

“What to Do When the Economy Stinks – Part 1”

Text: Matthew 6:31-33

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I decided to postpone my series on “You Are Shaped for Significance” for two weeks in order to deal with an important issue that all of us are facing—the economic crisis.

If you’re like me you look at the economic crisis of today and ask a couple of questions, “How will the current economic crisis affect our home and family?” “What does God have to say about our personal finances in the midst of daily discouraging financial news?” Let me remind you of what is happening in our nation:

- California has a budget deficit of \$17 billion dollars
- The U.S. budget has a deficit of \$455 billion dollars
- Our government has passed bailouts that total over \$1 trillion dollars.
- Homeowners are foreclosing at record numbers nationally
- Cost of living continues to increase while our salaries are frozen or decrease.
- Joblessness is rising at alarming rates.
- Credit has been removed from the Webster’s Dictionary....Just kidding.
- We hear phrases like “worst economic times since the depression.”
- For the first time in a long time pessimists outnumber optimists.
- A lot of people are getting worried about the economy.

But you don’t have to worry. Notice what the Jesus says, *“Don’t worry... Your heavenly Father already knows what you need, and he will give it to you if you will give Him first place in your life and live as he wants you to.”*

- God says, ‘You don’t have to worry. It doesn’t matter what happens in the economy. I’m going to take care of you. I really will. I really will.’ There are two conditions in this passage from Matthew 6: if you give God first place in your life and if you live as he wants you to live. Then you can count on God to help you out.

This morning, I want us to look at what to do when the economy stinks. Or how to follow God’s financial plan. I will cover this over the next two weeks, because I feel this is so important for all of us. My goal is to get everybody out of debt. That’s my goal, to get everybody out of debt.

PRAY!

If you want God's blessing on your finances, if you want to get out of debt, if you want to be financially free, it's pretty simple. God says you do five things. And you have to do all five.

1. DEDICATE IT ALL TO GOD.

- A. This is the principle of consecration. Dedicate it all to God.
Proverbs 3:6 says in the NIV, *"In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will make your paths straight."* The Living Bible says, *"In everything you do, put God first and he will direct you and crown your efforts with success."* The key to success is putting God first in everything we do.
- B. Here's the principle: Whatever you want God to bless in your life, dedicate it to Him.
- If you want God to bless your marriage, dedicate your marriage to God.
 - If you want God to bless you kids, dedicate our kids to God.
 - If you want God to bless your career, dedicate your career to God.
 - If you want God to bless your finances, your money, dedicate your money to God.
 - Whatever is dedicated to God, He blesses. It's that simple.
- C. *"Take your everyday, ordinary life – your sleeping, eating, going- to-work, and walking-around life - and place it before God as an offering."* May I suggest that you actually pray a dedication prayer, a formal prayer if you've never done this? If you're married do it with your husband or wife. If you have a family, do it with your kids. Hold hands around the table and say (would you practice this with me?), *"God, we want to dedicate our finances to you because we want You to bless them."* I'd also say something like this, *"In the first place, I know it all comes from You. We know that You are the source of everything. We would have nothing without You, God. Secondly, we know that we don't really own anything. We just get to use it while we're alive on this earth. It was here before we were here and it's going to be here afterwards and we don't really own anything. Father, You own it all, It's just on loan to us. We're not owners. We're managers, stewards. And God, we want You to bless our lives. So whatever You choose to give to us, we dedicate it to you."*

Once you dedicate it all to God...

2. GIVE THE FIRST BACK TO GOD.

- A. You've heard me talk about the principle of tithing many times. Tithing means ten or tenth. Tithing means giving the first ten-percent back to God in gratitude and in faith. Proverbs 3:9-10 in the Living Bible says, *"Honor the Lord by giving Him the first part of all your income, and he will fill your barns... to overflow!"*

- B. He says right off the top. He says I'll take care of all your needs if you put Me first. God says the first ten-percent of all you make comes back to Me. Why ten percent? Beats me! He could have said 20, 30, 50, or 90%. Obviously, God doesn't need your money. So why does God say, do this? Because He wants what it represents, your heart. He wants you to be unselfish. We tithe for three reasons:
1. Gratitude for the past – God has blessed me with everything,
 2. Priorities for the present – it says “God, you're number one in my life,”
 3. And faith in the future – “God, you've promise to take care of me if I do what You say and I'm going to depend on You.” That's all it means.
- C. When I do it? *“On the first day of every week put aside some of what you have earned during the week, and use it for the offering.”* Circle “first day” and in Proverbs 3, circle “first part”. We're to give the first part of our income on the first day of the week as an offering. Why?
- D. *“The purpose of tithing is to teach you always to put God first in your lives.”* 10 years ago when Pastor Margaret and I got married we made a commitment that we were going to put God first in our finances. So, before anyone else gets paid, God gets paid first. You say, “Are you telling me to tithe before I pay my bills?” That's exactly what I'm telling you to do. In fact, we're going to see in just a minute, you pay God first, you pay yourself second and then you pay your bills. Why? That's what God says to do. It's the way to financial freedom. You say, “I can't afford to tithe.” You can't afford **not** to. In fact the best time to start tithing is when you're in debt because you want God's help and blessing.
- E. Years ago, John D. Rockefeller was the Bill Gates of America. He was the wealthiest man in the world, president of Standard Oil. He was asked, “What is the secret of our prosperity?” He said this. “Tithe ten percent, save ten percent and live on the rest.”
1. That's the 10-10-80 principle. I highly recommend it. Tithe at least ten percent, save at least ten percent and live on the rest. You say, I can't afford to do that. I can't afford to save ten percent. I can't afford to tithe ten percent. Then you're spending too much money. You're spending too much.

3. SAVE FOR THE FUTURE.

- A. It doesn't have to be a lot but you have to set up a regular savings plan. You pay God first and pay yourself second before you start paying all your bills. This is the principle of investment. In Proverbs 21:20, God give us His IQ test. *“The wise save for the future, but the foolish spend whatever they get.”*
- B. The average Japanese person saves 25% of his or her income. The average European saves 18% of his or her income. The average American – 5%. Why? Because we're living for today. And we're keeping up with the Jones'. They had to refinance but we're going to keep up with them.

- C. Let me give you a question that will dramatically increase your savings ability. If you'll ask this every time you start to purchase something you'll find enormous reserves being opened up for saving. Do I really have to have this? This sweater, car, CD. Whatever. Every time you spend your money on something, that is money which is not going into savings. And the reason you don't save anything is you are spending it all on things you really don't have to have.
- D. Just because you can afford something doesn't mean you should buy it. You should be socking away some of that money. After 9/11's economic turndown, 25% of Americans decided not to go on vacation that year; 22% of Americans decided not to go out to dinner as often; and 20% decided not to buy a new car that year. That's called wisdom. Planning ahead.
- E. *"Money that comes easily disappears quickly, but money that is gathered little by little will grow."* Circle "little by little". It's consistency that makes savings grow. You don't have to be saving enormous amounts just consistency – little by little. It starts adding up.
- F. The Bible says consider the ant in Proverbs 6. It says, go look at how ants save. Ants are not very big and they certainly don't have the brain capacity of human beings but they're smart enough to save for tough times. Proverbs says, you go look at ants. In the summer time they're storing up all the goodies they can for winter so when there's an economic downturn in Antville they have a cushion. When they get laid off they've got something there to hold them up.
- G. Yet, I know people who have much bigger brains than ants but they aren't as smart as ants because they have no cushion, no margin, no savings. They're living check to check to check to check. That's not very smart.
- H. God says if you want My blessing you must save for the future. Studies have shown that most Baby Boomers are going to be flat broke in retirement. Why? We're spending it all right now. We want it and we want it right now. We're going to live within our means...even if we have to charge it.
- I. Save for the future.

So the first three principles of money management from God are: first, you dedicate it all to God. Second, you give the first ten percent back to God. And third, you save for the future.

Next week we'll look at principles four and five. Invite people you know who could benefit from this brief series to join you next week. There will be free CD's available next Sunday for those guests or regular attendees who weren't here today. That's how important, I believe, these principles are always and especially in times like this.

Also, next week there will be a financial expert who will speak briefly after the service in Higher Grounds Café.

PRAY!