

Lesson 6: 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.

As Christians, God expects that all possessions be transferred to Him. 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 that cause debt, anxiety, and fear of the future. The key to maintaining this relationship is to understand properly 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. 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.

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.

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. 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.

Bible Study

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” John 3:16

It's impossible to truly love and not give. Liking, wanting, needing, lusting—all of these can be experienced without giving, but not love. God Loved, Then Gave. Have you accepted God's gift of eternal life through Jesus? If not, pray now and surrender your life to Him. His love gives abundant life.

Discussion Questions

1. What are we supposed to give to God?
2. How can we be good stewards to the things God has entrusted to us?
3. What example of giving has God provided for us?

Prayer Focus

Lord, I give my life to you—everything I am and have. I believe Jesus paid for my sin with His own blood. Please forgive me and make me Your child.

Lesson 7: How to Control Spending

In order to change spending habits, people must first understand how habits are shaped and the ways spending behavior can be changed. In essence, they must identify spending leaks that give immediate satisfaction but do not help reach financial goals and, instead, substitute desirable spending behavior that may not be immediately gratifying but will allow financial goals to be reached.

How To Change The Habit

Luke 16:11 says, “Therefore if you have not been faithful in the use of unrighteous wealth, who will entrust the true riches to you?”

People need to learn to handle the smallest thing God has put under their authority—their money. Therefore, if the following guidelines are followed it should help them control spending.

- Establish self-discipline. Put all spending under God's control. In so doing, individuals become managers of God's finances and all spending should then be from the vantage point of whether He would be pleased with the purchase. With God's guidance, any bad habit can be broken.
- People need to learn to recognize the drive that places them in a difficult spending situation. When they shop, they can avoid the spending pitfalls produced by that drive by having a purpose for the shopping, a time limit, and a written plan. Hence, they need to make a list before they go shopping and then stick to it.
- How far money goes usually depends on how badly people want something. As such, they need to be in control of the money, under God's direction, instead of having the money control them by limiting what they do.
- A budget is a money plan. With it, people can organize and control their financial resources, set and realize goals, and decide in advance how money will work for the good of the family.
- People need to be accountable to other persons for a specified period of time for everything they spend. Ecclesiastes 4:9,10 says, “Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor. For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up.”

Conclusion

A good way to reduce debt is to develop discipline in spending habits. That may include taking away any security that might be used in case of emergencies: credit cards or other avenues of borrowing.

By committing not to go further in debt, people begin to reverse the process that produced the debt. Then, they can develop a balanced budget that will control spending and will allow them to stay within the parameters of their financial means.

Bible Study

“To one he gave five talents of money; to another two talents; and to another one talent, each according to his ability.” Matthew 25:15

“For I have learned to be content, whatever the circumstances may be. I know now how to live when things are difficult and I know how to live when things are prosperous. In general and in particular I have learned the secret of eating well or going hungry of facing either plenty of poverty. I am ready for anything through the strength of the One who lives within me.”

Philippians 4:11-13

Discussion Questions

1. How does God teach people to be dependent on him?
2. How does God teach people to manage money responsibly?
3. What habit of spending should a Christian be in?
4. What does our handling of finances say about our relationship to God?

Prayer Focus

Lord, please help me learn to be content and disciplined in all situations. Be with me always, so that I can know that it is You who will supply what I need to be satisfied.

Lesson 8: Material Things Demand Attention

The possession of material things and a guaranteed future that allows us to use those things has become the standard by which we judge success. Yet Jesus said, “So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own” (Matthew 6:34).

The Purpose of Things

The initial purpose of material things was to make our lives easier and more comfortable. However, over the years they have begun to take control of us, rather than our controlling them.

God does not prohibit us from enjoying the benefits of our hard work and the things that we are able to purchase. However, we are admonished not to get entangled in those things to the point that we are unable to fulfill our primary purpose—to serve God and to use all that He has provided for His service. Unfortunately, in today's Christian society most people are so entangled that they do not recognize what God wants them to do and how He wants them to spend their money. The real purpose of our resources is to free us to do more for Christ, not less. When the pursuit of material things becomes our focus in life, there can be no doubt about whom we serve. “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth”(Matthew 6:24).

Repeatedly, God's Word warns that material things and worldly pleasures are some of the greatest dangers we must face. Yet most of the Christian world considers the pursuit of these to be normal and acceptable. Nevertheless, most of these same Christians are not content with their lives. So, in essence, rather than providing more contentment, abundance has produced less contentment.

The Danger of Things

There are five primary dangers regarding material things of which Christians need to be aware.

- Feeling that a lifestyle of indulgence is normal. When our income can't supply those desires immediately, we simply mortgage our future income by charging. Eventually that could lead to borrowing more than we can pay back.
- Focusing on worldly success. Many Christians are both spiritually and materially mature, but when we regard people based on their material success rather than on their spiritual maturity, our focus has begun to be shaped by the world's standards.
- Diminishing God's direction. Nothing prohibits Christians from obeying God more than the tug of material comforts. Once we have adjusted to a lifestyle that includes material comforts, it is difficult to surrender them in order to serve God if He determines that those comforts need to be adjusted or eliminated.
- Imitating a superiority attitude. Those to whom God has given the responsibility of material things and resources must be very careful to exercise that responsibility with caution.

- Being indifferent toward those in need. A real danger of material affluence is that we begin to think that everyone has it. This blinds us from really seeing the needs of those around us. Giving to the poor, supplying shelter and food to the homeless, and providing for the needy are commands of God's Word; they are not requests.

Conclusion

There must always be a balance in the area of material things. God does not have an identical plan for all individuals or for all families. The common goal for all of us should be to reach the balance between the use of material things and being controlled and used by them. To do this, Christians must establish that they serve Christ first and all other considerations come after that. That means that all we do and have must be open and available for use in God's service.

Bible Study

“...You cannot serve both God and Money.”

Matthew 6:24

Jesus told us to put God first in our life, to love Him with all our heart, soul, mind and strength (Mark 12:30). But He knew our tendency to rationalize, to manipulate God's law until it conforms to our desires. Peering into our heart and seeing our true priorities, He used scalpel precision to pinpoint His greatest competitor for our devotion.

Money, unsundered, is often a ticket to power and pride, values for which Satan rebelled. Jesus makes the choice very clear: it is impossible for us to serve money—even in a small way—and still serve God.

Discussion Questions

1. Is it dangerous to own too many things? Why?
2. Does God want us to live in poverty?
3. What does the Bible say about worrying about the things of this world?

Prayer Focus

Lord, help me to see anything that competes with You in my priorities, and surrender it to Your direction.

Lesson 9: Modern Day Slavery

Financial slavery occurs when money and finances occupy the priority place in our lives that belongs to the Creator. Let's look the most common symptoms of financial slavery.

Excessive Concern about Finances

People in financial slavery are under such economic stress that they can't get their finances out of their heads. At home, they worry about finances; at work, they think about their bills; driving the car, they calculate their bank account; eating dinner, they plan how they will make their payments.

Anger, Wrath, and Bad Moods

With financial pressure bothering them all time, they're often in a bad mood. They shout, they're nervous, they get angry for no reason, and people generally prefer to avoid them.

Indulgence

Believe it or not, the people under the most severe financial pressure are those who can't help indulging themselves. They know they can't afford a certain luxury, but they get it anyway because they "deserve" it.

Poor Record Keeping

People in financial slavery often don't know where the money went. The end of the month comes and they have no idea how they spent their salary. "Miscellaneous expenses" are a black hole in the financial universe; money falls in there, and only God knows where it goes! People know their income should be enough, but somehow they end up "short" every month.

If you identify with these symptoms, consider doing these three things:

1. Transfer Everything You Own to God

It is not enough to pray and tell God that your life is His. Start acting as the manager instead of the owner of the goods God has entrusted to you. "Whoever trusts in his riches will fall" (Proverbs 11:28). You will probably have to make some difficult decisions in the near future, and if you are the "owner" of your belongings, home, or business, it will be very difficult to make the right ones freely.

2. Accept God's Leading in Your Life

The Word of God says, "Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight" (Proverbs 3:5-6). Start looking to the Word of God (and not only to your financial advisors) for the path He wants you to take. Allow the Holy Spirit to talk, not only through feelings but also through the Word. Remember that the heart is deceitful. Don't be led by hunches. Make sure your decisions are grounded in the everlasting Word of God.

3. Establish the Right Priorities

Remember that Psalm 127 warns us that unless God builds our lives, we are working in vain. The second verse says, “In vain you rise up early and stay up late, toiling for food to eat—for He grants sleep to those he loves.” Put God first in your life—not the church or all kinds of activities. Your relationship with God should be your number one priority.

Conclusion

It is not easy to live according to biblical priorities. It could mean a career change or working less—either of which will probably mean less income. The result may be a smaller house or driving an older car. But if you start living with the right family priorities, accepting God’s leading in your life, and becoming a good manager of the possessions, time, and relationships He has entrusted to you, you will be part of an exclusive minority who can say, with joy in their hearts, “I am free! Although I still have daily financial responsibilities and concerns, I am free from financial slavery!”

Bible Study

“Let no debt remain...except the continuing debt to love one another...” Romans 13:8

“Just as the rich rule the poor, so the borrower is servant to the lender” Proverbs 22:7

The Apostle Paul took pride in being a slave—a slave of Christ and a voluntary slave of those to whom he ministered (Romans 1:1; 1 Corinthians 9:19; 2 Corinthians 4:5). But he urged followers of Christ to resist becoming slaves of men in any other context: “If you can gain your freedom, do so....You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men” (1 Corinthians 7:21-23).

The Bible doesn’t prohibit borrowing. But don’t become burdened by debt that restricts your service to the Owner. Since God has given His only Son to buy us back from sin, He wants us to be free to serve Him—not lenders—without restriction.

Discussion Questions

1. Describe a time in your life when you felt like a slave or that you had no options because of a debt you owed.
2. One of the most important pieces of financial advice God offers is to get out of debt because debt creates risk in our lives. What impact has debt had in your life?
3. How would your life change if you were completely debt free?

Prayer Focus

Help me to be content in Your provision so I can avoid debt and freely live the law of love as Your exclusive slave.