

How to be a wise manager of money

Sermon for Sunday, May 27, 2007
by Bruce Fraser

Scripture: Proverbs 6:6-8; 13:11; 21:5, 20; 27:23-24;

Today we are looking at being wise in how we use our money. Right away there's a problem here. The Bible doesn't give much investment advice. When it was written, there were no such things as mutual funds or GICs, there weren't even banks. We can't look to the Bible to know what a good interest rate is, because in the Old Testament, charging interest was a sin: it was on the same level as adultery and idol worship, and was punishable by death! (Ezekiel 18:8-13).

What we do have, though, are some general principles to live by when it comes to money. Many of them are in the book of Proverbs, the collection of wisdom from Solomon.

1) Keep track of your money

Proverbs 27:23-24, Living Bible:

Riches can disappear fast... [Would you agree that is true?]

... So watch your business interests closely. Know the state of your flocks and your herds.

When Solomon wrote that a few thousand years ago, most people had their assets in their livestock. People were well off if they had lots of cattle and sheep. Put that in today's language, and it would come out something like "Know your financial situation."

We need to keep track of what's coming in and what's going out. We need to know how much we own, and how much we owe.

Do you ever come to the end of the day and ask yourself, "Where did the time go? Did I accomplish anything worthwhile today?" That can happen when we don't manage our time wisely. A similar question comes up when we don't manage our money wisely. We can come to the end of the week or the month and ask ourselves, "Where did the money go? Did I use it for things that matter? Did any good come of it?" If you're not keeping track of your money, you won't be able to answer that question. You will have no idea what your money is doing.

Whenever I'm in town, especially at breakfast or lunch time, I am amazed by the lineup at Tim Hortons. Maybe you're one of the regulars in that lineup. *Question:* do you have any idea how much you spend on coffee and snacks in a month? When people start keeping track of their money, they are often astonished at how the little things, over a few weeks, become very big things.

I mentioned on Mother's Day that money is one of the biggest sources of conflict in a marriage. This is one way that happens: the end of the month comes, and the couple have no idea where the money went. They might accuse each other of wasting money, but they really have no clue. Or, it might be that one person *does* keep track of the money, but keeps the other person in the dark. That's no good, either. You both need to know what's happening.

2) Have a plan for your money

Proverbs 21:5, Today's English Version:

Plan carefully and you will have plenty; if you act too quickly, you will never have enough.

This is the principle of budgeting. I just mentioned keeping track of where the money comes and goes. But this goes one step better: it's knowing where the money goes *before* you spend it.

The way it works is like this: you add up all the money coming into your household: paycheques, pension, social assistance, and so on. Then you add up all the money going out of your household: house payments or rent, utilities, food, clothing, transportation, and so on. I have done extensive research on this, and I have come to a surprising, even shocking conclusion: if I spend more than I take in, I'm going to have problems. Apparently this is a long-undiscovered secret, hidden even from governments with expert accountants and economists. That's the only way I can explain why so many people and, like I said, governments are digging themselves deeper in debt every year. I expect to be awarded the Nobel Prize in Mathematics for my discovery.

Seriously, folks, the point here is simple: we need to keep our yearnings within our earnings. So many people believe, "If I made just a bit more money, then everything would be OK. Then I'll be happy." The truth is, if you're not happy with the money you have now, you won't ever be happy, no matter how much you have. You will always be craving for "just a bit more." What some people mistake for the high cost of living is really the cost of high living.

Here's a Bible verse that is packed full of truth.

Proverbs 21:20, Today's English Version:

Stupid people spend their money as fast as they get it.

Remember that the basic principle behind this whole series about money: it all belongs to God, and we are managers looking after it. What would happen if you followed the same practices looking after someone else's money, that you do with God's money? Some people

might be put in jail! We need to be faithful and careful as we manage God's money.

Having a plan for your money is a key to dealing with this craving. It means setting priorities: these things must be paid first; then, if there is money left over in the budget, we can think about these other things.

Here's an example. This idea comes from Larry Burkett, a financial advisor.

Idea: Have a wish list.

If you want to buy something, put it on your wish list.

- ✓ It has to be on the list for seven days before you buy it.
- ✓ During that week, find the price for that item from two other sources.
- ✓ At the end of the week, after you've had time to mull it over, if you still think it's a wise decision, then buy it.
- ✓ Only one thing can be on the list at a time. If you think of something else you want before the week is up, you have to choose which one goes on the list.

3) Put money into savings regularly

A moment ago, I showed you Proverbs 21:20 (the passage about stupid people spending money as fast as they get it). Here it is, in the Living Bible:

**Proverbs 21:20, Living Bible:
The wise man saves for the future, but the foolish man spends whatever he gets.**

When you make a budget, part of it needs to be setting money aside for the future. We call that "saving." Here's the trick: you have to put aside the money for saving at the start. If you wait until everything else is paid, you'll never save anything. (By the way, the same principle applies to our offering to God; that is, put that aside first, rather than leaving it to the last. We'll look at giving money for God's work next in this series.)

Develop a plan for saving money, even if it's just ten or twenty dollars each month. Many mutual fund companies allow a person to make small investments by having automatic withdrawals.

Rick Warren, in a sermon on financial planning, points out this verse.

**Proverbs 6:6-8, Today's English Version:
Lazy people should learn a lesson from the way ants live. They have no leader, chief, or ruler, but they store up their food during the summer, getting ready for winter.**

Warren puts it this way: God is saying to us, "If an ant with a brain the size of a grain of dust knows how to save for hard times, why can't you figure it out?"

4) Be content; don't get greedy

I want to go back to an earlier verse.

**Proverbs 21:5, Today's English Version:
Plan carefully and you will have plenty; if you act too quickly, you will never have enough.**

I'm looking at the second half of that verse, about moving too quickly. That's not just for spending money; that's also true for growing money. What I mean is, don't fall for those get-rich-quick schemes. Here's another verse on that topic.

**Proverbs 13:11, New Living Translation:
"Wealth from get-rich-quick schemes quickly disappears; wealth from hard work grows."**

I received an advertising brochure in the mail this week. It's for a fantastic program that tells you what stocks to buy, and when to sell them before they go back down. It's full of testimonies from people who doubled or tripled their money in just a few months. And it's virtually guaranteed to keep your money safe. Sounds great, doesn't it?

I just had one question: the brochure said this program has been working flawlessly for twenty years. Suppose the person who invented this program had put \$10,000 into the program twenty years ago, and it doubled in price every year. That person would have ten *billion* dollars today. How come I don't see that person's name on the *Forbes* magazine of the world's billionaires? In fact, if he kept it up for another ten years, he would be worth ten trillion dollars: he wouldn't just invest in the stock market; he would *own* most of it!

This brochure appeals to our sense of greed. It's that part of us that wants to have the rewards, but without the work. That's the same motive that drives the whole lottery and gambling industry. It's huge. And it's destroying people's lives, who take the little they have, and spend it on a faint hope.

In our culture, it's quite common to fill out a form which asks you, "How much do you make? How much do you own?" But the question which Jesus asks of us is, "How do you use it?"

**Matthew 6:24, New Living Translation:
"No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other, or be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money."**