

Wisdom and Finance

*A pig and a chicken were walking through a poor section of the city.
The chicken said to the pig, "Look at all those hungry people."
They continued and felt compelled to help these people in some way.
The chicken spoke up "Let's feed them breakfast?"
The pig asked, "What do you have in mind?"
The chicken proclaimed, "How about we give them ham and eggs for breakfast."
The pig said, "Wait a minute. For you, it's a donation. For me, it's a sacrifice."*

Maybe you are a bit like the chicken having something extra to give, or maybe you are the pig thinking if I give anything my life is over. I always have one moment when paying the bills where I ask the question.

Where Did All Our Money Go? Any of you ever think that?
This morning I want us to examine of we are living as Prodigals

In Luke 15 Jesus' tells the story of the prodigal son – if you know the story you look into that story and maybe you focus on the prodigal son coming home – maybe you have that vision of the son finally swallowing his pride and the father running to the son – that great image of forgiveness and unconditional love. However, there is sometimes confusion on the word prodigal.

Prodigal does not mean someone who wanders away or is lost. If you look up the definition you will find it defined as "spending money or resources freely and recklessly; wastefully extravagant:"

Prodigal means "one who wastes money."

Luke 15:12 The younger son told his father, 'I want my share of your estate now before you die.' So his father agreed to divide his wealth between his sons. 13 "A few days later this younger son packed all his belongings and moved to a distant land, and there he wasted all his money in wild living.

We all relate to this story and think – what a dope. Why would he waste all that money.

However, if we are honest many of us struggle with that habit as well. Remember last weeks staggering statistics of credit card debt. I am not making this up am I.

Verse 14 *About the time his money ran out, a great famine swept over the land, and he began to starve.*

Maybe like the prodigal - We're not worried about tomorrow. We want it today. The problem with that kind of thinking is that, for most of us, the "famine" eventually comes.

It comes when we have spent everything we have and even a little bit of next year's income.

So we use the credit card and charge it, and we go a little further into debt. Finally, we come to a place where we "find ourselves." We have nothing left, not even any credit, and we can't figure out how we are we going to make it.

The More We Make, the More We Waste

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

Clarifying Our Relationship With Money and Possessions

We do not exist simply to consume as much as we can and get as much pleasure as we can while we are here on this earth. We have a higher purpose. We need to know and understand our life purpose—our vision or mission or calling—and then spend our money in ways that are consistent with this purpose or calling.

Be Clear About Your Purpose and Calling

Our society tells us that our life purpose is to consume—to make as much money as possible and to blow as much money as possible.

The Bible tells us that we were created to care for God's creation.
We were created to love God and to love our neighbors as ourselves.
We were created to care for our families and those in need.
We were created to glorify God, to seek justice, and to do mercy.

Why do we believe our - Our money and possessions don't have anything to do with living as God created us. We seem to think it is our money don't we – well it is also our sin and he gives us grace. Amen!

James 1:17 Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.

Your blessings come from God!

*A young boy was given some money.
He held it in his hands as the offering plate at church was coming by.
His mother looked at him and put her arm around her son.
She said, "Johnny, that is tainted money, you need to give it."
Thinking the worst the boy quickly put the money in the plate.
Afterwards the boy asked "Mommy what made that money tainted."
She said "Well, it taint yours, and it taint mine – it belongs to God"*

We are to use our resources to help care for our families and others—to serve Christ and the world through the church, missions, and everyday opportunities. We have a life purpose that is greater than our own self-interests, and how we spend our God-given resources reflects our understanding and commitment to this life purpose or mission.

Being able to accomplish the greater purposes God has for our lives requires some measure of planning.

Taking the time to set goals related to our lives and our finances is crucial if we are to become wise stewards of our God-given resources.

Each of us should think about our life purpose and goals and then identify two short-term financial goals, two mid-range financial goals, and two long-term financial goals that are aimed at helping us to accomplish our broader life goals. At least one goal in each category should relate specifically to our faith.

(Suggestion: Use the bulletin insert “My Life and Financial Goals Worksheet.”)

The Discipline of Managing Your Money

The Necessity of a Budget/Spending Plan

Once we have set some financial goals, we need to develop a plan to meet those goals. A budget is a spending plan that enables us to accomplish our goals. Some people use an envelope system to help them manage their saving and spending and stay on budget. Others use a variety of different approaches. Many people find it helpful to seek the advice of a financial advisor. For those who find themselves in the midst of a financial crisis, a financial counselor can help to work out terms with creditors and develop a workable financial plan. Whatever approach you choose, the important thing is simply to have a plan.

Six Financial Planning Principles

The following financial planning principles can help us to manage our money with wisdom and faith:

#1 - Put God first in your living and your giving.

2 Corinthians 9:6-7

6 Remember this—a farmer who plants only a few seeds will get a small crop. But the one who plants generously will get a generous crop. 7 You must each decide in your heart how much to give. And don't give reluctantly or in response to pressure. “For God loves a person who gives cheerfully.”

Give your tithe and offering from the “top” of your paycheck, and then live on whatever remains.

#2 - Prepare a spending plan and track all expenses monthly.

Proverbs 27:23-24

23 Know the state of your flocks, and put your heart into caring for your herds, 24 for riches don't last forever, and the crown might not be passed to the next generation.

Create a budget and track your expenses.

Creating a budget is simply developing a plan in which you tell your money what you want it to do. Tracking your expenses with a budget is like getting on the scales: It allows you to see how you are doing and motivates you to be more careful with your expenditures.

#3 - Simplify your lifestyle; live below your means. (Matthew 6:19-33)

your lifestyle (live below your means).

Matthew 6 - 19 "Don't store up treasures here on earth, where moths eat them and rust destroys them, and where thieves break in and steal. 20 Store your treasures in heaven, where moths and rust cannot destroy, and thieves do not break in and steal. 21 Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be.

25 "That is why I tell you not to worry about everyday life—whether you have enough food and drink, or enough clothes to wear. Isn't life more than food, and your body more than clothing? 26 Look at the birds. They don't plant or harvest or store food in barns, for your heavenly Father feeds them. And aren't you far more valuable to him than they are? 27 Can all your worries add a single moment to your life?

Because this discipline is critical to the success of any financial plan, next Sunday's sermon will be devoted to this topic.

#4 - Establish an emergency fund.

An emergency fund is an account separate from checking or long-term savings that is set aside specifically for emergencies.

Dave Ramsey recommends beginning with \$1,000 and building that to three months' worth of income. When you have this amount, you won't need to use your credit cards anymore.

Personal example

#5 - Pay off all credit card debt and use cash, not credit cards.

Proverbs 22:7 The rich rule over the poor, and the borrower is slave to the lender.

As you are building your emergency fund, begin to pay off your credit card debt and start using cash or debit cards for purchases. Some experts suggest starting with the credit card that has the highest interest rate. Others suggest paying down the smallest debt first, experiencing that victory, and applying your payments from the first card to the second, and so on, creating a snowball effect to pay off the cards as soon as possible. Cut up your cards as you pay them down so that you are not trapped or leveraged by your future for present-day pleasure, as the prodigal son was. If you must use a credit card, such as when traveling or making purchases online, be sure to pay off the debt monthly. If you are unable to do this, then it is better for you to cut up your cards and stop using them altogether.

#6 - Practice long-range saving and investing habits

Luke 14:28 "Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won't you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it?"

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

Proverbs 21:5 The plans of the diligent lead surely to abundance, but everyone who is hasty comes only to want.

Proverbs 21:20 - Precious treasure remains in the house of the wise, but the fool devours it.

Have you ever thought seriously about your money?