

"WISDOM AND FINANCE"
September 23, 2018

Luke 15:1-3,11-16

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Call to Worship

Jesus Christ creates all things new, including us. In following Christ, we wake up to a whole new world. **We thereby gain a new perspective on everything. Knowing that Christ is re-creating the world and everything in it, transforming us and the world, how then should we live?**

Beloved of God, we are a new creation in Christ. **Everything old has passed away. See, everything has become new! All this is from God!**

Prayer of Invocation

God who makes all things new, renew us, restore us, revive us again! We need your love, your assurance, your wisdom, and your guidance. Let your presence be felt in our worship today. These things we pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Word

Luke 15:1-3,11-16

Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them."

So he told them this parable: **Jesus said, "There was a man who had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.' So he divided his property between them.**

A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. **When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need.**

So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. **He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything.**

You know those shelves of candy bars at the grocery checkout? Well, it has been a curse to me for years. When you go to buy groceries, after all of the decision making and resisting that has to be done as you go through aisle after aisle of good looking meal deals, it is just wrong. There they are in front of you – smaller portions of the best of the 'taste bud options of the day' so far. Sometimes my eyes seek them out even before I get to them and I am deciding which one to have, before I can even reach them.

Then before you reached for them, the mind starts thinking up what you are going to say to the clerk. I have several pretty good lines: 1. First smile and then say "I have a five mile drive home and need some energy." Of course I can justify that in my head anyway, cause it is true! 2. "They're not for me." I have to be desperate for that one as I recognize that I have just really told a fib and it could be considered a sin. Only chocolate can push me to that place...

3. Sometimes I will pick up and buy two so they will assume I am buying them for 'the kids' or at least not only just for myself. Sometimes I will throw in: "Hope they like this kind." It is not a lie, but they probably think I am referring to other people, when I really was speaking of my taste buds.

Those scenarios actually happened in the past. Now I almost always just say "No!" IT is easier now as I can't have it. I have type 2 diabetes. I hate that, even so. I have dropped 40 pounds over the last 10 years without it. I still do have treats, but I am very selective and don't buy on impulse as much.

Where Did All Our Money Go?

Living as prodigals From Jesus' description in Luke 15:1-3,11-16, we see that the prodigal son had the habits of squandering and spending. The word prodigal does not mean someone who wanders away or is lost. It literally means "one who wastes money." Many of us struggle with that habit. We're not worried about tomorrow; we want it today. The problem with that kind of thinking is that, for most of us, the "famine" eventually comes. It comes when we have spent everything we have and even a little bit of next year's income. So we use the credit card and charge it, and we go a little further into debt. Finally, we come to a place where we have nothing left, not even credit, and we can't figure out how we are we going to get by.

The more we make, the more we waste.

It seems that the more financially secure we become, the less we worry about spending money here and there. We waste a dollar on this or that, and we forget where it went. Money just seems to flow through our fingers. We're not as careful with our money as we should be. There are many ways we waste money, but there are two primary money-wasters that many of us struggle with. It is not necessary to eliminate these two things altogether, but we should think more carefully about how we spend our money.

How to avoid impulse buying

- Never go grocery shopping when you are hungry.
- Shop only for what you need.
- Make a list and stick to it; buy what you need and get out of the store!
- Wait twenty-four hours before following through on an impulse buy.

Eating out

• The issue is frequency. The average American eats out an average of four times a week. By eating out less frequently, we will have more money to save, to spend on more important things, and to give away.

Fliers in the mail, Ads on TV, Billboards...The point of advertising is to get you to spend. The advertiser's job is to get you to buy, they want a quick sale so you will be ready for another product, that they will follow up with immediately. They are paid to do anything to get you to laugh or cry to make you remember them, their name.

Do we get wiser as we get older? Some do, some never do...

Clarifying Our Relationship with Money and Possessions

We do not exist simply to consume as much as we can and get as much pleasure as we can while we are here on this earth. We have a higher purpose. We need to know and understand our life purpose—our vision or mission or calling—and then spend our money in ways that are consistent with this purpose or calling.

Be clear about your purpose and calling.

Our society tells us that our life purpose is to consume—to make as much money as possible and then to spend it. The Bible tells us that we were created to care for God’s creation. We were created to love God and to love our neighbors as ourselves. We were created to care for our families and those in need. We were created to glorify God, to seek justice, and to do mercy. Our money and possessions should be devoted to helping us fulfill this calling. We are to use our resources to help care for our families and others—to serve Christ and the world through the church, missions, and everyday opportunities. We have a life purpose that is greater than our own self-interest, and how we spend our God-given resources reflects our understanding and commitment to this life purpose or mission.

Set worthy goals.

Being able to accomplish the greater purposes God has for our lives requires some measure of planning. Taking the time to set goals related to our lives and our finances is crucial if we are to become wise stewards of our God-given resources. Each of us should think about our life purpose and goals and then identify two short-term financial goals, two mid-range financial goals, and two long-term financial goals that are aimed at helping us accomplish our broader life goals. At least one goal in each category should relate specifically to our faith. (Suggestion: Use the bulletin insert “My Life and Financial Goals Worksheet” in 3. Communication Resources.)

The Discipline of Managing Your Money

Adopt a budget and spending plan.

Once we’ve set some financial goals, we need to develop a plan to meet those goals. A budget is a spending plan that enables us to accomplish our goals. Some people use an envelope system to help them manage their saving and spending and stay on budget. Others use a variety of different approaches. Many people find it helpful to seek the advice of a financial advisor. For those who find themselves in the midst of a financial crisis, a financial counselor can help arrange terms with creditors and develop a workable financial plan. Whatever approach you choose, the important thing is simply to have a plan.

Follow six financial planning principles.

The following financial planning principles can help us manage our money with wisdom and faith:

1. Pay your tithe and offering first.

Put God first in your living and your giving. Give your tithe and offering from the “top” of your paycheck, and then live on whatever remains.

2. Create a budget and track your expenses.

Creating a budget is simply developing a plan in which you tell your money what you want it to do. Tracking your expenses with a budget is like getting on the scales: it allows you to see how you are doing and motivates you to be more careful with your expenditures. (Suggestion: Use the bulletin insert “Basic Budget Worksheet.”)

3. Simplify your lifestyle (live below your means).

Because this discipline is critical to the success of any financial plan, next Sunday’s sermon will be devoted to this topic.

4. Establish an emergency fund.

An emergency fund is an account separate from checking or long-term savings that is set aside specifically for emergencies. Financial advisor Dave Ramsey recommends beginning

with \$1,000 and building that to three months' worth of income.¹ When you have this amount, you won't need to use your credit cards anymore.

5. Pay off your credit cards, use debit cards for purchases, and use credit wisely.

As you are building your emergency fund, begin to pay off your credit card debt and start using cash or debit cards for purchases. Some experts suggest starting with the credit card that has the highest interest rate. Others suggest paying down the smallest debt first, experiencing that victory, and applying your payments from the first card to the second, and so on, creating a snowball effect to pay off the cards as soon as possible. Cut up your cards as you pay them down so that you are not trapped or leveraged by your future for present-day pleasure, as the prodigal son was. If you must use a credit card, such as when traveling or making purchases online, be sure to pay off the debt monthly. If you are unable to do this, then it is better for you to cut up your cards and stop using them altogether.

6. Practice long-term savings and investing habits.

Saving money is the number-one wise money management principle everyone should practice. We do not save merely for the sake of saving. There is a word for that: *hoarding*. Hoarding is frowned upon in the Bible as the practice of fools and those who fail to understand the purpose of life. Saving, on the other hand, is meant to be purposeful. There are three types of savings we should have: for emergencies, for wants and goals, and for retirement.

*The plans of the diligent lead surely to abundance,
but everyone who is hasty comes only to want.*

(Proverbs 21:5)

*Precious treasure remains in the house of the wise,
but the fool devours it.*

(Proverbs 21:20)

Closing Prayer

God, you know all about us, even when we don't. We don't know where every dime went, but somehow you know what we did with all that we had, last year and every other year. You don't forbid us from having joy in our possessions; in fact, you delight in our having joy. But what you know is that simply acquiring more stuff isn't where we find joy. Lord, forgive us for being wasteful, for being prodigal. Forgive us for leveraging our future in order to have pleasure in the present. And help us to be good managers of the talents that you've given us. Help us to be generous and willing to share, kingdom-minded and focused on accomplishing your purposes for our lives. In Jesus' name. Amen.

¹ Dave Ramsey, *The Total Money Makeover: A Proven Plan for Financial Fitness* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007), 102–108.