about his baby sister. He doesn't want her to come near his toys. She just breaks them, sticks them in her mouth, or does something else to spoil his fun. You would think He would want to keep us as far away from His "stuff" as possible. After all, why let us be close to it since we're likely to mess things up anyway.

1. **We are entrusted with His goods.**

But that is not how He feels. He wants us to enjoy the good things too. God has given each of us a part of His possessions: some have a house or a car, some have a cassette recorder, and maybe some just have the clothes on their backs. Matt.25:14 says *"It will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them."* Wouldn't it be easy if He had just left it at that? But He doesn't.

2. **We are expected to manage them well.**

Let's skip a few verses and see what was expected of these servants. Matt. 25:19-22:

"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.'"

Stop! Most of us are so familiar with this story that it is easy to tune out when someone else is reading it. We probably miss the simple truth of this story just because we know it so well: we are expected to get good results with the money God gives us.

Is this talking about money? Yes. Is it talking about other things, like spiritual gifts, too? Of course, but let's not get sidetracked from what we are talking about today—money. God expects us to manage His goods well.

3. **We establish the amount He trusts us with.**

Let's look back at verse 15:

"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."

Do you want to know God's get-rich-quick scheme? It's pretty straightforward—take really good care of what He has already given you! Do you know what that means? You can start practicing right now! The less you have, the easier it is to take good care of it. Have you been practicing handling money wisely? How trustworthy are you in that area?

C. Be thankful for the requirement.

The first attitude we need to develop is an understanding that all our finances belong to God. The second attitude is to acknowledge that He expects us to take good care of these possessions. The third is to be grateful about it, instead of grumpy. We are so used to living in Satan's lies that often our first response to a Biblical principle is, "Oh no, not another one!" Stewardship is for **our** benefit, not God's. He fills our lives with good things, but since we are a little dense at times, He also has to show us how to use them. He doesn't NEED us to be stewards, He LETS us be stewards.

Let's look at some of the benefits of stewardship.

1. **Praise**

Matt. 25:20-21

"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!"

Imagine what a feeling it will be to someday stand before Almighty God and hear Him say to you before all creation, "Well done, good and faithful servant!"

2. Profit

Many men have proven how practically beneficial it is to follow God's principles for finances. In fact, many businessmen have studied and applied these principles because they recognized how valuable they are. In addition to the bottom line of financial profit, it will also profit your soul by enriching your character. Scripture regards money as an index to a man's true character. Our Lord takes money and uses it to test the lives of men and to mold them into His likeness.

3. Pleasure

As we practice being good stewards, we become content because we are continually deepening our understanding of what it means to trust our heavenly Father who owns everything, controls every event, promises to provide for our needs, and sovereignly dispenses His possessions as He sees fit. But the best benefit of all, even better than contentment, is what it means to the most important area of our lives—our relationship with God. We develop a closer, more intimate relationship with our Lord as we are faithful with the possessions He has entrusted to us.

There are so many other benefits that I'm not going to take the time to list them all here, but the bottom line is that it's going to change your home in hundreds of beautiful ways and all your needs will be met. You will experience financial freedom.

II. DIRECT ATTENTION TO FINANCIAL OUTFLOW

Once we have started to make sure we have correct attitudes about our finances, the next step is to consider how we are currently spending our money. One of the biggest reasons for poor stewardship is not because we have the wrong attitudes, but because we haven't considered what action we need to take. We just spend our money on what seems right at the moment and hope for the best. There is no system, no way to evaluate our decisions about how we spend our money. I'm going to give you some questions that will help you be more successful in this area on a regular basis. As I give them to you now, you will be able to begin evaluating yourself, but what you really need to do is make using these questions a habit. The test is very simple, and all of the questions require a simple 'yes' or 'no' answer. The first two sections are about your general spending habits, and the last section will help you evaluate individual purchases.

A. Does your financial outflow:

1. Exceed your fixed income?
2. Make it impossible to pay bills on time?
3. Restrict your ability to serve others?
4. Make social life impossible?
5. Force your wife to work?

B. Does your financial condition:

1. Cause you or your wife anxiety and worry?
2. "Force" you to be inconsistent in giving to God?
3. Create strife in the home?
4. Cause an ineffective prayer life?

C. Evaluate purchases

Assess your purchases according to scriptural principles you are aware of by asking questions like the following:

1. Do you have doubts about it?
2. Have you given God opportunity to supply?
3. Is this money already designated for something else?
4. Is it motivated by the love of God and others?
5. Is it motivated by the love of things?
6. Is it a good investment?
7. Will it hinder your spiritual growth?
8. Will it be meaningful to your family?

Just using these simple questions will already be a big step forward in being a good steward.

III. DEPLOY PRINCIPLES OF FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

There are some basic financial principles that affect our decisions both consciously and subconsciously. We will look at four of them right now, and I would strongly encourage you to review them several times in the coming month and throughout the year so that when the time comes that you need their guidance, they will be as natural to you as breathing. It's too late to review them after you've spent your money. They need to be there guiding you all along.

Principle #1. Supply

1. **God is the source.**

Philippians 4:19 says,

"And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus."

The definition of a need is: *a basic necessity of life*. Our basic necessities of life are food, clothing, and shelter. A want is anything in excess of a need. The Lord may allow us to have our wants fulfilled, but He has not promised to provide them.

As World War II was drawing to a close, the Allied armies gathered up many hungry orphans. They were placed in camps where they were well fed. Despite excellent care, they were afraid and slept poorly. Finally, a psychologist came up with a solution. Each child was given a piece of bread to hold after he was put to bed. If he was hungry, more food was provided, but when he was finished, this particular piece of bread was just to be held—not eaten. The piece of bread produced wonderful results. The children went to bed instinctively knowing they would have food to eat the next day. That guarantee gave the children a restful and contented sleep.

Similarly, the Lord has given us His guarantee—our "piece of bread." *"I will meet all your needs according to My glorious riches in Christ Jesus."* As we cling to His promises of provision, we can relax and be content.

2. **God provides through work.**

God did not place six billion people on the planet because he had so much work that needed to be done. He is still the Provider and our survival still depends on Him. But it is very clear from the Bible that God wanted us involved in the process of supplying our needs. Let's read 2 Thessalonians 3:6-12 together:

"In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers, to keep away from every brother who is idle and does not live according to the teaching you received from us."

For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example. We were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone's food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you."

We did this, not because we do not have the right to such help, but in order to make ourselves a model for you to follow. For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: 'If a man will not work, he shall not eat.'

We hear that some among you are idle. They are not busy; they are busybodies. Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the bread they eat."

Principle #2. Share

Sharing is another way we see how different God's ways are to the ways that we accept as normal. Our first reaction is to get as much for ourselves as we can. When someone passes the food around, it is natural to take the biggest cookie or the reddest apple. But God teaches us to live as children of light, to show our trust in His provision by being willing to share what He gives us. You serve God by serving men.

1. *Give to honor the Lord*

A beautiful way to show our love for God is to give the first and best of our possessions to Him. In Proverbs 3:9, 10 we read:

"Honor the LORD with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops; then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine."

2. *Gain through giving*

Luke 6:38 says, *"Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."*

Both of these verses teach that sharing is not an irresponsible thing to do. In fact, it is more responsible to share because as we obey His commands to share, He will supply even more for us.

Principle #3. Save

1. *Demonstrated by Joseph*

It's not always easy to do our best as a steward. Take Joseph for example. First his brothers picked on him, then he was sold as a slave, and finally he ended up in jail. Anyone else in his position would have said, "That's it! I've had enough. I've tried my best everywhere I've been, and look where it got me! From now on I'm just going to take the easy way out." In many ways he is similar to Job. No matter what happened to him, he just kept on doing the right thing. And because of his faithfulness he went from being a prisoner to being one of the most powerful rulers on the earth in just a few hours.

One day he was rushed into Pharaoh's presence. Out of all the thousands of qualified people God could have used, He chose to give Joseph the explanation for Pharaoh's dream. And what was God saying to Pharaoh? "Plan ahead! Good times are coming. Enjoy them, but don't take them for granted. Use your time wisely." Pharaoh got the idea and wasted no time acting on what he had learned. He saw that God had blessed Joseph and that Joseph knew what it meant to use his resources wisely instead of squandering them. And so he placed Joseph in charge of a giant savings program that would affect thousands of lives.

Joseph knew that being a good steward meant using the resources available to him as effectively as possible and planning for the future.

2. *Illustrated in nature*

God also uses nature to show us the need to plan ahead. In Proverbs 6:6-8 we read:

"Go to the ant, you sluggard; consider its ways and be wise! It has no commander, no overseer or ruler, yet it stores its provisions in summer and gathers its food at harvest."

What does the Bible call a person who doesn't plan ahead and save? A sluggard.

Principle #4. Spend

Finally we come to spending. In some ways this is the least important thing we do with our money because it mostly has to do with us—it is not an eternal matter. Yes, God does care about us and He does want to take care of our needs, but He wants our focus to be outward instead of inward. When we follow His principles, He has promised to take care of our needs. He has also provided many Scriptural principles that guide us how to act wisely when it comes to spending.

1. *Accept God's supply with satisfaction*

In Philippians the apostle Paul says, *"I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want."* (Philippians 4: 11-12)

2. *Adjust spending according to supply*

Sometimes there are so many changes taking place in our lives at the same time that we struggle to keep on top of them. Sometimes the changes are so subtle we fail to notice them. And sometimes we are so stuck in a rut that we are not willing to make the changes we know we need to. But those things do not excuse us for not being alert. It is the steward's responsibility to manage well what has been given him, not the master's. In Luke 12:48 we read, *"From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked."* Don't spend more than you have, and if the Lord gives you more than you need, know that He will expect more of you because of it.

IV.DETERMINE TO PLAN FOR FINANCIAL STABILITY

A. Make money your servant

It is easy to get mixed up on this point. So often we limit ourselves according to our finances. We do whatever they let us do and nothing more. That is such a backward thought! The Bible is very clear that God owns everything and can give us all we need whenever we need it. We can trust God that He knows how much money we need and that He has **already** supplied it for us. We are best friends with the richest person in the world. He will give us all the money we need when we need it, and in the meantime, we need to make the money He has already given us serve us well.

The way we do this is by making a budget—deciding ahead of time what the money given us must accomplish. There are several things to consider:

1. *Compute your income*

Consider how much money you earn every month, and don't forget about sources of income other than your salary from work. Does your wife sell flowers at the market in the spring? Do you make a little extra money in the evenings after work by helping people with their cars? Include those things too.

2. *Conclude what God wants you to give*

If God has convinced you that you should tithe, you need to remember that this will be a regular outflow of your resources. Some families feel led to give extra freewill offerings to the Lord. This may include supporting a Christian ministry outside your church on a regular basis, or it may mean a one-time gift to a visiting missionary. Either way, these things need to be taken into account.

3. *Contemplate your fixed expenses*

It's often easier to figure out what our income is than what our expenses are. Money comes from one direction but leaves in many. However, if you sit down and take the time to think about it, with a little effort you will be able to identify regular monthly expenses. If your family eats one loaf of bread every day, you know that you will need to buy 30 loaves of bread every month. When you multiply the cost of the bread by the amount you need, you will know how much you spend on that category of food every month. You can also do this in a more general way by keeping track of how much money you spend every time you go shopping for groceries. Soon you will know approximately how much you spend on food every month. Other fixed expenses are your utilities: you need gas and water every month. How much does that normally cost you?

4. *Consider controllable family expenses*

You may be thinking, "What are controllable family expenses?" This has much to do with our desired lifestyle. Doing some remodeling in the home, buying a new TV, sending your children to a better school, or upgrading to more attractive clothing could all fall in this category. There are many good things we can do with our money, but not all of them are essential. So you must consider whether you need to limit your spending on these kinds of items or take other steps such as postponing the purchase till later.

5. *Calculate amount for your savings plan*

You should have a plan to save some money every month and you need to keep it in mind as you view your overall financial picture. It is important to do this so that emergencies don't overwhelm you. And if God is gracious and there are no special emergencies then you will slowly accumulate towards other needs of your family. It is a valuable asset, and you don't want to leave it out.

Thinking about each of these points and including them in your budget—your plan for how you will spend your money—will help you make the change from letting money make your decisions to having it serve you.

B. You can become a stellar steward

1. *Be thrifty in buying*

There are so many ways to save money nowadays. You can buy high-quality second-hand clothing and shoes. You can find nice furniture at low prices in special classified ads in newspapers. You can pick up great bargains at auctions. You can keep your eyes open for sales. There are so many ways to save money. You just need to be creative and make it into a game.

This is something women are often better at than men, so don't be too proud to ask your wife's advice about how to be more economical, and be sure to praise her when you see her spending money carefully and wisely.

2. *Avoid credit blues*

Credit is an unfortunate idea that is sneaking up on us. It is growing more and more popular. "Buy now, pay later," they tell us. Don't fall for this trap. For one thing, it will end up costing you more in the end, and more importantly, it violates a Biblical principle. The Bible teaches that the borrower is servant to the lender. By learning to save your money instead of spending it before you earn it, you will save yourself much needless stress about the future as well as keep your freedom. And if you wait to purchase something until you have saved enough for it, you will appreciate it all the more.

3. *You don't have to have it*

The way we spend our money must not arise out of comparing ourselves with the way those around us live. Just because you want something or your children want something does not mean that it would be a wise purchase. Learn to differ between what you *need* and what you *want*.

Let's take the issue of clothing for example. There is a time for getting new clothes, and there is a time for realizing that you have enough. Buying clothing is something we all have to do, but there are ways to stretch our money. Instead of buying many new clothes at once, you could plan to buy one item every month. Instead of buying based on wants, you can buy based on need or on limited wants. Another way to control cash outflow in this area is to buy second-hand clothing.

4. *Avert impulse buying*

Learn to evaluate your purchases on the go using the questions I gave you earlier. It is so easy to think we desperately must have something, only to buy it and find out that it is a big disappointment. Have an agreement with your wife that you will not spend over a certain amount without talking to each other. Only buy what you have already planned to buy, don't be pressured by a salesman who wants you to buy **right** now.

C. Saving for the future.

It is also wise to have a savings plan. If you have a target amount you would like to save each month you are a lot more likely to save a larger amount of money than if you don't. Without a plan money will disappear between the cracks, being spent on other "needs."

1. *Saving is good discipline*

Self-discipline is one of the defining characteristics of the Christian's life. You can't hope to experience all that God has in store for you if you let your old nature run wild. But overcoming old, bad habits opens new possibilities.

2. *Saving for major purchases*

Many people have "rainy day" savings. That is an excellent idea, but often it is more motivating when you have a specific item or need in mind that you are saving for. Perhaps it is saving money so you can hang new wallpaper in your house. Or perhaps it is something bigger like buying a car or sending your children to college. College education is not free like it used to be, so this is certainly something you need to consider.

3. *Saving for years of lower income*

Joseph gave us a wonderful example when he saved ahead for the lean years. He knew he needed to plan ahead. James also tells us how foolish it is to assume that things will always be the way they are now. He reminds us that we are finite humans and don't know what the future holds. It is not wise to presume on the future by assuming that we will always have the same resources we do now. We need to plan ahead.

CONCLUSION

Include the entire family in your financial planning, because the decisions you make and the goals you set affect the entire family. If everyone participates there will be fewer misunderstandings, and more joint effort in reaching goals smoothly. Discussing solutions to your family's money management issues can lead to harmony and cooperation within the home. That is far different from the division and bitterness that so often arises within a family as a result of poor financial planning, and it teaches your children about money management!

Learn as a family to avoid financial pitfalls and take advantage of opportunities and you will be able to live within your income. Yes, living within your income is a possibility. It is not only a possibility; heaven expects it of you. God gave you 2350 Bible verses to help with that. Do you think that is enough? Do you think He expects you to live within your income? I do! And I am glad to testify that God has given me fantastic financial lessons and tests. The results have been most wonderful. Thank you Jesus! Thank you that you have a plan. Thank you that you know best. Thank you for this inspirational message. Making other people successful. What a privilege. Glory to Your name.

Blessings to you, our dear friends!

We are happy to present the video, audio and paper materials that have been prepared by **New Life for Churches**. You have the privilege upon completion of your practical assignment to use this lecture with others.

Practical assignment

Completed

- Have a financial discussion with your wife. Make a budget that includes your basic living needs as well as a plan for saving and sharing. Bring it to the next seminar. ☐
- Based on the discussion with your wife have a family financial planning meeting with all of your children. Share the budget with your children and ask for their suggestions and input. Be open. ☐