**Putting Your Financial House in Order**

**Sermon**

Scripture: Proverbs 27:23, 24

Many tithe-paying Christians believe that their financial responsibility to God ends after returning their tithe and giving offerings. As a result, some have experienced needless financial hardship.

In the Bible, we read about some people who lost their salvation over money. In Genesis 19, Lot’s wife became a pillar of salt after she looked back at Sodom. Even after being saved from the destruction of Sodom, she perished because her heart was attached to her material possessions that were destroyed by fire. In Acts 5, Ananias and Sapphira following the example of the apostle Barnabas, sold their land to contribute to the needy. They could have chosen to give only a portion of their proceeds, but they promised to return the entire amount to the apostle Peter and the church. However, they secretly withheld a portion of the proceeds and lied to Peter. Ananias and Sapphira died as a result.

Our money management is important because it reflects our walk with God.

• According to Billy Graham, “our checkbook is a theological document, it will tell you who or what you worship.” Our money management practices may also determine where we spend eternity.

• What is worship? Worship is defined as “reverent honor and homage paid to God or a sacred personage, or to any object regarded as sacred,” ([www.dictionary.com](http://www.dictionary.com)). And when a person worships an object, such as money, rather than the living God, it is idolatry.

• Idolatry is defined as extreme admiration, love, or reverence for something or someone.

A person may not realize he or she is “worshipping” money. But, as Billy Graham reminded us, when we use our money for things that are either against God’s purposes or do not help further them, we are not being faithful to God with our finances.

• Worship is giving the best of what He has given to us:

 Time

 Talents (abilities)

 Temple (body)

 Treasure (money and possessions)

• Psalm 100 is a beautiful expression of what it means to worship God:

“Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth. Worship the LORD with gladness; come before him with joyful songs. Know that the LORD is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture. Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name. for the LORD is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations,” (NIV).

• And Mark 12:30 tells us:

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength,” (NIV).

“But where do I begin?” you may ask. “How do I put my financial house in order?”

**Where to Begin**

• 1. We must know our financial situation.

• Proverbs 27:23, 24, tell us, “Be sure you know the condition of your flocks, give careful attention to your herds; for riches do not endure forever, and a crown is not secure for all generations.” In Bible times, wealth was measured by crops and animals as it was an agrarian society. Although this is still the case in some cultures, the western world uses cash and its equivalent to measure wealth. • Therefore, we need to know our *assets*—what we own—and our *liabilities*—what we owe. Assets includes cash, homes, vehicles, furniture, etc. Liabilities include our debts: mortgages, student loan, car note, credit card balances, etc.

 • 2. We must put God first.

 According to Proverbs 3:9, we are to honor God with our wealth and with the first fruit of all our crops. God requires us to return to him a tithe. • “You must set aside a tithe of your crops—one-tenth of all the crops you harvest each year,” Deuteronomy 14:22. In our society, that means that God ought to be first in our salary and wages, and we do so by returning a tithe and giving of a generous offering.

 • The tithe is returned:

* As a test of our loyalty
* From received blessings
* As an act of worship
* For our benefit

 Here is a sample paystub for a New York City residence earning $35,000 and getting paid semi-monthly.

 Gross Pay $1,667.67 Federal Withholding $ 168.80 Social Security $ 103.33 Medicare $ 24.17

State Tax $ 63.90

City Tax $ 41.07

 State Disability Insurance $ 1.30

 Medical Insurance $ 50.00

 Retirement: 401K $ 100.00

 **Net Pay $1,115.10**

 Although the employee takes home $1,115.10, the salary is $1,667.67 and the tithe is to be calculated on the gross as that’s the increase. The tithe on this salary is $166.67. The offering is whatever one desires to give. “Each of you should give what you decide in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver,” (2 Corinthians 9:7, NIV). Many follow a systematic giving plan and give five percent as offering. In this case, it would be $83.33. Before I even had a job, I purposed that my offering will be equal to or more than my tithe. The entire tithe goes to the conference, so I believe my church should be supported in the same manner. Tithe should be returned regularly, systematically, and before paying bills.

 • We must determine how to calculate tithe.

There is often a debate on what is deemed income for tithing purposes. *Income includes all that represents an increase, whether earned or unearned income.* • Examples include (but are not limited to): Salary, wages, tips, vacation pay, sick pay, stipend, honorarium, overtime, bonuses, jury duty, social security, retirement income, investment, interest, welfare, litigation settlement, cash gifts, alimony, child support, net self-employed income.

 Some retirees are confused as to what portion of their retirement income should be tithed, since they tithed on their money during their working years. One could verify with their retirement plan contributor as to what portion of retirement income represents contribution. For Social Security income you can be taxed up to 85 percent, so you may estimate 15 percent as your contribution. Your contribution is often so small that many tithe on the entire amount. The truth is: You can’t out give God.

 There are other sources of income that many question whether or not they should return tithe for them. Tax refund is a common one. When your tax refund is simply a refund for overpayment of taxes, there is no increase. For example, you paid $3,000.00 in federal income taxes for the year but got a refund of $980.00. This is most likely an overpayment for a refund and does not represent an increase. Using the same payment, if your refund is $8,500 as a result of credits received, then this represents an increase and is subject to tithe. Loans and reimbursements do not represent increase and are not subject to tithe.

• We must determine how to submit tithe.

 There are many ways we can submit our tithe.

• Tithe is returned to the conference through the local church via:

Envelope (during worship service)

Online Giving through link on church’s website

Wire Transfers

Bill Pay

Debit Card

I strongly discourage the use of credit card for tithing as you want to give directly from income received immediately upon receipt.

 I am old-fashioned and was reluctant to use modern methods of submitting tithes and offering, but I changed my mind after a hacking experience. I was paid on the 15th of the month, which fell on a Tuesday. On that same day, I wrote out my tithe and offering check, then paid all my other bills online, leaving only my tithe and offering amount on my checking account.

 On Sabbath I submitted my check during worship service. On Sunday morning I returned my bank’s call (they left me a message on Sabbath). The banker informed me that my account was hacked. I informed the representative of my outstanding check payable to my church. The bank cashed the church’s check even before refunding the amount that was hacked. I was happy that the check did not bounce. But as a result, I vowed that God’s money will get to the storehouse’s account before my vendors get paid.

 • We must create a budget.

 • A budget enables one to develop wise money management habits and cultivates discipline that enables a person to live within his or her means. The one who is able to prepare a budget and stick to it will spend wisely, reach financial goals, save for emergencies, retirement, and major purchases.

 The budget form shown on the slide can be found in the back of your workbook.

 A budget will include income from all sources. It will include expenses. The person who is self-employed may estimate income based on their prior year’s earnings. You may choose to prepare your budget annually or monthly or every pay period. Whichever time frame you choose is OK but be certain not to spend before having a spending plan.

 I prepare my budget in December of every year for the upcoming year. Changes are made during the year, but I usually stick to the plan. We may plan yet find things happen outside of our control. That’s why our budgets should be placed in God’s hand.

 • 6. We must determine to save.

 • The Bible encourages savings in Proverbs 6:6-8, “Go to the aunt you sluggard; consider its ways and be wise! It has no commander, no overseer or ruler, yet it stores its provision in summer and gathers its food at harvest.”

 • Include savings in your budget. You should begin by creating a thousand-dollar emergency fund and build up to having six months’ worth of living expenses in savings.

 • Opt for automatic savings through payroll deductions. In that case, if you don’t see it, you won’t miss it!

• Save at the best interest rate. Online savings and your Union’s Revolving Fund are great ways to save.

 • Diversity your investments. Seek advice.

• Save for Retirement. For those whose employers offer a retirement plan, please enroll. Whether or not the employer contributes, you are saving. You may choose a Roth or a traditional retirement plan based on an estimate of your future income needs. If you are looking for immediate tax benefits, you may opt for a traditional plan. If you are seeking benefits during retirement, a Roth is better—especially for those expecting to have high income during retirement or intending to pass on funds to their beneficiaries.

 • Save for your children’s education.

• It is very unfortunate that many have accepted student loans as the norm for paying for education. Parents should be encouraged to save for their children’s education. Research the 529 College Savings Plan, which is tax deductible. Train children to work and save at an early age so they can participate in their educational savings. Teach children to perform well so they can quality for scholarships. Apply to affordable colleges. Select a field of study that offers a marketable career. If you must borrow, only borrow what is needed.

 • 7. We must avoid debt.

 Debt has become the new normal for purchasing the things we want but can’t afford. The Bible tells us in Romans 12:1, 2 that we should not be conformed to this world but should be transformed by the renewing of our minds. When it comes to borrowing, Christians appear to be doing it just as the world does. We are to be different and our financial practices should not pattern that of those who do not know Christ.

 While the Bible does not condemn debt, the more than 26 references to debt are negative. • Proverbs 22:7 describes debt: “The rich rule over the poor, and the borrower is slave to the lender.” Debt is living today on tomorrow’s presumed income. And this is not a healthy financial practice as it prohibits one from experiencing financial freedom. When consumed with debt, giving becomes a challenge.

 We may get into debt due to unfortunate circumstances like illness, loss of a job, death in the family, unexpected bills, reduction in income, and co-signing loans for others. But often, debt is a result of a consumption lifestyle: the desire to keep up with technology and others, unwillingness to sacrifice, poor financial management, little or no savings, addictions, etc. Creditors have made credit easily available, therefore it becomes easy to get into debt.

If you have a problem with debt, God is able to help you overcome, but there are steps you must take. A few of those steps are:

• Obtain a free credit report from one of the major credit bureau to analyze your overall credit situation.

• Destroy credit cards and seek God’s guidance on repayment and self-discipline.

• Create a resolution plan. Include payments in your budget and make sacrifices to pay off as quickly as possible. Cut costs where necessary. A great way to do so is by doing things yourself. For example, instead of buying lunch every day, cook. Wash your own hair rather than go to the salon. Avoid going out with friends whose idea of fun is going to the mall every weekend. Avoid commercials that would prompt you to making unnecessary purchases.

 The quicker debt is paid off, the less interest you pay. Paying at a high interest rate is like throwing away money that could be used for a good cause. The method and timing of payments will vary for each person. However, I found paying off the smaller debts first seems to work well for many. This method is called by various names. • Some call it the Debt Snowball. Others call it the Rollover Method. Here’s how it works:

 You may make large payments on the small debts while paying the minimum on the bigger debts, such as the home mortgage. When payment is completed on the smaller ones, apply that payment to another debt. Use unexpected cash towards debt, sell stuff to have more money to make payments, make sacrifices, and watch God work wonders for you.

 The form you see on shown on the slide can be found in the back of your workbook.

 Please don’t discontinue giving to God while you pay off your debt. Returning God’s tithe should never be compromised. It is by tithing we exercise obedience and trust in God. To know God and fear Him, we will obtain wisdom, and the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

 • In *Adventist Home*, page 393, Ellen White admonished, “Be determined never to incur another debt. Deny yourself a thousand things rather than run into debt. This has been the curse of your life, getting into debt. Avoid it as you would the smallpox. Make a solemn covenant with God that by His blessing you will pay your debts then owe no man anything if you live on porridge and bread.”

**Summary**

 The one who practices good financial habits by implementing counsel from this section will experience satisfaction and joy in the process. Knowing your financial potential, making the best use of what you have, and trusting God to do what you can’t give great joy and satisfaction.

 • Remember, a budget tells us who and what we worship. Who will you worship today?