

THE SUFFICIENCY OF SCRIPTURE AND MONEY:

Practical Principles for Money Management

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To “Big Al” my dear friend and fellow elder, who was the first to direct me to the
Scriptures with my questions about money.

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INTRODUCTION

When I was a young Christian and newly married, I had much to learn about finances and managing my possessions. Thankfully, an older mature brother in the church befriended me, so I was able to go to him for advice. For every question I had, he wisely pointed me to the Scriptures. I was amazed to discover all that the word of God teaches on this subject. There are over 2300 verses in the Bible related to money. As I began to study some of these, I realized God has given us sufficient principles to adequately help us manage His resources.

After seeing many young Christians make unwise decisions with their money (some of the same mistakes I had made), I was burdened to help them as my friend had helped me. My desire is to challenge you, the reader, to look to the Scriptures for help when making financial decisions. God's word is more than sufficient to help us.

Often the temptation is to look to the "experts," the people in the world with financial degrees, for help regarding money. We do not think of looking to the word of God, because we presume the Bible is about spiritual things, not money. However, the danger of getting advice from those in the world is that much of the world's philosophies about money contradict the Scriptures. The best education a Christian will get about managing money is from God. So, instead of looking to the so-called experts, we need to look to the Scriptures. The principles found in the word of God are foundational for how a Christian manages his money.

Most Christians get in trouble with their finances because either they do not know what God says on this topic, or they do not consistently practice what He says. It is only after a person has learned these biblical principles and then follows them, that he can use them to evaluate worldly philosophies about money. In other words, these principles become the grid or lens through which we can evaluate what the world says about money and possessions. This is why it is so important to know what God teaches. If a person does not understand the biblical principles, or if he does not establish his decisions upon them, it is sure to lead to problems and in some cases financial disaster. This is how foundational they are.

The goal for the Christian is to properly manage his money for the glory of God. So before a person starts investing in real estate or stocks, before he purchases a house or a car, before he decides to go into debt, even down to the small every day decisions about spending money and the type of lifestyle he will live, all of these decisions should be based on these foundational principles found in Scripture. What are they? There are at least eleven principles we should know.

PRINCIPLE #1 ***HAVE A STEWARDSHIP MENTALITY***

We actually do not own anything. God owns it all. This means we are stewards who manage the resources God has given us. Notice how this is emphasized in Scripture.

"Behold, to the Lord your God belong heaven and the highest heavens, the earth and all

that is in it" (Deut 10:14).¹ God owns everything. This means that everything that we have is actually His. He owns it and it is on loan to us. We are simply managing His property.

In the past I have had friends loan me expensive tools and equipment—some easily worth hundreds of dollars. I always treated them with care. Is this how we view the things we own? Do we treat them with care because they are really God's?

God asked Job, "Who has given to Me that I should repay him? Whatever is under the whole heaven is Mine" (Job 41:11). Everything is God's. Thus the possessions we "own" are actually His. "The earth is the Lord's, and all it contains, the world, and those who dwell in it" (Ps 24:1). This would include us. We are God's possession. He owns us.

"For every beast of the forest is Mine, the cattle on a thousand hills. I know every bird of the mountains, and everything that moves in the field is Mine. If I were hungry I would not tell you, for the world is Mine, and all it contains" (Ps 50:10-12). "'The silver is Mine and the gold is Mine,' declares the Lord of hosts" (Haggai 2:8). "Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body" (1 Cor 6:19-20).

From these texts it is evident that God owns everything, including us. We own nothing. Therefore, if we ever lose anything, we do not really lose it, because we never owned it.² God simply took away what was His.

Recognizing that God is the owner is only half the story. Since God is the owner, this means we are stewards who manage God's possessions. We need to adopt a steward's mentality toward the assets God has entrusted (not given) to us. This means how we handle money and possessions reveals who we really believe their true owner is—us or God.³ If we really believe God is the owner, we should constantly be asking ourselves, "Lord, what do You want me to do with Your money and Your possessions?" When this lays hold of us then we will have a proper perspective of our stewardship. Our thinking will change from, "What can I spend this money on for myself," to "Lord, where do you want me to invest your money?" We need to find out what the owner wants done with His assets and then carry out His will.

This principle is foundational to all others. Do you assent to this or do you really believe it? If you really believe this it will affect every financial decision you make.

Stewardship Means Accountability

God will hold us accountable to how we spend His money. We see this in the parable of the talents.

¹ All Scripture quotations are taken from the *Updated New American Standard Bible* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1995).

² John MacArthur, *Whose Money Is It, Anyway? A Biblical Guide to Using God's Wealth* (Nashville: Word Publishing, 2000), 10.

³ Randy Alcorn, *Money, Possessions, and Eternity*, revised and updated (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 2003), 152.

For it is just like a man about to go on a journey, who called his own slaves and entrusted his possessions to them. To one he gave five talents, to another, two, and to another, one, each according to his own ability; and he went on his journey....Now after a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. (Matt 25:14-15, 19)

This parable is a picture of the Lord Jesus Christ. He has entrusted to each of us—His slaves—with some of His possessions and resources [what He calls *talents*, which equates to money (Matt 25:18)]. He gives each of us according to our ability (Matt 25:15). Our Master is the one who determines what each of us will have. So some will have more than others; others will have less. Having more simply means a person has more responsibility. Each of us must learn how to properly use what we have so that it brings glory to Christ.

Some day our Master is going to return and each one of us will give an account to Him of what we did with His resources (Matt 25:19). Paul writing to believers, says, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad” (2 Cor 5:10). Every Christian will “be recompensed,” or paid back, for the things they have done in the body, “whether good or bad”! This does not mean we will lose our salvation. But it does mean God is going to hold us accountable for how we managed His resources. He will reward us accordingly or take away reward.

Think about this: God has entrusted to each one of us unrestricted access to certain resources. This is a privilege subject to abuse. Randy Alcorn writes,

As His money managers, God trusts us to set our own salaries. We draw needed funds from His wealth to pay our living expenses. One of our central spiritual decisions is determining what is a reasonable amount to live on. Whatever that amount is—and it will legitimately vary from person to person—we shouldn’t hoard or spend the excess. After all, it’s His, not ours. And He has something to say about where to put it.⁴

Stewardship Requires Faithfulness

He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much; and he who is unrighteous in a very little thing is unrighteous also in much. Therefore if you have not been faithful in the use of unrighteous wealth, who will entrust the true riches to you? And if you have not been faithful in the use of that which is another’s, who will give you that which is your own? (Luke 16:10-12)

Often people will say, “If I just had a little more money, everything would be all right. Then I would be able to give more. Then I would be able to get out of debt.” What would Jesus say? If a person cannot manage the little he has, he will not be able to handle more. If a person is not faithful with a little, he will not be faithful with much. If a person is dishonest and selfish in

⁴ Randy Alcorn, *The Treasure Principle: Discovering the Secret of Joyful Giving* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, 2001), 26.

the use of the few dollars that he has, then he will still be dishonest and selfish if he has more. The issue is not how a person would handle a larger amount of money, but what are they doing with the money they have. Are they being faithful? Are they using God's money wisely?

So principle number one is: we own nothing; we are simply stewards of God's resources. We must learn how to faithfully manage what God has given us for He will hold us accountable.

PRINCIPLE #2

THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF SERVING TWO MASTERS

"No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth" (Luke 16:13). Having a master means we are slaves.⁵ We are slaves of Christ. He is our Lord and Master. He has bought us with a price, thus we are not to give our allegiance to another.

Jesus says that it is impossible to serve God and money. He does not say, "You *must* not serve God and wealth." He specifically says, "You *cannot* serve God and wealth." Since a person is incapable of serving God and money, he will either love God or he will love money. He will either hate God or he will hate money. He will either hold to God or he will hold to money. There is no middle ground. Some relationships by their very nature are mutually exclusive. This is one of them. Either God is on the throne or money is on the throne. If a person's life is bound up in wealth and material things, this shows that he does not love Christ but despises and hates Him. Their devotion is to mammon, which is a false god. They are an idolater and are serving the god of materialism. A person "cannot serve God and wealth."

Christ says, "Give me your heart." Wealth says, "No, give it to me." God says, "Be content with such things as you have." Wealth says, "Get as much as you can get." God says, "Be honest and just in all your dealings." Wealth says, "Cheat, steal and lie if you can gain by it." God says, "Be generous and give." Wealth says, "Hold on to all; save for a rainy day. Spend it on yourself."⁶ God says, "Give and it will be given to you." Wealth says, "Invest and then you can give to God later." Thus we see the commands of God are in direct contradiction to the philosophies of the world. This is why we need to understand what God says and abide by it because if we are not careful we will become a slave of money instead of being a slave of Christ. So though we might have both God and money, we cannot serve both God and money. Who is your master—God or money? Who are you a slave to?

⁵ We have already seen this implied in principle number one.

⁶ *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Acts to Revelation*, vol. 6 (United States: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), 66.

PRINCIPLE #3

GUARD AGAINST EVERY FORM OF GREED

Imagine being in the role of a financial counselor. A successful, hard working, middle-aged businessman enters your office seeking financial advice. His business has excelled, and so he tells you that he is planning to invest his profits in a diversified, but safe, portfolio. This way he will have plenty stored up for the future. He then plans to take it easy, retire early, and maybe do some traveling and golfing. What would you tell him?

Would you say something like, "This sounds good. You have worked hard. God has blessed your business. If you can save enough to take care of yourself the rest of your life, by all means do it!"⁷ Is this the advice you would give? Doesn't it seem reasonable? Isn't this the American Dream?

This is a philosophy of the world. We must evaluate all such philosophies through the grid of Scripture. What does God say? We do not have to speculate. The word of God tells us what He would say.

Then he said, "This is what I will do: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry.'" But God said to him, "You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared?" So is the man who stores up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God. (Luke 12:18-21)

In this passage we meet the rich businessman. We are not told that he made his money dishonestly, so it appears he was an honest, hardworking man, whom God had blessed. He had done so well that he decides to tear down his barns and build larger ones to store up his grain. He now can retire and enjoy the good life. This is the so-called American dream and many have bought into this worldly philosophy.

Notice what God thought of the rich man. God called him a fool because that very night his soul was required of him (Luke 12:20). The rich man had stored up treasures for himself.⁸ He never thought in terms of eternity and the brevity of life. He never considered that God may have blessed him so he could give to others. He was not rich toward God, but only toward himself, which revealed the state of his soul. He was a fool.

So as financial counselor, how did you do? Was your thinking in line with what God says, or with what the world says? Doesn't this show that many times our beliefs about money are not only radically different from God's but diametrically opposed to them?⁹ We need to change how we view money and possessions so that they line up with how God views them.

⁷ Alcorn, *Money, Possessions and Eternity*, 7.

⁸ Notice all the personal pronouns: "This is what *I* will do: *I* will tear down *my* barns and build larger ones, and there *I* will store all *my* grain and *my* goods" (Luke 12:18). Clearly, he was only thinking of himself and not God.

⁹ Alcorn, *Money, Possessions and Eternity*, 8.

This is why our foundation about money and possessions must be from the word of God.

The reason Jesus told this parable of the rich fool was because of a greedy man:

Someone in the crowd said to Him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me." But He said to him, "Man, who appointed Me a judge or arbitrator over you?" Then He said to them, "Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions." (Luke 12:13-15)

Jesus earnestly warns us to guard against every form of greed. Greed is the intense and selfish desire for wealth, possessions, and power, and it takes on many forms. We are cautioned to watch carefully against *every* form it may come in.

In this passage we see one form of greed. This man wanted a share in the family inheritance. He probably had a "right" to this, yet it was still a form of greed. He was consumed with having possessions. Greed often surfaces in covetousness, which is the longing for and preoccupation with having things that God has not given us. This is what a person dreams of and thinks about. Does this mean we are not to have dreams or we are not to make plans? No, we simply must beware that it is not because of greed.

At the heart of greed is a belief that life consists of your possessions, and that what makes a person happy and feel important is having things (Luke 12:15). People think that the more they have, the more happy they will be. But life does not consist of having possessions. Life is having Christ. He is the only one who can truly satisfy the longings of your soul. He is the bread of life who satisfies our hunger and who quenches our every thirst (John 4:14; 6:35). This is why greed, ultimately, amounts to idolatry (Col 3:5), because a person replaces Christ with something else. You cannot love God and money.

Paul warns us about this, "But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs" (1 Tim 6:9-10). For some people, investing in real estate, mutual funds or stocks will become a snare to them and plunge them into ruin. It will become their god, because it will consume them, so they should not do it. Paul says, "But flee from these things, you man of God (run quickly in the opposite direction), and pursue (run after other things), righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness" (1 Tim 6:11). What should consume a Christian is Christ and becoming like Him, not money and possessions, or how our stocks are doing. What consumes you? What are you running after? Is it God or money? Guard yourself against every form of greed.

PRINCIPLE #4

DO NOT BE PRESUMPTUOUS

Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit." Yet you do not know what

your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. Instead, you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that." But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil. Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin. (Jas 4:13-17)

James, in this passage, warns against being presumptuous. He is describing people who made ambitious plans and major decisions without ever seeking direction from God. They would never admit to making decisions without God, but there are certain indicators that show this is exactly what they did.

How do we see this? First, they made plans assuming all things would continue as they had been. "We will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit" (Jas 4:13). Their presumption was in the stability of earthly things. Many people still make this deadly presumption. For example, many people thought: "The housing market has gone up for the last ten years, so it will continue to go up." Then, based upon that presumption many made very unwise decisions. One of the ways to guard against presumption like this is to seek godly counsel.

Recently I was contemplating a strategy to pay off my mortgage quicker. I spent an hour on the phone talking to the CEO of a company who had developed a unique way to do this. It sounded very intriguing, but I wanted a second opinion. So I called a Christian friend of mine who is a banker and explained the plan to him. He agreed it was a very good plan but showed me its one major drawback. It had a variable interest rate based on the prime rate. So I asked, "Does the prime rate fluctuate very much?" Over the last ten years it has not fluctuated very significantly at all. It has slowly but steadily decreased from about 9% down to its current level of 3.25%. Thus, for the last ten years it has been relatively stable. But that was not the case back in the late seventy's and early eighty's. In a three year span the prime rate went from about 6% to over 21%! Things do not always stay the same. We should not presume they will.

Second, presumption is seen when one trusts in his own power and resources to get things done regardless of what God might do. In verse thirteen the force of the subject and verb is really over every phrase. So we could interpret it this way: "Today or tomorrow *we will* go to such and such a city, and *we will* spend a year there and *we will* engage in business and *we will* make a profit" (Jas 4:13). This is what these people had determined to do. Now, there is nothing wrong in planning what you would like to do, but it is clear these people had left out God. They assumed they were in control and they could determine what they wanted to do. They left no room for God. We must not be so presumptuous and arrogant (Jas 5:16). We must leave room for the sovereignty of God: "If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that" (Jas 5:15). God determines what will happen tomorrow. Thus, we should follow the wisdom of Proverbs: "The mind of man plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps" (Pro 16:9). Make plans, but let the Lord change your plans and direct your steps.

Third, presumption is seen when someone is focused on temporary things and not eternal ones. What was important to these people was doing business and making money. They had totally lost sight that life is short. "You do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away" (Jas 4:14). Life is temporary. It will soon be over and you will meet your Maker. We can become so preoccupied

in our investments or our portfolio that we lose sight of eternity. We must guard against this. We are not to be presumptuous.

PRINCIPLE #5 **LEARN CONTENTMENT**

Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me. (Phil 4:11-13)

Paul tells us he *learned* to be content. We must all learn this, because it is not something that comes naturally. Paul had learned from experience. He had discovered how to be content in whatever circumstances God had him. Notice, contentment really has nothing to do with outward circumstances, but everything to do with inward attitudes. Paul depended upon the providence of God to provide for him day to day, and this satisfied him.

Think about how easy it is to become dis-contented. Adam and Eve were in paradise. There was no sin. God superabundantly had provided for their every need. God only put one restriction upon them, yet they became discontent over that one restriction.

God created Satan as the highest angel, and he was perfect in beauty. There was no one higher than him but God. Satan was top angel, yet that did not satisfy him; he became discontent. He wanted to be like God. People can have beautiful homes, fancy cars, the latest fashions, and still not be content. On the other hand, a person can have very little, and be content and happy with what God has given him. Have you learned to be content in whatever situation God has you?

Paul learned the secret of contentment. "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me" (Phil 4:13). The secret of contentment is Christ. The Lord Jesus empowered Paul to be content. Your possessions, position, home, or car, will never give you contentment. It can only be found in Christ. He promises to empower us so we can be content in whatever circumstance we may find ourselves in.

Our contentment comes from God. A Christian should be content that God loves him, that God has forgiven his sins, and that God has given him a gift so he can serve Him. A Christian should be content that God is his Father, knowing that He is concerned for him and cares for him. Contentment is resting in God's character. He is sovereignly in control of all things. He is all powerful and can provide for our every need. He is all wise and knows what's best for us. He is all seeing and knows our needs and our desires. A godly person is motivated not by a love of money or possessions, but by the love of God.

Are you satisfied with what God has given you? Or are you always distracted by what you don't have? You will never be truly satisfied apart from Christ. Contentment comes from within, from a satisfaction only found in Christ.

The right perspective of contentment is: “If we have food and covering, with these we shall be content” (1 Tim 6:8). In Proverbs 30, Agur requests of God, “Give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is my portion, that I not be full and deny You and say, ‘Who is the Lord?’ Or that I not be in want and steal, and profane the name of my God” (Pro 30:8-9). Do you pray this? Do you ask the Lord not to give you too much, because you know that you will forget him? This seems to fly right in the face of most thoughts on money, doesn’t it? One thing this emphasizes is that we need to live a contented, simple lifestyle. We should never want to get to the place where we do not need to live by faith. We must learn contentment.

PRINCIPLE #6

UNDERSTAND THE DANGER OF DEBT

The average American family has over \$5,000 in credit card debt, yet we live in one of the most affluent societies in history.¹⁰ This is the average. At the end of 2009, consumer debt in the United States (which does not include mortgage debt) was nearly 2.5 trillion dollars. This works out to nearly \$8,100 for every man, woman, and child that lives in the United States.¹¹ Why are so many people in debt when we live in such an affluent nation?

Debt is often a symptom of a deeper problem. Sometimes people are in debt because they are poor and are in hard economic times, and the Scriptures recognize this (Ex 22:25; Deut 15:7-10; Matt 5:42; Luke 6:35). When someone finds himself in this situation, his family and the church family is to help him. But often people are in debt because of other things. They get in debt because they are covetous, and want what other people have and want it now. They are impatient and do not wait for God to provide what they desire. They are in debt because they are lazy and did not work, plan, or save. They are in debt because they are impulsive and lack self-control. They are in debt because they presumed upon God. They are in debt because they did not trust that God would provide for them, so they took matters into their own hands. Debt is often a symptom of these other things, and many times a combination of these things.

The Scriptures severely warn us about the different perils of debt. These warnings are for our good, for God knows the trouble debt brings. Here is what He says, “The rich rules over the poor, and the borrower becomes the lender’s slave” (Pro 22:7). Debt is likened to slavery. It naturally brings with it a slavish relation of dependence. If you have ever purchased something on credit or bought something with a loan, you know the feeling of this. You are under the weight of that obligation until that debt is relieved. If we want to avoid slavery, we should make it our endeavor to stay out of debt.

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The Federal Reserve reported that the average household in 2009 carried nearly \$5,100 in credit card debt. “Credit Card Debt Statistics,” <http://www.money-zine.com/Financial-Planning/Debt-Consolidation/Credit-Card-Debt-Statistics/> (accessed October 1, 2010).

¹¹

“Consumer Debt Statistics,” <http://www.money-zine.com/Financial-Planning/Debt-Consolidation/Consumer-Debt-Statistics/> (accessed October 1, 2010).

The Bible pictures the one who lends as being under a blessing and the one who borrows as under a curse. "The Lord will open for you His good storehouse, the heavens, to give rain to your land in its season and to bless all the work of your hand; and you shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow" (Deut 28:12). It is the righteous who is gracious and gives and who is gracious and lends (Ps 37:21, 26). It is a blessing to be in the position to lend money rather than to borrow money. God told Israel, however, that if they disobeyed Him then, "The alien who is among you shall rise above you higher and higher....He shall lend to you, but you will not lend to him; he shall be the head, and you will be the tail" (Deut 28:43-44). God promised that if they kept His commandments they would have enough to give and lend to others in need, but if they disobeyed, He would remove His blessing and they would be in need.

Debt has obligations. "The wicked borrows and does not pay back, but the righteous is gracious and gives" (Ps 37:21). The person who borrows is under obligation to repay, and if he does not he is counted among the wicked. The righteous person—a Christian—is under obligation before God and men to repay. Otherwise, he will dishonor the name of Christ.

Understanding the danger of debt should cause a Christian to seriously consider if going into debt is the wisest thing to do. He should check his motives and consider how he is going to pay off this debt before he ever gets into it.

PRINCIPLE #7 ***BE A DILIGENT WORKER***

The primary means God has given us to earn money is through work. Thus, God expects us to work. Paul told the Thessalonians, "Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life and attend to your own business and *work with your hands*, just as we commanded you" (1 The 4:11, emphasis added). Later he told them, "If anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either" (2 The 3:10).

Work is good. There is a dignity to it. This is because God is a worker, and He created us in His image to work. "God completed His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done" (Gen 2:2). God works. He created Adam, placed him in a garden, and gave him work to do. He was to "cultivate it and keep it" (Gen 2:15). Work is seen as something good, which we are to enjoy. Solomon writes, "Here is what I have seen to be good and fitting: to eat, to drink and *enjoy oneself in all one's labor* in which he toils under the sun during the few years of his life which God has given him; for this is his reward" (Ecc 5:18, emphasis added).

This is where we need to be careful. We are told by the world that we need to become financially independent so we no longer have to work. Work is viewed as a necessary evil to accomplishing our goal. But should becoming financially independent be our objective? There are no verses in Scripture that encourage us to stop working and become financially independent. As a matter of fact there are principles in Scripture that seem to warn against this. "Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction" (1 Tim 6:9). "Do not weary yourself to

gain wealth, cease from your consideration of it. When you set your eyes on it, it is gone. For wealth certainly makes itself wings like an eagle that flies toward the heavens" (Pro 23:4-5).

People justify this ambition for financial independence by saying, "I will be able to give more." They may be able to give more in amount, but they will often give less of a percentage. If they have not been faithful in a little, they will not be faithful with much (cf. Luke 16:10). People also justify becoming financially independent by saying, "I will be able to serve more." Doesn't God want us to serve Him right where we are at? Hasn't He placed us on our jobs for a reason?

God wants us to be diligent workers and He promises to bless our work. We are not working for our employer, we are working for Christ. Paul says, "Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve" (Col 3:23-24). We are to work our hardest; we are to be the most diligent worker we can be, and our real Boss promises to reward us. Many times He rewards us now with bonuses, promotions, and so forth. But even if He does not reward us now, we will be rewarded in the future.

Proverbs says, "Poor is he who works with a negligent hand, but the hand of the diligent makes rich" (Pro 10:4). Being diligent provides dividends. "Wealth obtained by fraud dwindles, but the one who gathers by labor increases it" (Pro 13:11). We increase our wealth through labor. God wants us to be diligent workers and enjoy our work.

PRINCIPLE #8 ***DISTINGUISH BETWEEN SAVING & HOARDING***

Biblical Teaching on Saving

"There is precious treasure and oil in the dwelling of the wise, but a foolish man swallows it up" (Pro 21:20). In the house of the wise there is treasure and oil. In other words, the wise, by diligence and care, store up and save, and are able to increase what they have. They proportion their expenses to their income and are able to save. The foolish, on the other hand, devour all they have, swallowing it up greedily, with nothing to show for it, and nothing stored. They mispend what they have and end up with nothing. So, according to this verse it is wise to save, and wise to anticipate future needs. The foolish, however, consume their resources with no consideration of tomorrow.

Solomon instructs us to learn from the ants, who store up for future needs. "Go to the ant, O sluggard, observe her ways and be wise, which, having no chief, officer or ruler, prepares her food in the summer and gathers her provision in the harvest" (Pro 6:6-8). Ants prepare in the summer when there is an abundance for the winter when there will be lack. Only a short sighted, lazy person would fail to store up provisions for upcoming times of predictable need.

These predictable needs are expenses that come up regularly (automobile maintenance, Christmas gifts, vacations are things that come up every year). It would be wise to plan, save, and set aside money each month for these expenses.

God gave Joseph wisdom to devise a careful savings plan in light of seven years of famine that was coming to Egypt. Joseph encouraged Pharaoh,

To exact a fifth of the produce of the land of Egypt in the seven years of abundance. Then let them gather all the food of these good years that are coming, and store up the grain for food in the cities under Pharaoh's authority, and let them guard it. Let the food become as a reserve for the land for the seven years of famine which will occur in the land of Egypt, so that the land will not perish during the famine. (Gen 41:34b-36)

This passage implies a number of things. Let me point out two. First, when things are going well, it would be wise to save because things will not always be going well. The majority of the Egyptians did not save *anything* in all their prosperity. They spent it all. Second, we should plan to save for long term things, not just short term ones. This might include saving for your child's college education, a remodeling project, to replace a car, or retirement. The point is, we are not to save without a purpose, but for a specific cause.

There are also wrong reasons to save. Some people save out of greed, or because they are miserly. Others are anxious about the future, so they save out of fear. This brings us to our next point.

The Dangers of Hoarding

Hoarding is saving taken to the extreme. It is accumulating money for no purpose other than to ward off a *possible* future disaster, or to provide wealth for many years to come. The classic example of this is the rich fool, which we saw earlier (Luke 12:18-19).

Hoarding is an attempt to completely cover all our financial bases so that we have no need for God. A common goal of hoarders is to achieve financial independence. But what are they trying to get independent from? It is from God, our family, or our Christian brothers and sisters?

The person who stockpiles riches to cover every conceivable scenario ends up trusting in his riches instead of God. "He who trusts in his riches will fall, but the righteous will flourish like the green leaf" (Pro 11:28). Riches are a false security. They will fail you. Either they will be lost in this life, or they will be lost when you die because you cannot take them with you. Our trust is to be in God who supplies all our needs "according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus" (Phil 4:19). Our goal should not be financial independence. Our goal is to trust in God that He will supply all our needs as we seek first His kingdom.

The New Testament teaches that we are not to stockpile God's resources, but we are to be givers of God's resources. We are to use what we need and give away the rest. Our abundance is a provision for others' needs. "At this present time your abundance being a supply for their need" (2 Cor 8:14). God gives us "an abundance for every good deed" (2 Cor 9:8). God enriches us "in everything for all liberality" (2 Cor 9:11). Whatever role saving money has in our lives, it should always be second to giving, and it must never become a substitute for trusting God.¹²

¹² Alcorn, *Money, Possessions and Eternity*, 330.

Discerning Between Saving and Hoarding

So, how do we distinguish between saving and hoarding? Saving is a means of not presuming upon God. If God has given us an abundance there is a good possibility that He would want us to save some of that and not spend it all on ourselves. Hoarding is a means of replacing God. Here is one way to distinguish between the two: when I save I lay aside money for future need, but if I sense God's leading, I will give away what I have saved to meet greater needs. On the other hand, when I hoard, I am unwilling to part with what I have saved to meet another's need, because my *possible* future needs outweighs their actual *present* needs. Hence we fail to love our neighbor as ourselves because of our hoarding.¹³ It is one thing to save for a rainy day, it is another to save for a rainy decade (or century!). In seeking to provide for our future needs, we should not neglect those who are currently needy. Our plenty is to be a supply of others' needs (2 Cor 8:14).

In the above verses you may have sensed a tension, for the Bible teaches that it is both wise to save and a blessing to give. So should we save for future needs or should we give money away? Are we presuming on God when we give money away that He may want us to save?

The wisdom of our world tells us that we are to save a certain amount of money no matter what. The Bible seems to indicate, however, that giving always has precedence over saving. The Bible never, ever condemns a person for giving too much. Can you imagine standing in glory with Jesus and hear Him rebuking someone for giving too much? I can't! The Bible commends those who gave even in their poverty. The Macedonians are our example of generous liberal givers and they were people who had no retirement, and no savings. Instead they were in "deep poverty" (2 Cor 8:2). Yet they were commended for giving "beyond their ability" (2 Cor 8:3).

When we give, God promises to meet all of our needs (Matt 6:33; 2 Cor 9:6, 8, 10-11). He promises that when we give it will be given to us. "They will pour into your lap a good measure—pressed down, shaken together, and running over" (Luke 6:38).

PRINCIPLE #9 *SEEK FIRST THE KINGDOM OF GOD*

For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they? And who of you by being worried can add a single hour to his life? And why are you worried about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin, yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which

¹³ Alcorn, *Money, Possessions and Eternity*, 333.

is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more clothe you? You of little faith! Do not worry, then, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear for clothing?' For the Gentiles eagerly seek all those things; for our heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own. (Matt 6:25-34)

This is a passage about worry and anxiety (Matt 6:25, 27, 28, 31, 34). Jesus describes people who were worried about what they would eat or how they would clothe themselves. They were overwhelmed by their circumstances and worried if they would have enough for tomorrow. Because of their insecurity they were tempted to hoard up treasures on earth.

Jesus instructs them to look to the birds. They do not sow or reap. They do not stockpile things in barns. They have nothing saved, yet they do not worry because God graciously provides for them. God will graciously provide for us as well because we are more valuable than birds. We simply must trust Him.

Jesus had just explained that no one can serve two masters (Matt 6:24). A person cannot serve God and wealth. If someone is worried about what he is going to eat, and how he is going to clothe himself, he will be tempted to serve wealth. It will become his god. He will be consumed with taking care of his needs. But if he is serving God, if God is his master, then he can trust that God will provide for him and he can stop worrying (Matt 6:30). It is a matter of faith: "You of little faith!" (Matt 6:30). Will you trust God to provide for you?

The way a person shows he is trusting God is seen in verse thirty-three: "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things (that you were worrying about) will be added to you" (Matt 6:33). When we seek God first with our resources, He promises to meet all our needs. Our preoccupation, then, is to be on the kingdom of God, not on the things we do not have.

We are to seek God first and honor Him first. God's agenda must come before our own. "Honor the Lord from your wealth and from the first of all your produce" (Pro 3:9). The money we have are His resources and we are to use them for His glory.

The greatest motive we have for giving is Christ Himself. "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich" (2 Cor 8:9). Christians know the grace of our Lord Jesus. He was rich beyond measure. He is the creator and owner of all things. Yet, for our sakes, He became poor. He laid aside His glory and became poor for one reason: that His people might become rich. Paul is specifically thinking of Christ's death and what it accomplished for His people. We who were sinners and doomed to eternal death, became inheritors of eternal life. When we understand the grace of our Lord Jesus for us, this moves us to be generous, liberal givers like Him. If Christ has captivated your heart, then give to Him, worship Him, adore Him, and honor Him through your sacrificial giving.

When we give like this, He promises to provide everything we need. I have never seen Him fail to do this. "All these things *will* be added to you" (Matt 6:33). All the things you used to worry about, He will provide.

PRINCIPLE #10 *INVEST IN THE RIGHT PLACE*

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasure in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where you treasure is, there your heart will be also. (Matt 6:19-21)

Here Jesus is talking about smart investing. Investing in the stock market and mutual funds has its risks. Many people saw their portfolio dropped to half of its value in less than a two year period.¹⁴ There has to be a better place to invest your money, and Jesus gives the best possible place, which is guaranteed to pay the greatest dividends and it is not subject to any form of decay. He says, “Store up for yourselves treasure in heaven” (Matt 6:20).

Treasures on earth are subject to decay, being stolen, or rusting away. The word *rust* literally means to be eaten away. How many of your earthly treasures have been “eaten away”? Instead of investing in things that are temporary and with many risks, we must learn to invest in eternal things, that are permanent and that will not fade away. We are to invest in the kingdom of God.

All of us save things and invest in things. Jesus is simply telling us to be smart about where we invest. Jesus says, “Store up for *yourselves* treasures in heaven” (Matt 6:20, emphasis added). Jesus is giving us an incredible opportunity to trade temporary goods and currency for eternal rewards. By putting our money and possessions in His treasury while on earth (in other words, by investing in the kingdom of God), we will assure ourselves of eternal rewards far beyond comprehension. We can trade temporal possessions we cannot keep for eternal possessions we cannot lose.¹⁵ This is an incredible offer. What you keep you will lose, but what you invest and give to the kingdom of God you will receive back in heaven in a far better and permanent form. Anything we hang on to now will be lost forever, but whatever we put in God’s hands will be ours for eternity. If we give instead of keep, if we invest in the eternal instead of the temporary, we store up treasures in heaven that will never stop paying dividends.¹⁶

Jesus is commanding us to have a smart investment mentality. Before we spend money on things for ourselves we need to ask, what is the better investment for eternity? Could this money be better invested in the kingdom of God?

The reason it is so important to invest in eternal things is that your heart will follow your treasure (Matt 6:21). This is why it is not wise for some people to invest heavily in stocks (or many other things), because this is where their heart will go. It will become a snare to them. When our money is poured into the kingdom of God that is where our hearts will be. We need to become smart investors and invest in the right place.

¹⁴ As one friend put it: My 401k has become a 201k.

¹⁵ Alcorn, *Money, Possessions and Eternity*, 96.

¹⁶ Alcorn, *Money, Possessions and Eternity*, 96.

PRINCIPLE #11

LEARN THE LAW OF SOWING AND REAPING

“Now this I say, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully” (2 Cor 9:6). Paul, in the context is talking about giving and he compares it to sowing and reaping. Everyone knows that if you sow miserly, you will reap miserly, and if you sow generously you will reap generously. This is a simple law that always works.

Amazingly, Paul applies this law to giving. However a person gives (sparingly or bountifully) that is how he will reap. Since this is a law, it always works this way whether we believe it or not and whether we act on it or not.

This is a law that must be believed by faith because it does not make sense mathematically. How can a person give away money when things are tight and still have more than enough to live on? It does not add up on paper. Yet, we need to have this principle firmly fixed in our minds so that when we are tempted to doubt and not give for fear of loss, we may immediately remind ourselves that the Lord declares we are sowing.¹⁷ When a person gives money away it sets this law in motion. They will reap what they sow, and they will reap more than they sow. The reaping is always out of proportion to the sowing.¹⁸

The more a person gives the more they seem to have. Now I am not sure how this works but I do know that it is true, because I have seen it in action. The more my wife and I have sown, the more we have reaped.

Giving is a matter of faith. It is believing that this principle is true, that when you give your money away, you will still have enough to live on. God gives us this principle to encourage us to give bountifully, liberally, and generously. If we want God’s blessing on us and if we want Him to be generous to us, then we must learn to be generous to others. When we give bountifully, we will reap bountifully. God allows us to reap bountifully so we can give bountifully again. He enriches us “in everything *for* all liberality” (2 Cor 9:11, emphasis added).

By faith when you give you need to trust that “God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed” (2 Cor 9:8). God will make sure that when we give we will always have enough. Even more than that, God will make sure that we will have more than enough so we can give again. No one can out give God. By faith, we need to practice the law of sowing and reaping.

¹⁷ *Calvin’s Commentaries: 1 and 2 Corinthians*, vol. 20, trans. John Pringle (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2003), 309.

¹⁸ They will also reap later than they sow, which is why giving requires faith. We must believe that God will do what He promises.

BECOMING A GOOD STEWARD OF GOD'S RESOURCES

Plan

We must learn to faithfully manage what God has given us. To do this we must develop a plan of how to spend God's money based on the principles above.

The importance of planning is emphasized in Scripture. "The plans of the diligent lead surely to advantage, but everyone who is hasty comes surely to poverty" (Pro 21:5). If a person has a plan, if they know how much they are spending on certain expenses, this will help them avoid hasty decisions, for it is hasty decisions that lead to poverty.

"Know well the condition of your flocks, and pay attention to your herds, for riches are not forever" (Pro 27:23-24). Flocks and herds; were a way to measure a person's wealth. Thus we are encouraged to know well the condition of our resources. We need to carefully oversee the possessions God has given us.

To do this we must determine how much we make each month and subtract what we spend each month.¹⁹ If our monthly expenses exceed our monthly income, we need to make some changes. Evaluate why you are over spending (for example, too much debt, too much spent on entertainment, most of your money going to a mortgage you cannot afford, not honoring God from the first of your wealth, etc.). Once you have evaluated where you are, make cuts so that your expenses do not exceed your income.

Plan by Faith

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight" (Pro 3:5-6). Developing a plan with our resources begins with faith. We cannot lean on our own understanding, but we must trust in the principles God has given us in His word. We must acknowledge Him and He will direct our paths.

By faith "commit your works to the Lord and your plans will be established" (Pro 16:3). Commit to God that you want to establish your plans based on His principles. Be flexible. Understand that "the plans of the heart belong to man, but the answer of the tongue is from the Lord" (Pro 16:1). "The mind of man plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps" (Pro 16:9). Leave room for God to alter your plan. You may plan some things, but the Lord may send some unexpected thing your way: your car breaks down, or your hours at work are cut back, or you lose your job. This is God sovereignly testing you to see if you will, by faith, continue to trust in Him.

Seek Godly Counsel

If you are married review your financial situation with your spouse. After you develop a plan, it would be wise to go to someone you trust, who understands these principles and let

¹⁹ See Monthly Income and Expense Form, page 41.

them help you evaluate your plan. "Prepare plans by consultation" (Pro 20:18). "Without consultation, plans are frustrated, but with many counselors they succeed" (Pro 15:22). Seek godly advice from those who are applying these principles from God's word.

The goal is to be a good steward of the resources God has given us. It is to use His resources for His glory, so that when we stand before Christ we will hear, "Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master" (Matt 25:21).

MONTHLY INCOME AND EXPENSES

<u>INCOME</u>	<u>Monthly</u>	<u>Total</u>
Gross Wages	_____	
Interest/Dividends	_____	
Business Income	_____	
Other _____	_____	
Gross Total Monthly Income		_____
<u>EXPENSES</u>	<u>Monthly</u>	<u>Total</u>
Giving/Contributions		
Church (General, Mission, Bldg, Agape)	_____	
Other _____	_____	
Other _____	_____	
Total		_____
Taxes (Federal, State, Social Security, etc)	_____	
Debt Reduction		
Credit Cards	_____	
Student Loans	_____	
Personal Loans	_____	
Other _____	_____	
Total		_____
Savings		_____
Housing		
Mortgage or Rent	_____	
Home/Renter's Insurance	_____	
Property Taxes	_____	
Electricity/Gas	_____	
Water & Sewer	_____	
Trash	_____	
Communication (Phone, web, cable, etc)	_____	
Maintenance (Repairs, furnishings, etc)	_____	
Total		_____
Food (Include all household products)		_____
Automobile		
Gas	_____	
Insurance	_____	
Tax & License	_____	
Parking/Bridge fees	_____	
Maintenance, repairs	_____	
Car Payment	_____	
Car Replacement	_____	
Total		_____

Clothing		_____
Insurance/Medical		
Life Insurance	_____	
Disability Insurance	_____	
Health Insurance	_____	
Doctor Bills	_____	
Medications	_____	
Dental	_____	
Other _____	_____	
Total		_____
Entertainment/Recreation		
Eating Out/Activities	_____	
Babysitters	_____	
Vacation, Family Outings	_____	
Clubs and activities	_____	
Total		_____
Children		
Allowances	_____	
Camp	_____	
Schooling Costs	_____	
College/Tuition	_____	
Sports, Clubs, Activities	_____	
Other _____	_____	
Total		_____
Gifts		
Christmas	_____	
Birthdays, Anniversaries, etc	_____	
Total		_____
School		_____
Miscellaneous		
Beauty/Barber	_____	
Child Support	_____	
Animals (License, food, vet, etc)	_____	
Husband: misc. expenses	_____	
Wife: misc. expenses	_____	
Other _____	_____	
Total		_____
Total Monthly Expenses		_____

CASH FLOW ANALYSIS

Gross Monthly Income

Less:

Giving	_____
Taxes	_____
Debt	_____
Savings	_____
Housing	_____
Food	_____
Automobile	_____
Clothing	_____
Insurance/Medical	_____
Entertainment/Recreation	_____
Children	_____
Gifts	_____
School	_____
Miscellaneous	_____

Total Living Expenses

Cash Flow Margin

Your “Cash Flow Margin” should be zero!