CITYLIGHT INSTITUTE

God and Finances Seminar

Handout | February 15, 2025

Part 1: Biblical Foundations

Five principles for money and wealth

1. God owns everything

> The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein. (Psalm 24:1)

> For every beast of the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand hills. [11] I know all the birds of the hills, and all that moves in the field is mine. [12] "If I were hungry, I would not tell you, for the world and its fullness are mine. (Psalm 50:10–12)

Everything we have is a gift of God's grace that is meant to be used to glorify him.

2. We are God's stewards

Stewardship, definition: The active and responsible use of God's creation for God's purposes (Cortines and Baumer, *God and Money*).

> And the Lord said, "Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom his master will set over his household, to give them their portion of food at the proper time? [43] Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. [44] Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions. (Luke 12:41–44; see also Matthew 25:20–30)

> Do you see a man skillful in his work? He will stand before kings; he will not stand before obscure men. (Proverbs 22:29)

3. Wealth is powerful, for both good and evil

> I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, 4 always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, 5 because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. (Philippians 1:3–5; see also 4:15–16)
>
> For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. (1 Timothy 6:10)
>
> Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." (Hebrews 13:5)

4. Wealth is a tool designed for specific purposes. Use it accordingly.

In order to use money wisely, we need to know what it is for (and what it is not for). Here are five purposes for money:

1. **Honoring God above all**

   So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. (1 Cor 10:31)

2. **Furthering God's kingdom interests in this world**

   But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you (Matt 6:33)

3. **Helping the Poor**

   Whoever oppresses a poor man insults his Maker, but he who is generous to the needy honors him. (Prov 14:31)

4. **Providing for yourself, your family and dependents**

   If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat. (2 Thess. 3:10 ESV)

   But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. (1 Tim. 5:8)

5. **Enjoying God's good gifts**

   Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. (James 1:17)

   …Then you shall turn it into money and bind up the money in your hand and go to the place that the Lord your God chooses [26] and spend the money for whatever you desire—oxen or sheep or wine or strong drink, whatever your appetite craves. And you shall eat there before the Lord your God and rejoice, you and your household. (Deuteronomy 14:25–26)

What are some things that money is *not* for?

5. Worldly wealth is fleeting, heavenly treasure is eternal

But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. (Matt 6:20)

A Question, a framework, and a concept

Asking the right question

Not how much should I _____, but how much should I _____?

The framework: Spenders vs. savers vs. servants

Spenders	Represented by most people in the western world, a spender is someone who pursues the greatest possible consumption, even if mindful of the need to save some.
Savers	By contrast, a saver strives to limit consumption to some extent, focusing instead on increased wealth accumulation
Servants	A servant orients their life around limiting both consumption and wealth-building, focusing instead on giving the most money they can toward blessing other people.

From Cortines and Baumer, *God and Money*, 113.

Your money mindset (spender, saver, servant) is driven by two factors: your "temporal focus," and your view on the highest purpose of money.

Temporal focus is about **maximizing value**. We all maximize the value of money in some way, but *when* do we want to see it maximized?

Spender:
Saver:
Servant

Highest purpose: **What is money truly for**?

Spender:
Saver:
Servant:

"Rather than just examining the percent of income spent, saved, or given, it is better to ask, 'Where would I focus my thoughts and efforts if my income began dramatically increasing over time?'" (p. 114)

"All faithful Christians must be servants in order to live a life that is consistent with Scripture." (p. 119)

The concept: The finish line

What limits do you put on your giving?

Big idea: Create a *finish line*, not on your _____, but on your _____. Decide in advance NOT "how much is enough to *give*?" but "how much is enough to *keep*?" Commit to give everything above that to the Lord.

Biblical Giving

To begin with, let's remember the general biblical principles we looked at above, especially:

- God owns everything; we are God' stewards; heavenly treasure is eternal
- Money is (in part) for furthering God's kingdom and interests as well as helping the poor

Five Biblical Principles on Giving

1. **Cheerful generosity**

   Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. *7* Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. (2 Cor 9:6–7)

2. **Sacrificial generosity**

   …for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. 3 For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord…
   (2 Cor 8:2–3)

   … and he saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins. 3 And he said, "Truly, I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them. 4 For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on." (Luke 21:2–4)

   "I am afraid the only safe rule [when it comes to giving] is to give more than we can spare. If our expenditure on comforts, luxuries, amusements, etc., is up to the standard common among those with the same income as our own, we are probably giving away too little…. There ought to be things we should like to do and cannot do because our charitable expenditure excludes them." (C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*).

Next, what should our giving go toward?

3. Providing for kingdom work

"To the Levites I have given every tithe in Israel for an inheritance, in return for their service that they do, their service in the tent of meeting…" (Numbers 18:21)

Then the leaders of fathers' houses made their freewill offerings, as did also the leaders of the tribes, the commanders of thousands and of hundreds, and the officers over the king's work. 7 They gave for the service of the house of God 5,000 talents and 10,000 darics of gold, 10,000 talents of silver, 18,000 talents of bronze and 100,000 talents of iron. (1 Chronicles 29:6–7; see also Exodus 36:3–5)

Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. 18 For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain," and, "The laborer deserves his wages." (1 Timothy 5:17–18)

4. Providing for the poor, especially those of the household of faith

"At the end of every three years you shall bring out all the tithe of your produce in the same year and lay it up within your towns. 29 And the Levite, because he has no portion or inheritance with you, and the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow, who are within your towns, shall come and eat and be filled, that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands that you do. (Deuteronomy 14:28–29)

At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem bringing aid to the saints. 26 For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem. (Romans 15:25–26)

So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith. (Galatians 6:10)

5. What about tithing?

Definition: Giving 10% of your gross income to the Lord for His work, particularly to the local church.

Is tithing biblical for Christians?

Old Testament: The command was not 10%, but at least _____ !

NT: Tithing is not specifically mentioned, but radical, cheerful, sacrificial generosity is.

What do we do with this??

Calling the question:

Strictly speaking, is the tithe required for Christians?

> Randy Alcorn: The tithe is the "training wheels" of Christian giving.

Biblically, what does tithing bring?

> Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the LORD of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need. (Malachi 3:10)

If the tithe—or even giving as much as 23% percent or more—was the Old Testament standard, what does that imply about us who know so much more about the grace, love, and goodness of God as displayed in Jesus Christ? Alcorn: The tithe was not so much *given* as *repaid*. (MPE, 176)[1]

Verdict: if you are not yet tithing, begin with the "training wheels" now. Dream and begin to plan about increasing the amount you give (or decreasing the amount you keep) over time.

Question: Should I tithe on gross or net?

> **Answer (as rhetorical questions):** Do you pay taxes on gross or net? Why do you suppose that is? Which would you prefer to be blessed on, gross or net? Does the Bible refer to "firstfruits" or "secondfruits" when it speaks about tithes and offerings?

Biblical Counsel on Giving

In light of the above, how much should I give?

[1] Currently the average Christian gives 2.5% to the church. This has declined over the years.

Start with a tithe (see above). However, what is the problem with tithing? What are some ways we can solve this problem?

1)

2)

3)

Whether a tithe or more, who should receive what I give?

We suggest starting with giving a tithe to the local church. We badly misunderstand the central place of the local church in God's plan if we simply think in terms of "kingdom giving" in general, apart from prioritizing the local church of which we are covenant members! Why?

1) The vast majority of giving that we see in both the Old and New Testaments is for the support of spiritual leaders.
    a) For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain," and, "The laborer deserves his wages." (1 Tim. 5:18 ESV)
    b) See also Exodus 36:3-5; Numbers 18:21; 1 Chronicles 29:6-7.

2) The local church is absolutely central to God's kingdom program and the nexus of kingdom activity. We should therefore prioritize giving to it, since this is where God has prioritized his action in the world.
    a) On this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. (Matt 16:18)
    b) Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. (Acts 20:28 ESV).

3) All of the biblical images for the church indicate entities that require our first line of attention and support: body, family, house, flock. Since your local church is *your* body, family, house, flock, you should expend your time, talent, and treasure toward its support!
    a) For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. (Eph. 5:29-30 ESV)

4) When you give to the local church, you support not only the ministers and ministries of the church, but also missions and missionaries, as well as poverty alleviation.

Beyond the local church

Other worthy causes for our giving may include:

- Missions and missionaries (3 John 3:5–8; Acts 28:13-14
- Poverty alleviation (Proverbs 19:17; Deuteronomy 14:28–29)
- Christian education (Deuteronomy 4:5; Acts 18:11; James 3:1)
- Other gospel ministries

Beyond finances

Debt and Interest

Biblical Principles and Wisdom

> The rich rules over the poor, and the borrower is the slave of the lender. (Proverbs 22:7)
>
> Whoever multiplies his wealth by interest and profit gathers it for him who is generous to the poor. (Proverbs 28:8)
>
> "The wise person earns interest; the fool pays it."

Avoid debt wherever possible; Use interest to your advantage:

Avoid debt wherever possible

Credit Cards:

- **Never** carry credit card debt!!
    - As of February 2025, the average credit card interest rate in the United States is approximately 28.72%.[2]
    - If you have a $3,000 balance on a 28.72% credit card, decide to never put anything else on the card, and just make a minimum payment of $72 per month, it will take you *20 years and 9 months* to pay it off. You will end up paying *$14,918.56* in interest![3]
    - If you use Credit Cards, be ruthlessly committed to pay off the balance in full every month. If not, cut them up and never use them.

How to get out of debt

[2] www.forbes.com/advisor/credit-cards/average-credit-card-interest-rate

[3] Per calculator.net based on a 2% minimum payment. Simply by increasing the monthly payment to $80, you reduce the time to payoff to 8 years and 1 month, and the interest to $4,704.88!

- The minimum payment trap (see above)
- Any increase over the minimum payment will help you! (See example above)
- Use the "snowball effect" to pay off your debt:

1. List all your debts, smallest to largest. Ignore the interest rate.
2. Pay the minimum balance on each one, except for the smallest.
3. For the smallest, dedicate as much extra $ as you can (without robbing from your giving) until it is paid off.
4. Then move onto the second-smallest debt.
5. Continue until all the debts are paid off.

"The idea is that you'll gain momentum by watching debts disappear, as you would watching a snowball grow bigger and bigger, and that will motivate you to continue."[4]

"Unavoidable" Debt

- Home
- Higher education (?)
- Car (?)

Use interest to your advantage

Conclusion

[4] https://www.cnbc.com/2018/03/01/the-snowball-method-is-the-most-effective-way-to-pay-off-debt.html
https://hbr.org/2016/12/research-the-best-strategy-for-paying-off-credit-card-debt

Part 2: Practical Finances

Some Basics

1. Live within your means
    a. If you can't afford it, don't buy it!
    b. No credit card debt!
    c. Use designated savings accounts (called "sinking funds") for predictable but unspecifiable medium-large expenses (e.g. medical expenses, car repair, tech purchases, vacations, etc.)

2. Make and stick to a budget (see below)

3. Cut out unnecessary expenses

    a. Cell phone, cable, streaming, subscriptions
        i. Cell phone: do you need that plan / carrier? Friends and family plan
        ii. Entertainment: do you *use* all those services? Do you *need* them? (take advantage of discounts when available)
        iii. Any unused / unneeded subscriptions?
        iv. Shopping subscriptions (e.g. Prime, Walmart, etc.): is it worth it for you?

    b. Gym membership: Can a cheaper gym or home gym work?

    c. Food: dining out / ordering in (as opposed to preparing your own meals) can also be a big hole.
        i. Food waste also a big problem - at least ⅓ of all food produced in the US is wasted!

    d. Watch out for introductory prices / subscriptions that have run their course and gone up in price!

    e. Overall, distinguish between *must have* and *nice to have*

4. Hustle to earn extra income
    a. Probably no reason for most people not to have a side hustle of some kind

    b. AirBnB, etc.

    c. Credit Card rewards: If you use a credit card and have decent credit, there is no reason not to get at least 1% on your purchases; 2% up to 5% is not unreasonable for some categories / seasons! Or, use points to pay for travel

d. Bank signup offers (just read the fine print)

e. Passive income

Budgeting 101

1. Your budget reveals your heart.

   > For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (Matthew 6:21)

2. Have a budget. Use a budget.

3. See sample budgets here: https://tinyurl.com/clsamplebudgets

Notes:

Emergency Fund

Some statistics:[5]

- Nearly 2 in 5 (37%) Americans say they couldn't afford an emergency expense over $400 (without resorting to credit, loans, help from family, etc.)
- The median emergency savings for Americans is $600
- 21% of people have no emergency savings at all
- 1 in 4 (25%) people dipped into emergency savings to cover basic living expenses in the past year
- 34% believe they could handle any emergency expenses in the coming year

[5] https://www.empower.com/the-currency/money/over-1-in-5-americans-have-no-emergency-savings-research?utm_source=chatgpt.com

A good goal is to have at least six months of cash (based on a stripped down budget)

- Suppose you get laid off. The average job search takes 20 weeks = 5 mos.[6] Add 1 for insurance.

If you currently have $0, start with $1k and build up from there.

Where should I keep this money?

- The basic problem: liquidity vs. interest; the eroding power of inflation

- Some possible solutions?

Savings & Retirement

Remember the finish line concept discussed above. Set a limit.

Savings (besides emergency fund)

- Assuming you already have six months of expenses in an emergency fund (do this first!), You can continue to save in sinking funds (see above): Devote a certain % for predictable but unspecifiable medium-large expenses (car repair, vacation, medical bills & co-pays, etc.) 5%-10%/month?

Education

Retirement

What does the Bible say about retirement?[7]

Fact: many Americans (nearly half) are financially unprepared or underprepared for retirement.[8] Why is this a solvable problem, at least for the younger members of our congregation?

[6] https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/finding-a-job/how-long-does-it-take-to-find-a-job
[7] See https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/boasting-only-in-the-cross/excerpts/dont-waste-your-life
[8] https://usafacts.org/data-projects/retirement-savings
https://www.fool.com/research/retirement-savings-gap-statistics/

Some principles and ideas about saving for retirement

1. Start young!

2. Guaranteed pensions / retirement benefits are valuable!

3. Assuming 401k (or similar), see if you can max it out. Max out employer matches.

4. Aim to put at least 10% of your gross income toward retirement, without robbing God or other obligations.

5. Again, compound returns are your friend!

6. Remember the finish line

7. If you are older and required to take distributions (RMD), consider a QCD (qualified charitable distribution) to the church if you do not need the money now.

Home buying and ownership

Is it wise to buy a home?

How much home can I afford?

Some tips if saving for or buying a first home

- If you are considering buying a house, save up as much as possible to try and avoid private mortgage insurance (PMI) which you must pay if you put less than 20% down.

    - If you are paying PMI now, consider getting out of it early with a reappraisal!

- If you already own, make sure to budget for home maintenance & improvements (1% rule)
- If you buy a second home, consider keeping the first as a rental home (fairly priced of course).

Car

Some statistics[9]

- Average car payment as of Q3 2024 is $737
- 17.5% of auto loans are over $1,000 / month[10]
- Car payment second only to mortgage
- Average loan term 68.2 months (new); 67.2 (used)
- Used car prices are coming down after rising for several years during pandemic
- A new car loses 9% in value when you drive it off the lot; 20% after one year[11]

All things being equal, is it financially better to buy new, used, or lease?

How long should I keep my car? Up to a point, *the cheapest car is the one you own.*

Paid your auto loan off? Great! Keep paying yourself. Make it your aim to eventually pay cash for a car (though this takes discipline!)

Miscellaneous

- Giving stocks, securities, crypto
- “complex asset giving” (donating tax liability from sale of a business, etc.)
- Neighborhood Assistance Program

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[9] From https://www.lendingtree.com/auto/debt-statistics/ except where noted

[10] https://www.investopedia.com/why-more-people-than-ever-are-paying-over-usd1000-a-month-for-new-cars-8347761

[11] https://www.ramseysolutions.com/saving/car-depreciation?srsltid=AfmBOopyWtf8JkQ5bXM6TMty-dQoKGYIsOxJdYb-mnQ52MR4TO3yfU_g

Memento Mori

"Remember that you must die"

Beneficiaries

Life Insurance

Living will, HCP, POA

Will

Conclusion

> And the Lord said, "Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom his master will set over his household, to give them their portion of food at the proper time? [43] Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. [44] Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions. (Luke 12:41–44)

> So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him.
> 10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.
> (2 Corinthians 5:9-10)

> His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.'
> (Matthew 25:21)

Recommended Books:

- Randy Alcorn, *Money Possessions and Eternity* (thorough, biblical); *The Treasure Principle* (short and convicting)
- John Cortines and Gregory Baumer, *God and Money* (both biblical and practical)