

Enough: Wisdom and Finance

(Inspired by Adam Hamilton, *Enough Stewardship Program*)

Texts: Proverbs 21:5, 20

Oct. 9, 2011

I. Where Did All Our Money Go?

Polls have been saying the first issue on most people's minds is the economy including employment. You can tell because all the presidential candidates mention it in every paragraph of every speech. We have just come through the worst financial quarter since 2008. It is affecting every segment of our society, including practically every church. Ours is no exception. But, as bad as it seems now, we are not in a depression and nothing like the Great Depression of the 1930's perhaps a few of you remember growing up. Actually, our economy has recovered time after time from devastating events in our world since 1941, World War II, Vietnam, the Cold War, the assassination of President Kennedy, the real estate collapse of the 80's, several recessions, the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Center, and a real estate finance crisis. The American economy has weathered every storm and within three to five years has resumed its advance. Our country is not falling apart, nor will it in the next few years, regardless of what some are saying. Though our economy is stressed, it is still stronger than practically every other country's. However, that doesn't mean that everything is fine!

I opened my retirement fund statement last week to see my hard-saved money showing nearly a 20% decline, maybe the worst quarter since 2008. That hurts, and the closer we get to retirement the scarier it is. I know many of you are already living on your hard-saved funds and fixed incomes. The latest reports are that many people have started taking steps to correct the problem by buying less on credit, paying down and off credit cards, and saving more. But, some still haven't gotten the message and it may be too late. 29% of workers over 55 have less than \$10,000 in their retirement savings

(Employee Benefit Research Institute in their Retirement Confidence Survey, 2010 results, from bargaineering.com).

From Jesus' description in Luke 15:11-16, we see that the prodigal son had the habits of squandering and spending. The word **prodigal** does not mean someone who wanders away or is lost. It literally means "extravagant" or "**one who wastes money**." A prodigal is one who wastes money. Many of us struggle with that habit as well. 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. (Adam Hamilton, *Financial Wisdom*, p. 1)

But, most of us enjoy the sweet fruits of our labors. And, we enjoy it so much that we reach for more and more without noticing the dollars slipping through our fingers. The more successful we become the less we worry about what we are spending here and there. Even though we are not in financial crisis we waste lots of money on small things without realizing it. Have you noticed how much it cost for a night at the movies? It's so easy that we hardly think of the dollars we are throwing around. Here are a couple of reasons and a few ways we can learn to control spending:

1. **Impulse buying: whatever looks good that make us happy**

Here are some tips to avoid impulse buying:

- Never go grocery shopping when you are hungry.
- Shop for what you need only.
- Make a list and stick to it; buy what you need and get out of the store!
- Wait twenty-four hours before purchasing an impulse buy.
- The internet is a dangerous place to drop a lot of money without realizing it.

2. **Eating out**

The issue is frequency. The average American eats out an average of four times a week. By eating out less frequently, we will have more money to save, or to spend on something more important, or to give away. Other areas where we can cut back may be expensive coffee and sodas every day. We hardly think about how it adds up. ("Statistics About Eating Dinner Out," by Magali Rheault, Kiplinger's Personal Finance Magazine, October 2000; http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1318/is_10_54/ai_65368848?tag=content;col1.)

II. **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 possible while we are here on this earth. We have a higher purpose. We need to know and understand our life purpose— mission or calling—and then spend our money in ways that are consistent with this purpose or calling.

A. **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 God gave humans the job of caring for God's creation. Jesus pointed to the favorite Jewish sayings that our purpose is to **love God and to love our neighbors as we love ourselves**. We were created to glorify God, to seek justice, and to do mercy. Our money and possessions should be devoted to helping us fulfill our calling to help care

for our families and others—to serve Christ and the world through the church, missions, and every opportunity. **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.

II. Set Worthy Goals

To accomplish the greater purposes God has for our lives requires some measure of planning. Taking the time to set goals for our lives and our finances is crucial if we are to become wise stewards of our God-given resources. Let's 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 will help us accomplish our broader life goals. At least one goal in each category should relate specifically to our faith.

(Show the bulletin insert "My Life and Financial Goals Worksheet.")

III. The Discipline of Managing Your Money

A. 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 as Dave Ramsey recommends, to help them manage spending and savings to stay on budget. Many people find it helpful to consult 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**.

(Show the video clip "Finding Financial Stability.")

Six Financial Planning Principles – I have prepared a gift for you to keep, a bookmark listing the **Six Key Financial Principles** along with a scripture supporting each one. They can help us manage our money with wisdom and faith:

1. **Pay your tithe and offering first.** - Put God first in your living and your giving. Give your tithe/offering from the "top" of your paycheck, and then live on whatever is left.
2. **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.

(Show: Use the bulletin insert "Basic Budget Worksheet.")

3. **Simplify your lifestyle (live below your means).** - 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 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.

5. **Pay off your credit cards, use cash/debit cards for purchases, use credit wisely.** - As you are building your emergency fund, begin to pay off your credit card debt and start using cash or debit cards for purchases.

6. **Practice long-term savings and investing habits.** - Saving money is most important: three types of savings we should have: 1) emergency savings, 2) savings for wants and goals, and 3) retirement savings.

God has put us here for a reason, and he has put a calling upon our lives. Have we found it yet? Have you asked God to show you your own calling? We can learn to live into that calling by prayerfully considering and setting some goals for our lives and finances. I invite you to reexamine with me how we spend our money by making a plan and keeping track of our spending. Will you join me to simplify our lives and get our eyes off the stuff that clutters our lives. Christ expects us to realize our lives do not consist of things we have, but **the love we live**.

Closing Prayer:

God, you know what we don't even know. We don't know where every dime went, but somehow you know what we did with all that we had, last year and the year before. You don't forbid us from having joy in our possessions. In fact, you delight with us in our joy. Lord, forgive us for being wasteful, for being prodigals. Forgive us for leveraging our future in order to have pleasure in the present. And, help us to be good managers of the talents that you've given us. Help us to be generous and willing to share, kingdom-minded and focused on accomplishing your purposes for our lives. In Jesus' name, Amen.