

GIVE, SAVE, LIVE

I don't know if he did it on purpose or not, but the opposing coach called us to the line even though most of my teammates, including me, still had our sweats on. It was my junior year in high school. Lompoc High School was our chief rival and we were running on their home course. I literally stepped out of my sweat pants and turned toward the start line, which was about five yards away, when he fired the gun. I don't know if he hoped some of us would keep our sweats on or what, but he was definitely playing shady.

It would be a nightmare to run the 3-mile Lompoc course in sweats. When we raced we did everything we could to run light and unencumbered. Our race shoes weighed ounces. Our race shorts and tank tops were lightweight nylon. We didn't wear hats or jewelry. We got as light and unencumbered as possible so that we could run fast. (BTW, we swept them, finishing our top 5 before their first runner!).

The goal of this series on money is to help us run the race of life unencumbered by the weight and entanglements of materialism. Our calling is to love God with all that we are, to love one another as Christ has loved us and to help others become disciples of Jesus along with us. Our calling is to joyfully serve Jesus and one another through our spiritual gifts and the material resources God has entrusted to us.

We run free when we acknowledge that God owns everything and we are stewards of His possessions. We run free when we trust our heavenly Father to provide for us and we focus on serving His kingdom without worry. We run free by keeping this issue of money simple: give, save, live.

Our first priority is to worship and honor God by giving back to Him the first fruits of what He has given to us. We are to give thoughtfully and joyfully, trusting God to provide. And we are to give proportionately; if God has entrusted much to us our giving should reflect His generosity.

In this study let's think about saving and living.

SAVE

The following is from an online article of USA Today.

The U.S. is often referred to as the land of economic opportunity. Apparently, it's also the land of consumption and "spend everything you've got."

We don't have to look far for confirmation that Americans are generally poor savers.

...new data emerged this week from personal-finance news website GoBankingRates that shows just how dire Americans' savings habits really are.

GoBankingRates... posed the question to (7,052) Americans of how much they had in their savings account.... The result? Nearly seven in 10 Americans (69%) had less than \$1,000 in their savings account.

Furthermore... no income group did particularly well. Some 29% of adults earning more than \$150,000 a year, and 44% making between \$100,000 and \$149,999, had less than \$1,000 in savings.

There was even minimal difference between multiple generations of Americans. From seniors aged 65 and up to young millennials aged 18 to 24, between 62% and 72% of Americans had less than \$1,000 in a savings account.

According to GoBankingRates' report, two factors are to blame for Americans' inability to save. First, some Americans are simply living beyond their means. With roughly 70% of U.S. GDP tied to consumption, and our society revolving around going out for entertainment, this isn't too surprising.

*The other issue is that credit cards and alternative payment platforms, such as Apple Pay, have made it easier than ever to spend money. It's a lot easier to spend money when you're not dealing with tangible cash. This out of sight, out of mind mentality could leave Americans out of money when they need it.*¹

God instructs us to be wise and save; it's part of running free and unencumbered in the Christian life. Saving enables us to cover both the predictable costs of large ticket items as well as the unpredictable costs of breakdowns and emergencies. Saving protects us from the bondage of debt. Saving enables us to not only help ourselves but others.

But as this article indicates, if we don't prioritize saving it is the kind of thing that will never get done. If we have money, we tend to spend it. We need to establish our monthly saving goal and then pay it like a bill every month. We need to take that money out of circulation so that we don't squander it.

Here's a simple guide to saving:

- Tier One: 3-6 months of expenses. Use a savings or money market account to keep liquid and accessible.
- Tier Two: big ticket items such as car purchase or downpayment on house.
- Tier Three: long term saving for retirement. If your employer has a retirement plan, maximize your contribution as early as possible in parallel with Tier One or Tier Two saving.

There are two additional reasons to establish saving as your second priority. When it comes to saving, time is your friend. The earlier you begin, even if it's a modest amount, the better off you will be. Second, the more you save, the less you will need to borrow. The less you borrow, the less you will waste in interest payments.

Finally, avoid risky savings plans or get-rich-quick schemes. Remember, it's God's money; we shouldn't play fast and loose with it. If it sounds too good to be true, it is. Be disciplined. Be patient and your savings will grow.

It is God Who instructs us to save. He encourages us to be like ants who gathers (stores up) food at harvest time.

Proverbs 6:6–11 (ESV)

⁶ Go to the ant, O sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise. ⁷ Without having any chief, officer, or ruler, ⁸ she prepares her bread in summer and gathers her food in harvest. ⁹ How long will you lie there, O sluggard? When will you arise from your sleep? ¹⁰ A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest, ¹¹ and poverty will come upon you like a robber, and want like an armed man.

As faithful stewards of God's possessions we want to give, to save and then live on what remains. Not everything will apply to everyone because our households vary. But I trust we all will be able to glean something that will help us steward God's resources better and enable us to more freely serve Christ in all we do.

LIVE

It is a challenge to manage God's assets well. According to one source:

*Household income has grown by 28% in the past 13 years, but the cost of living has gone up 30% in that time period. Some of the largest expenses for consumers — like medical care, food and housing — have significantly outpaced income growth.*²

This requires us to be disciplined stewards. Following are a few key principles to help us manage this portion of God's assets.

¹ <http://www.usatoday.com/story/money/personalfinance/2016/10/09/savings-study/91083712/>

² <https://www.nerdwallet.com/blog/average-credit-card-debt-household/>

Work Hard And Do Good Work

Be the best employee your boss has. Be dependable, trustworthy and good at what you do.

Live Within Your Means

Be content with your needs being met.

Be on guard against the thousands of messages every day that clamor for your attention through television, radio, and social media—all designed to get you to buy things you don't need, with money you don't have, to impress people you don't know, and to find happiness where it cannot be found.

Know Your Financial Condition At All Times

No matter who pays the bills in your household, both husband and wife should know the financial condition of your household. This is particularly important husbands if your wife has the burden of paying the bills – it is important that you husbands stay informed and take responsibility for the financial health of your family. There are many products on the market today that make staying informed very easy.

TurboTax has developed a free app called Mint. You can sign up online for free (www.mint.com) or download the app via the App Store or Google Play. Mint syncs with your bank accounts, helps you set up a budget, tracks your spending and your income. Everyday, in a matter of seconds, you can see exactly where you are financially.

I'll mention two other products both of which must be purchased. First, for those using PC's, Quicken is a very good program for managing God's resources. They have a range of products from Starter to Premier ranging from \$30 to \$100. I would argue this is worth every penny.

If you use a Mac, Banktivity is the app I recommend. You can download it at the App Store for \$60. When I open it, it automatically syncs all our bank accounts and investment accounts. I categorize each of our expenditures so we can track where the money is going. You can schedule payments. It is easy to make and track our budget. For us, it's worth every penny and more.

For married couples, staying informed includes both of you knowing

- where your financial and legal records are kept.
- your bank accounts and investments including usernames and passwords to online accounts
- knowing how bills are paid i.e. by check, by autopay from your checking account or credit card account.

This is something about which I am fairly passionate because I experienced the blessing of a man having his house in order. That man is my father and when he passed from this earthly life to his heavenly home he had everything recorded and organized so it was very easy for me to take over and care for my mother.

We cannot manage well what we don't know – so know your financial condition at all times.

Get Out And Stay Out Of Credit Card Debt.

There are two main types of credit card users:

Transactors pay off their credit card balances every month, so they don't owe interest.

Revolvers carry all or part of their credit card balances from one month to the next, so they pay interest on their average daily balance.

Because credit card debt is one of the most expensive types of debt, it's not cheap to be a revolver. The average household with revolving credit card debt carried a balance of \$6,885 as of June 2016 and pays \$1,292 a year in interest, assuming an annual percentage rate of 18.76%.

Just making more money doesn't solve debt problems. In fact, according to our findings, debt loads increase as income does... ...Households that bring in more than \$157,479 per year pay almost four times more in credit card interest than households that make less than \$21,432.

If you are in credit card debt do everything you can to get out and stay out of credit card debt. Seek help from your Home Group – there may be people who have gone through the process of paying down credit card debt who can coach you. Some one may have the name of a reputable debt relief organization. A major factor in getting out of credit card debt is to reduce your spending and pay off your balances.

The basic rule of thumb is this: Don't buy anything you don't need.

If you're in a situation where you need to reduce expenses, here are a few ideas to get you started:

Downsize: *your house, car or commute —downsize big expenses to save a lot in a short time.*

Cut the cord: *get rid of cable. Between Netflix and Amazon Prime you can find your favorite shows without paying exorbitant cable charges.*

Ditch the labels: *Whether it's clothing or food, go for store brand instead of name brand.*

Put it off: *If possible, put off large purchases or expensive events until you've paid off your credit card debt.*

DIY: *Cut your own hair, cook and make coffee at home, handwash your clothes, clean your own house and car or groom your pets — take on the tasks yourself that you usually outsource.*

Barter: *Trade your skills for services you need. For instance, you can do your neighbor's taxes while he tiles your floor.*

Entertain yourself for less: *Get books at the library instead of buying them, have a picnic in the park instead of a fancy dinner out.*

Automate it: *Some of your bills — like Internet or insurance — may be cheaper when automated. Companies want you to pay your bills on time, so some will give you a discount for automating payments.*

Use less energy: *Turn off lights and unplug electronics when not in use, turn your heat down and AC up, or hang dry instead of using a dryer. Preserving resources will save both the environment and your wallet — win, win!*

Unsubscribe: *Unsubscribe from paid subscriptions as well as free retail emails that tempt you with deals and coupons. These will cause you to buy when you don't need anything.*

Lower your bills: *Increase your insurance deductibles and decrease your data or Internet plan.*

Comparison shop: *When making a large purchase, price shop to ensure you're getting the best possible deal.*

Again, you will find a lot of help in your Home Group. Closely related to credit card debt is the issue of borrowing in general

Keep Borrowing To A Minimum

Romans 13:8 (ESV)

⁸ Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.

Proverbs 22:7 (ESV)

⁷ The rich rules over the poor, and the borrower is the slave of the lender.

Debt is bondage. We should hate debt; I sure do. But there are things for which we may need to borrow and take on debt. But we should only do so if it is an absolute need and we have a plan to pay off our debt as quickly as possible.

Our culture runs on credit. We're constantly encouraged to buy on credit and I fear we've become dull to the danger of borrowing.

A young friend of ours was devastated when I explained to him that he would pay not only the sticker price, but an additional \$3000 in interest on the car he had just financed. To his credit, he disciplined himself and threw every extra dollar against his debt and paid off the car in two years and saved himself a lot of that interest. How many of us are like him and don't play out the full consequences of financing a purchase?

I am appalled that if we pay the minimum principal and interest on our mortgage over the period of our loan we will have paid an additional \$122,000 in interest! You can be assured that we will be throwing every extra dollar against our loan to reduce the amount we lose in interest.

I know there are financial advisors who down play debt and have schemes for beating the market etc. But if you will K.I.S.S. your money management you will be better in the long run.

When Can We Owe Money?

Crown Financial advises:

- The item purchased is an asset with the potential to appreciate (in value) or to produce income.
- The value of the item equals or exceeds the amount owed against it.
- The debt is not so large that repayment puts undue strain on the budget.

CONCLUSION

Obviously we have only been able to touch on a few topics related to money management. We don't have time to think about creating and sticking to a budget. We don't have time to think about training our children in stewardship. So I want to encourage us to do at least two things, perhaps three.

First, I encourage you to care enough about each other in your Home Groups to really come alongside one another and help each other give, save, live. I know there is tremendous wisdom in our church family from which we all would benefit greatly.

Second, attend the *Crown Financial* class. The *Crown* class gives you time to go deeper into each of the areas we've covered plus much more. As you have heard or will hear from members of your Home Group, the *Crown Financial* class is truly life changing. It will help you run light and unencumbered.

Third, if you're facing overwhelming challenges in this area, please let us help. We love you. We have no desire to judge you. We want to help you get free so you can run your race with us. Let your Home Group leader know if you need help. Contact one of our deacons; they're listed on our website and app. Contact the Elders. If need be we'll connect you with a financial counselor. Whatever we can do is what we will do to help you get free.