

FINDING FINANCIAL FREEDOM

It is not always a lack of money that creates financial pressure. Many times it is simply a matter of attitude. If there is a right attitude toward money, freedom from financial bondage can be assured. God did not say that money and material things were problems; money is neither good nor bad. It is the use of money and the attitude toward money that is the problem. Therefore, Jesus regularly warned His followers to guard their hearts against greed, ego, and pride, because Satan can control God's people with these emotional tools. In the area of finances, God's people are extremely vulnerable. As such, they need to be encouraged to follow the necessary steps that will ensure money management according to God's plan, thus assuring financial freedom.

Transfer ownership God has designated the most difficult step, transfer of ownership, as the first step. Once this has been accomplished, all other steps will fall into place.¹

As Christians, God expects that all possessions be transferred to Him. But since we can't literally place everything into His hands, this transfer becomes an act of faith. In essence, it means accepting the fact that God owns it all. Transferring ownership to God means that God owns all that we consider ours: clothes, car, home, family, income, debts, present, and future. Once ownership is transferred, God can begin to lead out of debt and into financial freedom. We then become stewards and managers of what belongs to Him.

So, if God is the owner of everything in Christians' lives, He can be trusted to change unhealthy spending habits (especially the abuse of credit cards) that cause debt, anxiety, and fear of the future. The key to maintaining this relationship is to properly understand the definition of stewardship. A steward is someone who manages the property of another. As His stewards, we are responsible for managing His property in a way that will please Him.² God will not force His will on us, but if we realize our responsibility and transfer everything to Him, He will keep His promise and provide for each and every need. The first step in achieving financial freedom is to realize that since God is in complete control, all that we are, do, have or ever will have must be transferred to Him.

Get out and stay out of debt There are many ways to get into debt but only one sure way to get out and stay out of debt: self-discipline.

Regardless of income, disciplined debt elimination is mandatory in order for a money management plan that keeps Christians out of debt to function properly. Proverbs 27:12 says, "A prudent man sees evil and hides himself, the naive proceed and pay the penalty." Debt can best be eliminated by following these steps: (1) transfer ownership of every possession to God (Psalms 8:6, Deuteronomy 5:32-33); (2) allow no more debt, including bank and personal loans, and cut up all credit cards if unable to pay them off each month (Proverbs 24:3); (3) develop a realistic balanced budget that will allow every creditor to receive as much as possible monthly (Proverbs 16:9); and (4) start retiring the debt (Psalms 37:21, Proverbs 3:27-28), beginning with the smallest debt first. Once the smallest is paid off, put all the money on the next, and so on. Generally speaking, if these steps are followed, the average family will be debt free in less than five years and the problem that caused the debt in the first place could very well have been corrected. 3

In order to stay out of debt, two steps need to be followed.

Develop a written plan of all expenditures in order of importance. Determine whether the expenditure or purchase is a need (basic necessities such as food, clothing, and housing), a want (things that make life easier, such as more expensive clothes, a VCR, or air conditioning), or a desire (more expensive wants, such as designer clothes, a new BMW, or a wide-screen TV).

Open a savings account and get in the habit of putting something into the savings account regularly, perhaps every week or every month. The amount of deposit is not nearly as important as the consistency in making a deposit. This savings can then be used for specific purchases or emergencies, rather than making these purchases on credit.

Establish a tithe Every Christian needs to give something back to God as a testimony to God's ownership. A tithe is the portion of our income that we give to God and to God's work. It should be the first part. "Honor the Lord from your wealth and from the first of all your produce" (Proverbs 3:9). Tithe means "tenth."

This is the amount most Christians use as a guide for tithing. It's through sharing that God's power in finances is brought into focus. "Now this I say, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully" (2 Corinthians 9:6). 5

Accept God's provision In order to maintain true financial peace, we must recognize and accept that God's provision—all that He gives—is what He has provided to direct our lives. Many Christians are under the impression that God directs financially only by an abundance of money. This is not necessarily true. Sometimes He directs by withholding financial abundance. As such, He expects His people to live on what He provides and not be pressured by the desire for riches and material possessions.

Put others first Christians seeking financial freedom must always be willing to put other people first. "Be hospitable to one another without complaint. As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God" (1 Peter 4:9-10). It is not God's plan for us to get ahead in the world at the expense of another. Their welfare must be considered. "Do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased" (Hebrews 13:16).

Avoid indulgence Unfortunately, most Christians in America are self-indulgers, rarely passing up a want or desire, much less a need. To achieve financial freedom, indulgences and the tendency to spend more than what can be afforded on things that are not needed must be avoided.⁶ Indulgence is greed. "But immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints" (Ephesians 5:3).

Avoid snap decisions Avoid impulse spending, get-rich-quick schemes, and other financial decisions made through intimidation. "The plans of the diligent lead surely to advantage, but everyone who is hasty comes surely to poverty" (Proverbs 21:5). The best way to avoid these traps is to pray about each purchase, each financial decision, and each opportunity that is intended to produce extra income—especially if the decision will affect the family's financial welfare. "Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him; do not fret because of him who prospers in his way, because of the man who carries out wicked schemes"

(Psalm 37:7).7

Conclusion Most Christians have an upside-down view of money. They feel that the money they have is theirs and that God's money is the portion that they give to the church. But God has a different view. As Lord, God, and King, He owns everything—including the money that we claim as our own. As such, He has clear ideas of how He wants His people to function and to make use of His possessions—ideas that result in financial freedom for His people, if they are followed step by step.

Larry Burkett, Money Management for College Students, Moody, 1998, p. 28

Larry Burkett, "Giving and Tithing," Christian Financial Concepts, 1999, p. 2

Larry Burkett, "Debt and Credit," Christian Financial Concepts, 1999, pp. 6-8

Larry Burkett, Making Ends Meet, Christian Financial Concepts, 1997, pp. 15-16

Larry Burkett, Your Finances in Changing Times, Moody, 1975, pp. 119-120

Larry Burkett, Money Management for College Students, Moody, 1998, p. 30

Larry Burkett, Debt-Free Living, Moody, 1989, pp. 97-100