

WATERMARK COMMUNITY CHURCH M O N E Y W I S E SMALL GROUP CURRICULUM

Over the next five sessions, we will study what God's Word says about money and our opportunity to glorify Him through how we manage His resources. The topics we will study include:

1. God's Purpose with Money
2. Lifestyle, Spending and Budgeting
3. Debt
4. Giving
5. Saving, Investing and Assets

Before beginning the study, we would like to set out some ground rules for successfully working through the study.

1. Focus on God's Word regarding the subject, not what the world has to say about the subject. (See 2 Timothy 3:16-17, Joshua 1:8, 1 Corinthians 3:18-20.)
2. Recognize that you are a sinner, and your stewardship of God's resources is likely not an exception to this. (See Ecclesiastes 7:20, Romans 3:23.)
3. Enter the study with a teachable spirit, recognizing that you still have a lot to learn about financial stewardship. (See Luke 14:11, Proverbs 18:15, Psalm 66:18.)
4. Be open and authentic with your community group, sharing your financial details and your feelings about the material studied. Recognize that you will grow more in community than in isolation. (See Ecclesiastes 4:9-12, Proverbs 13:20, Proverbs 11:14, Proverbs 18:1). We have more on this topic below.
5. Be an encourager with others in your group. Remember that the objective of this curriculum is to help one another grow, not to discourage one another. (See Luke 6:36, Hosea 6:6, Proverbs 12:18, Psalm 19:14.)
6. Be committed. (See Proverbs 16:3.)

For each of the session assignments below, work through the material in advance of meeting with your community group and then meet with your group prepared to discuss the material. If you are married, process the preparation work together.



There is often resistance to sharing financial information with others, especially around the financial topic of giving. Therefore, we have included a response to three of the more common objections to sharing finances in community. We hope these help people grow in the comfort with being transparent and authentic in their community group.

What are the benefits of sharing my financial information with others? What if it causes others in my community group to be uncomfortable?

In order to assess the benefits of involving others in discussing finances (or any other aspect of our Christian walk), we need to begin by understanding the nature of man. We all have sinful hearts, so we can easily deceive ourselves and rebel against God's will. (See Jeremiah 17:9, Proverbs 28:26.)

In addition to understanding the natural tendency of man, we must recognize that God's plan is for us to be in community, not in isolation. God is very clear that we benefit from connecting with the body of Christ and suffer from isolation. (See Proverbs 11:14, Ecclesiastes 4:9-12, Proverbs 27:17, Ephesians 4:16, 1 Corinthians 11:1.)

Practically speaking, Scripture shares an example of people being inspired and changed by being exposed to the details of how others are giving. (See 2 Corinthians 9:2.) We can benefit in the same way.

If a member of your community group does not want to participate in group discussions about finances, it is best to begin by asking questions about the motives for his or her concern. (See Proverbs 16:2.) Ask the person to reference Scripture as much as possible in sharing with you why it is best to not share about this issue. Also, try to understand why they have concerns about sharing on this topic while being comfortable sharing about other topics such as marriage, parenting and work. If a person in the group does not want to participate openly, the rest of the group should still go through the material, rather than everyone giving up the opportunity to grow in their stewardship.

Why should I share my finances with others when Matthew 6:3 tells me that I should give to God's work confidentially?

Matthew 6:3-4 states, "But when you give to the poor, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving will be in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you." Looking at these verses in isolation would clearly lead you to believe that all giving should be done confidentially. However, as with all Scripture, these verses should be read within context, both the context of the broader passage and the whole of Scripture.

Context of passage. This passage pictures Jesus speaking to a crowd of Jews in what is known as the Sermon on the Mount. Matthew 6:1 sets up the purpose of this portion of the Sermon on the Mount; "Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them [emphasis added]; otherwise you have no reward with your Father

who is in heaven.” The purpose of God warning against letting your giving (or prayer or fasting, which are also mentioned in this passage) be known to others is related to sharing this information with the wrong motives. Specifically, Jesus is warning against acts of righteousness being done with the motive of being recognized and rewarded by others. Jesus spoke specifically of giving, prayer and fasting in this passage because these were common issues of the day; Jesus recognized many Jews performing these acts with the motive of temporal recognition. In addition, it was also common amongst first century Jews to teach lessons with three examples, hence giving, prayer, and fasting. It is also worth noting that Jesus was clearly speaking in hyperbole, since it is obvious that a left hand and right hand don’t do things secretly from one another or have the ability to reason for that matter.

Context of the whole of Scripture. The obvious question is whether Scripture shows specific positive examples of others knowing of a person’s financial stewardship. There are examples of this in the Bible, including Acts 2:45, Acts 4:32-37, Numbers 7, 1 Chronicles 29:1-9, and 2 Corinthians 8:2-3. Similarly, we can see the same thing with prayer (compare Matthew 6:6 to Matthew 18:19-20 and Acts 2:42). Another question to consider is whether God calls us to share with others what it looks like to follow Christ. We see many examples of Scripture calling us to be a light to others providing them an example of what it means to follow Christ. (See Matthew 5:16, Hebrews 10:24, 1 Corinthians 11:1, 1 Timothy 3.)

In summary, we should not share with others about our financial stewardship (or anything else for that matter) where our motive is anything other than to bring glory to God. Giving, like all things, should be an act of worship. If we are sharing information with others to receive recognition, affirmation or reward from them, then we need to recognize that this grieves God and negates any eternal rewards.

I would like to share with my community group, but I just don’t know what financial transparency looks like in a group. What tips do you have for success?

As discussed above, many of you may be anxious about sharing your financial situation with others; in fact, the thought of sharing numbers with others may intimidate you or you may believe that your financial status is too personal. Before you share your finances with others in your group, or before you look at the numbers of others in your group, make sure you think through the following questions:

- Are you able to look at the numbers of others without comparing your status to theirs or coveting their situation?
- Are you able to look at other’s numbers without judging them for decisions they have made?
- Are you secure in your identity in Christ that your past financial decisions, whether they are good or bad, do not define you?



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Ask the Lord to help you share and receive well in the middle of your financial transparency.

Practically, when you share specific numbers with one another, it would be best to send out copies of your spreadsheets in advance of your group meeting. That way members can review your documents before group. If you are unable to complete before you meet as a group, bring in copies of spreadsheets for everyone/every couple in the group so that they are able to see the numbers before them. This applies for every aspect of the curriculum, including budget, assets/liabilities and debt repayment plans (if applicable). The spreadsheets found online on the Watermark Moneywise site can be saved to your computer and emailed out to others or printed out as needed.

Remember that your community can best serve you, and you can best serve one another, when you are transparent in all aspects of your walk with Christ. Your willingness to share with one another will allow you to best serve one another with regard to future purchases, family decisions, potential job changes and much more. The financial status of other members or couples in your group should not be shared with others outside your group, specifically in the form of gossip or slander. If you need counsel or wisdom in this area, please consult the Moneywise team.

One final word of encouragement. This study is hard work; many of the sessions are demanding. Therefore, don't feel like each session needs to be completed in a week. Rather, view each session as a unique topic, and spend as much time on each session as is required to learn and grow. There are many exercises throughout this study, and most of these have the option of being completed in electronic spreadsheet format from a download on the Watermark MoneyWise website (www.watermark.org/ministries/care/moneywise-ministry/) in the Small Group Study session.

SESSION ONE

GOD'S PURPOSE WITH MONEY

Memory verse Luke 16:10-11 "He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much; and he who is unrighteous in a very little thing is unrighteous also in much. Therefore if you have not been faithful in the use of unrighteous wealth, who will entrust the true riches to you?"

God tells us in His word that He owns all resources and we are accountable to Him for how we manage or steward His resources. For example, below is a list of passages where God makes it clear to us that all we have is His and we are accountable for how we steward His resources.

- Psalm 24:1
- 1 Chronicles 29:11-12
- Deuteronomy 8:17-18
- Luke 12:48
- 2 Corinthians 5:10
- Matthew 25:14-29
- 1 Corinthians 4:2
- Luke 16:10-11

After studying these verses, consider the following questions and journal your thoughts.

- How are you operating like God owns everything you are entrusted with? Alternatively, how are you operating as if you own it but will share some of it with Him for His purposes?

- How are your actions portraying a belief that you created your wealth because of your wisdom and hard work, and how are your actions portraying a belief that God created your wealth in spite of your lack of wisdom in all things?



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- In what ways do you praise God daily for His provision in your life?

- Are you asking the right questions? What are the right questions? Do you even know what the questions are?

- In what ways are you deluded by the culture and what others around you do?

God makes it clear that there is an intimate correlation between how one handles resources He entrusts a person with and how that reflects a person's commitment to follow Him. Meditate on the following verses that present stewardship as a reflection of one's relationship with Christ, and note anything that comes to mind.

- Matthew 6:19-24

- Luke 19:8-9

- Acts 2:45

- Matthew 19:20-21

- Acts 4:32-37

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- 1 Timothy 6:9-10
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Money as a tool is no different than anything else. God wants us to use resources to love Him and love others. Read Mark 12:29-31 and Matthew 22:37-40. Here is a list of ways we are called to love God and love others through our financial stewardship.

- Provide for your family. Read 1 Timothy 5:8...BUT...only within the context of 1 Timothy 6:8.
- Find a church where you can give joyfully and yoke with the church. Read 2 Corinthians 9:7, 1 Timothy 5:17-18, Galatians 6:10, 1 Corinthians 16:1-2.
- Seek opportunities to share with others. Read Hebrews 13:16, 1 Timothy 6:17-18.
- Recognize that your not loving others through your money may be an indication of imperfections in your relationship with Christ. Read 1 John 3:17-18, 1 John 4:20.

Develop a list of ways you are succeeding and struggling in your love for God and love for others through how you steward the resources God has entrusted you with.

SUCCEEDING

STRUGGLING

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In closing, meditate on the following verses and praise God for His unbelievable mercy, grace and abundant kindness.

- Luke 6:38
 - 2 Corinthians 9:6-11
 - Matthew 19:21
 - Matthew 19:29
 - Proverbs 11:25
 - Proverbs 22:9
-
-
-
-
-
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RECAP: PERSONAL APPLICATIONS MENTIONED IN SESSION ONE

- Review the scripture on page 5, and reflect on the questions that follow.
- Review the scriptures on pages 6 and 7, and list ways you are succeeding and struggling in your love for God and love for others through how you steward the resources God has entrusted you with.
- Spend some time praising God corporately for his mercy, grace and kindness as you meditate on the verses on page 7.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are your hopes and expectations for this financial study?
2. What would you like to see God do over the course of these 5 sessions?
3. What changes in either thought or action do you anticipate you will need to make?
4. Do you believe that how you handle financial resources has an effect on your walk with Christ? Why or why not?
5. Share one way you are succeeding and one way you are struggling in your love for God and love for others through how you steward the resources God has entrusted you with.

SESSION TWO

LIFESTYLE, SPENDING AND BUDGETING

Note: We noted in the introduction to this small group study that each session should not be viewed as one week sessions but rather as sessions that are worked through at the appropriate pace to allow you to learn and grow. We want to reemphasize this at this point as there is a large amount of work in this session.

Note: As a reminder, all worksheets in this small group study are available in electronic spreadsheet format from a download on the Watermark MoneyWise website (www.watermark.org/ministries/care/moneywise-ministry/) in the Small Group Study session.

Memory verse 1 Corinthians 10:31 “Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”

“So is our lifestyle a spiritual issue? Does God care how we spend our money? As long as I give a decent amount of money, how I spend the rest doesn’t really matter to God, right?” This is a common line of reasoning, but is it right? Review the following passages and then journal how you would answer this person’s questions.

- 1 Corinthians 10:31
- Proverbs 16:2
- Revelations 4:11
- Ecclesiastes 12:13-14
- Luke 12:13-21
- Ecclesiastes 5:18-20
- Philippians 4:11-13
- Luke 16:10-12

Hopefully it has become clear to you that every experience in your life is an opportunity to grow in your relationship with your Father. God is sovereign over all things (see Psalm 100:3, Psalm 139:16, Deuteronomy 8:17-18), and He has blessed you with countless occasions throughout the day to seek and know Him – in conversations,



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seeing needs, experiencing trials...AND MAKING SPENDING DECISIONS. So with a biblical perspective about God's hand in lifestyle, spending, and budgeting decisions, let's get started.

For most people, the single most powerful determinant of their lifestyle is their level of income. If a person's income increases, he will generally increase his lifestyle in a similar manner. Nowhere in Scripture are we called to increase our lifestyle when we experience an increased income. As we will learn in the next session as we discuss debt, income is a critical factor in setting a cap on lifestyle, but its usefulness ends there. Review the following passages:

- 1 Timothy 5:8
- 1 Timothy 6:6-8
- 2 Corinthians 8:14-15
- Proverbs 30:7-9
- Matthew 6:24
- 1 John 4:20

Based on the above passages, what are some potential reasons that God provides you with resources?

"So now I understand that spending decisions are important. I also understand that increased compensation doesn't necessarily mean I should increase my lifestyle. So how do I make wise decisions?" We have listed some questions to ask in processing spending decisions in life. (Author John MacArthur)

- Will it benefit you spiritually? (See 1 Corinthians 10:23.)
- Will it bring bondage? (See 1 Corinthians 6:12.)
- Will it defile God's temple? (See 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, Romans 6:13.)
- Will it cause anyone to stumble? (See 1 Corinthians 8:8-9, Romans 13:10.)
- Will it further the cause of evangelism? (See 1 Corinthians 10:32-33.)
- Will it violate your conscience? (See Romans 14:23, James 4:17.)
- Will it bring glory to God? (See 1 Corinthians 10:31.)

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Just being in your community group where you can process spending decisions is a big step towards wise spending decisions. (See Proverbs 15:22.)

In all things, planning increases our likelihood of success. (See Proverbs 21:5, Proverbs 19:2.) With respect to spending decisions, a budget is a good planning tool, so let's learn how to develop a budget and work within a budget.

The rest of this session is quite long. In order to give you a picture of where we are headed, here is a summary of the steps remaining in this session:

1. Know your take-home income.
2. Know your current expenses – dollar amount; essential versus non-essential.
3. Compare your income and expenses.
4. Develop an appropriate budget.
5. Track spending to remain within budget.
6. Periodically reassess budget.

The first step to developing a budget is knowing your take-home pay (i.e., after taxes, healthcare premiums, etc.)...the amount that gets deposited in your checking account. For you and, if applicable, your spouse, write down what your monthly take-home pay is. Be sure to differentiate income between what is predictable (e.g., guaranteed minimum paycheck) and what is unpredictable (e.g., year-end bonuses, commissions). Do not develop a budget that relies heavily (preferably not at all) on unpredictable income.

	PREDICTABLE	UNPREDICTABLE
His job #1		
Gross monthly pay		
Less: taxes		
Less: medical payroll deductions		
Less: Other _____		
Monthly take-home pay	0.00	0.00

Her job #1		
Gross monthly pay		
Less: taxes		
Less: medical payroll deductions		
Less: Other _____		
Monthly take-home pay	0.00	0.00

TOTAL	0.00	0.00
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To calculate an unpredictable income, take a conservative estimate of your annual after-tax income (based on an income of the past few years, divided by 12). To be safe, multiply by 85%. Not a “hoped for” amount!

Now that we have your income calculated, let’s talk about a spending plan. As mentioned earlier, your spending plan needs to be less than your total take-home pay calculated above. If not, you will end up in debt and bondage. (See Proverbs 22:7.) We will discuss debt more next session.

Recognizing that even predictable income isn’t really predictable (for example, we can lose our job), you should build an emergency fund to provide for you and your family during these short-term seasons when your income can vanish. (See Proverbs 6:6-8.) In most circumstances, an emergency fund that can cover basic needs for four to six months is sufficient. If you have not built up an emergency fund, be sure to add a line in your budget for setting aside money each month until you have a sufficient emergency fund.

We can categorize expenses into two categories – essential and non-essential. God has given us direction on what is essential. Read the following verses to better understand what God views as essential.

- 1 Timothy 5:8

- 1 Timothy 6:8

- Romans 13:5-7

- Acts 20:35

- Hebrews 13:16

- 1 John 3:17-18

- Psalm 37:21

As you can see, we are called to do many things, including providing our family with basic needs (such as food and shelter), adhering to laws (such as having auto insurance if you own a car), providing for needs around us (such as poor orphans), and fulfilling our commitments (such as paying off debts).

The Lord also allows us to use funds for non-essential items. (See Ecclesiastes 5:19-20.) The pitfall is that it is easy for us to go from moderation to excess when it comes to using God's provision for non-essential items. If we do not adhere to a budget that we track closely, then we have to rely on our own judgment, which is not always good. (See Jeremiah 17:9.)

Review the list of expense categories below. In the first column of blanks, mark which expense categories you spend money on, and in the second column of blanks, categorize each expense as either essential or non-essential. Of course, some might be a combination of essential and non-essential. For example, food is essential, but having filet mignon is not.

EXPENSE CATEGORY	IN YOUR BUDGET?	ESSENTIAL, NON-ESSENTIAL, BOTH
Auto – Fees, Registration	_____	_____
Auto – Gasoline	_____	_____
Auto – Loan payment	_____	_____
Auto – Maintenance, Repair	_____	_____
Auto – Parking, Tolls, etc.	_____	_____
Auto – Payment	_____	_____
Debt repayment – Credit card	_____	_____
Debt repayment – Student loans	_____	_____
Debt repayment – Other	_____	_____
House – Cable	_____	_____
House – Cleaning	_____	_____
House – Electricity	_____	_____
House – Furnishings	_____	_____
House – HOA fees	_____	_____
House – Lawn care	_____	_____
House – Maintenance, Repair	_____	_____
House – Mortgage, Rent	_____	_____
House – Natural Gas	_____	_____
House – Property taxes	_____	_____



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EXPENSE CATEGORY	IN YOUR BUDGET?	ESSENTIAL, NON-ESSENTIAL, BOTH
House – Telephone, Internet	_____	_____
House – Water, Sewer	_____	_____
Household – Babysitting	_____	_____
Household – Clothes	_____	_____
Household – Dry Cleaning	_____	_____
Household – Groceries	_____	_____
Household – Hair care	_____	_____
Household – Other	_____	_____
Household – School supplies	_____	_____
Household – School tuition	_____	_____
Household – Day care	_____	_____
Household – Wireless phone	_____	_____
Insurance – Auto	_____	_____
Insurance – Disability	_____	_____
Insurance – General	_____	_____
Insurance – Health	_____	_____
Insurance – House	_____	_____
Insurance – Life	_____	_____
Other – Child support	_____	_____
Other – Giving	_____	_____
Other – Medical other	_____	_____
Other – Medical visits	_____	_____
Other – Medicines	_____	_____
Other – Other	_____	_____
Recreation – Gifts	_____	_____
Recreation – Gym	_____	_____
Recreation – Movies	_____	_____
Recreation – Country club	_____	_____
Recreation – Restaurants	_____	_____
Recreation – Vacations	_____	_____
Savings – Emergency fund	_____	_____
Savings – Auto replacement	_____	_____
Savings – Retirement	_____	_____
Savings – School/education	_____	_____
Savings – Other	_____	_____

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Review the work above and journal about your initial impressions of how you are stewarding God’s resources. For example, how are you doing at keeping your non-essential spending moderate? In what ways can you change your spending patterns to improve your stewardship?

Let’s figure out exactly where your money is going. If you already track your spending, great! Print out the detail and bring it to your next community group meeting. If you haven’t been tracking your spending, gather your receipts, bank statements, and credit card statements and try to estimate your spending. If it helps, track your spending this week and use that information to help estimate your spending. In the below section, you can estimate your average monthly spending. (Note: see the supplemental electronic spreadsheet for a sample budget tracking tool.)

EXPENSE CATEGORY	ESSENTIAL + NON-ESSENTIAL = TOTAL
Auto – Fees, Registration	_____ + _____ = _____
Auto – Gasoline	_____ + _____ = _____
Auto – Loan payment	_____ + _____ = _____
Auto – Maintenance, Repair	_____ + _____ = _____
Auto – Parking, Tolls, etc	_____ + _____ = _____
Auto – Payment	_____ + _____ = _____
AUTO SUBTOTAL	_____ + _____ = _____
Debt repayment – Credit card	_____ + _____ = _____
Debt repayment – Student loans	_____ + _____ = _____
Debt repayment – Other	_____ + _____ = _____
DEBT REPAYMENT SUBTOTAL	_____ + _____ = _____
House – Cable	_____ + _____ = _____
House – Cleaning	_____ + _____ = _____
House – Electricity	_____ + _____ = _____
House – Furnishings	_____ + _____ = _____
House – HOA fees	_____ + _____ = _____



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EXPENSE CATEGORY	ESSENTIAL	+	NON-ESSENTIAL	=	TOTAL
House – Lawn care	_____	+	_____	=	_____
House – Maintenance, Repair	_____	+	_____	=	_____
House – Mortgage, Rent	_____	+	_____	=	_____
House – Natural Gas	_____	+	_____	=	_____
House – Property taxes	_____	+	_____	=	_____
House – Telephone, Internet	_____	+	_____	=	_____
House – Water, Sewer	_____	+	_____	=	_____
HOUSE SUBTOTAL	_____	+	_____	=	_____
Household – Babysitting	_____	+	_____	=	_____
Household – Clothes	_____	+	_____	=	_____
Household – Dry Cleaning	_____	+	_____	=	_____
Household – Groceries	_____	+	_____	=	_____
Household – Hair care	_____	+	_____	=	_____
Household – Other	_____	+	_____	=	_____
Household – School supplies	_____	+	_____	=	_____
Household – School tuition	_____	+	_____	=	_____
Household – Day care	_____	+	_____	=	_____
Household – Wireless phone	_____	+	_____	=	_____
HOUSEHOLD SUBTOTAL	_____	+	_____	=	_____
Insurance – Auto	_____	+	_____	=	_____
Insurance – Disability	_____	+	_____	=	_____
Insurance – General	_____	+	_____	=	_____
Insurance – Health	_____	+	_____	=	_____
Insurance – House	_____	+	_____	=	_____
Insurance – Life	_____	+	_____	=	_____
INSURANCE SUBTOTAL	_____	+	_____	=	_____
Other – Child support	_____	+	_____	=	_____
Other – Giving	_____	+	_____	=	_____
Other – Medical other	_____	+	_____	=	_____
Other – Medical visits	_____	+	_____	=	_____
Other – Medicines	_____	+	_____	=	_____
Other – Other	_____	+	_____	=	_____
OTHER SUBTOTAL	_____	+	_____	=	_____

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EXPENSE CATEGORY	ESSENTIAL + NON-ESSENTIAL = TOTAL		
Recreation – Gifts	_____	+	_____ = _____
Recreation – Gym	_____	+	_____ = _____
Recreation – Movies	_____	+	_____ = _____
Recreation – Country club	_____	+	_____ = _____
Recreation – Restaurants	_____	+	_____ = _____
Recreation – Vacations	_____	+	_____ = _____
RECREATION SUBTOTAL	_____	+	_____ = _____
Savings – Emergency fund	_____	+	_____ = _____
Savings – Auto replacement	_____	+	_____ = _____
Savings – Retirement	_____	+	_____ = _____
Savings – School/education	_____	+	_____ = _____
Savings – Other	_____	+	_____ = _____
SAVINGS SUBTOTAL	_____	+	_____ = _____
TOTAL SPENDING	_____	+	_____ = _____

Now compare your income to your expenses.

- Predicable income \$ _____
- Essential expenses – \$ _____
- Positive (negative) cash flow = \$ _____
- Unpredictable income + \$ _____
- Nonessential expenses – \$ _____
- Positive (negative) cash flow = \$ _____



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Based on all of the above data, fill in the below matrix.

Category	Dollar Amount (\$)			Percentage of Income (%) ⁽¹⁾		
	Essential	Non-essential	Total	Essential	Non-essential	Total
Auto						
Debt repay						
House						
Household						
Insurance						
Other - Giving						
Other						
Recreation						
Savings						
Total						

(1) Take-home income is 100% of predictable income and 85% of unpredictable income.

Assessing the work above, where are you experiencing victory? Where are you struggling? What are you going to do to transform your struggles into victories?

As we stated earlier, your income is not a biblical indicator of what your lifestyle should be, but it is a good indicator of what your maximum lifestyle can be. If your expenses exceed your income, write out a plan below to resolve this problem. If your expenses are less than your income but you have a sizable amount of non-essential expenses, then journal below on whether and, if so, how you intend to resolve this issue.

Based on the above, you can develop a realistic and God-honoring budget. (Note: After completing your study of debt, giving and savings over the next three sessions, revisit your budget to see what other changes you might want to make.) In developing and adhering to a budget, we would like to share a few practical tips to increase your chances of success.

- Attempt to keep your base essential expenses within your predictable income.
- Develop budget-line items to save now for big ticket items such as cars, so you can avoid debt in the future.
- If you are married and hope to have one parent stay at home with the kids, start moving toward living on one income now.
- Find ways to cut costs. For example, use coupons, start a babysitting co-op, make coffee at home, bring your lunch to work, and remove some non-essential items from your budget.
- Consider using an envelope system for keeping expenses within your planned budget. For example, if you budget \$500/month for food, place \$125 in an envelope at the beginning of each week and pay for all food expenses (e.g., groceries, restaurants) with cash from the "food envelope." When the cash is gone, you are out of money for the week.

In summary, here is a review of the six steps to developing and staying within a budget:

1. Know your take-home income.
2. Know your current expenses (dollar amount; essential versus non-essential).
3. Compare your income and expenses.
4. Develop an appropriate budget.



5. Track spending to remain within budget.
6. Periodically reassess budget.

Remember, if you have any challenges in developing your budget, the MoneyWise team would be happy to meet with your community group.

RECAP: PERSONAL APPLICATIONS MENTIONED IN SESSION TWO

- Review the scripture on pages 9-11, and reflect on God’s perspective on lifestyle and spending.
- Make a list of reasons God provides you with resources. Talk through these with your community group or with another person/couple to gain perspective.
- Begin to develop a budget by calculating your income, then categorizing your expenses into two categories—essential and non-essential.
- Review the scripture on pages 12-13 to better understand what God considers essential.
- Track your spending and gather receipts, bank statements and credit card statements in order to estimate your spending. Compare income to expenses, and fill in the matrix on page 18.
- Discuss with your community group how you can change your spending patterns to improve your stewardship.
- If your spending exceeds your income, write out a plan to resolve the problem.
- If your spending did not exceed your income but you have a sizable amount of non-essential expenses, spend some time journaling about it and discuss with your community group whether you have an issue to resolve.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Provide each community group member with a copy of each worksheet you completed for this session. (Note: Do so at least two days in advance of your group meeting to discuss this session.) Each person should review everyone’s worksheets to fully understand current circumstances and planned changes.
2. Come prepared to ask questions, encourage and gently guide where appropriate.
3. Share with the group at least one way they can encourage and help hold you accountable to better steward your resources.

SESSION THREE

DEBT

Note: As a reminder, all worksheets in this small group study are available in electronic spreadsheet format from a download on the Watermark MoneyWise website (www.watermark.org/ministries/care/moneywise-ministry/) in the Small Group Study session.

Memory verse Proverbs 22:7 “The rich rules over the poor, and the borrower becomes the lender’s slave.”

We need to remain firm where Scripture is firm and flexible where Scripture is flexible. Scripture does not forbid debt, so this study will not forbid debt. At the same time, we need to recognize that Scripture speaks of debt with words of caution, so we must be cautious in considering the use of debt. For example, here are two warnings:

- Debt presumes on the future. See James 4:13-15.
- Debt can lead to bondage. See Proverbs 22:7, Proverbs 22:26-27.

In addition, we should explore our heart for any unhealthy, underlying conditions that led to our current circumstance and deal with those issues to prevent future unnecessary incurrance of debt. Meditate on Galatians 5:1, 1 Timothy 6:6-19, and 1 Corinthians 7:23-24, and journal about the areas where you have an unhealthy relationship with money.

When debt becomes extreme, Scripture is clear that bankruptcy is not the best option for becoming debt free. Bankruptcy has become an increasingly common “solution” people turn to in order to resolve their previous poor decisions. Before considering bankruptcy as an option, study the following passages:

- Psalm 37:21
- Ecclesiastes 5:4-5
- Proverbs 3:27-28
- Romans 13:7

Based on the above passages, as well as an overall study of Scripture, the following can be said about debt for followers of Christ.



M O N E Y W I S E

- We are to enter into debt commitments with extreme caution.
- We are to fulfill the loans we do take out. The unrighteous are the ones who do not repay what they owe, but the righteous repay their debts.
- We are to do everything within our power to repay debts including liquidating assets, living spartan lifestyles (i.e., no non-essential spending), and earning additional income.
- Even if bankruptcy is declared and the courts discharge debt, followers of Christ are to pay back what is owed regardless of how long it takes.

Please develop a list of all of your debts.

DEBT DESCRIPTION	DOLLARS OWED	INTEREST RATE	MONTHLY PAYMENT
	TOTAL=		TOTAL=

In reviewing the above passages and your current list of debts (if any), how are you honoring Christ in this area, and where can you grow the most?

If you need to begin reducing and eventually eliminating debt, consider the following steps:

- **Eliminate all credit cards** and incur no new debt.
- Develop a list of the **details** of all your debts (done above).
- Reconsider your lifestyle and budget (from session 2) to **minimize costs** which will allow for redirecting funds to rapidly paying down debt.

- Develop a detailed plan to reduce debt as quickly as possible and allow your community group to help you **stay accountable to meeting your plan**.
- **Pay off** highest interest rate debts first. Roll payments to the next debt. **Incur no new debt.**
- **Communicate with creditors** to improve the terms of your debt but only do this after you have developed a realistic plan that you are able to deliver on.
- For more help, go to www.watermark.org/ministries/care/moneywise-ministry/ and review debt articles.

Note: The MoneyWise team can help your community group with developing a debt repayment plan for you.

One final thought as we close this session. Many people in debt are tempted to stop giving to God's needs around them while they focus on reducing debt as quickly as possible. While recognizing the struggles associated with being in debt, we should still give to God's work in the midst of our financial bondage since we are called to give of our first fruits. (See Proverbs 3:9-10.) In processing your potential decision to not give to God's work while you are in financial bondage, process the following statements and questions, and journal about the reasoning for your stewardship decisions during times of financial bondage.

- Describe how you have removed all non-essential expenses before considering eliminating giving. (See 1 Timothy 6:8 for a definition of essential needs.)
- In choosing to temporarily eliminate giving, how do you feel this is an appropriate way to glorify God? In what ways will it further the cause of Christ? (See 1 Corinthians 10:31-33, Matthew 5:16.)
- Recognizing that all you have is really God's, why do you feel that not giving is what He would have you do with His resources? (See Psalm 24:1, 1 Chronicles 29:11-12.)
- In considering how this will impact your walk with Christ, how will it benefit you spiritually? (See Luke 16:10-13, 1 Corinthians 10:23.)
- Describe how you might be struggling with trusting that God can provide for you and trying to take the situation into your own hands. (See Matthew 6:25-34.)
- By not giving, how are you potentially avoiding the benefit of God's discipline? How are you possibly avoiding the fact that God, through His love, providentially uses hard circumstances and the consequences of your poor choices to grow you? How might you miss out on an opportunity to strip away idols in your life? (See James 1:2-4, Hebrews 12:4-11, 2 Corinthians 1:9-10.)
- In what ways are your circumstances worse than the poor widow Jesus encounters (see Mark 12:41-44) or the Christians at Macedonia (see 2 Corinthians 8:1-5)?



- How is not giving setting a Christ-like example for your children and those on your Top 10 list? (See 1 Corinthians 11:1.)

Remember, if you have any challenges in determining how to deal with debt, the MoneyWise team would be happy to meet with your community group.

RECAP: PERSONAL APPLICATIONS MENTIONED IN SESSION THREE

- Review the scripture on page 21 to see what God says about debt.
- Develop a list of all of your debts.
- Discuss with your community group how you are honoring Christ in this area and where you can grow the most.
- If you are in debt that is not appropriate,
 - Eliminate all credit cards and incur no new debt,
 - Reconsider lifestyle and budget to minimize costs,
 - Come up with a debt repayment plan, and
 - Communicate with creditors to improve the terms of your debt.
- If you are considering not giving to God in order to pay off debt, review the points on pages 22-23 and process with your community group.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Provide each community group member with a copy of each worksheet you completed for this session. (Note: Do so at least two days in advance of your group meeting to discuss this session.) Each person should review everyone's worksheets to fully understand current circumstances and planned changes. Come prepared to ask questions, encourage and gently guide where appropriate.
2. Come prepared to share with your group whether and why you feel comfortable with your current level of debt, as well as any specific plans you have for changing your current circumstances. Ask them to speak wisdom into your situation.

SESSION FOUR

GIVING

Note: As a reminder, all worksheets in this small group study are available in electronic spreadsheet format from a download on the Watermark MoneyWise website (www.watermark.org/ministries/care/moneywise-ministry/) in the Small Group Study session.

Memory verse 1 John 3:17-18 “But whoever has the world’s goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth.”

Giving is a topic that leads to many questions from followers of Christ. Here are a few common questions people ask:

- Do percentages matter? If so, how much should you give?
- What is sacrificial giving?
- Should you give if you can’t do so joyfully?
- In giving, do you consider income only or also savings (investments, assets)?
- How do you assess an organization that you are considering giving money to?

In starting, it will help to have a complete list of your recent giving. Complete the below section, including all of your contributions to Christ-honoring organizations over the past twelve months.

ORGANIZATION	ORGANIZATION PURPOSE	DOLLAR AMOUNT
TOTAL=		

In addition, note your last twelve months income (reviewed in session 3) and your total assets (will review further next session).

- Income \$_____
- Assets \$_____



A common belief in the church world is that a fully devoted follower of Christ is to give a tithe or 10% of income. A complete study of Scripture on the subject will quickly show the inaccuracy of this belief for two primary reasons. First, the biblical concept of tithing was more than 10%. Second, God frequently calls His followers to give well beyond a tithe. Let's unpack these two points!

In studying the biblical concept of tithing, the following truths will become evident:

- The tithe was a starting point. (See Matthew 23:23-24.)
- Anything less than a tithe was robbing God. (See Malachi 3:8-10.)
- There were multiple tithes, not just one – first to priests (see Numbers 18:21, 24), second to festival (see Deuteronomy 12:17-18), third to orphans, widows and the poor (see Deuteronomy 14:28-29).

In addition, a further study of Scripture shows that the giving topic is so much broader than "tithing." Study these passages:

- Give according to your heart. (See 2 Corinthians 9:7.)
- The willingness to give is foundational. (See Exodus 36:4-7.)
- The widow gave everything. (See Luke 21:1-4.)
- Early Christians gave possessions, not just income. (See Acts 2:44-45, Acts 4:32-37.)
- Christians are encouraged to give beyond their capability. (See 2 Corinthians 8:1-5.)
- Provide freewill offerings. (See 1 Chronicles 29:9, Deuteronomy 12:6.)

In reviewing these passages, hopefully it is evident to you that Christ's grace and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit doesn't lower the calling for believers—it raises the calling. (See Luke 9:23-27.) It is important to understand that the right question is not "how much should I give?" Rather, the right question to ask is "how much should I keep?" Faithful giving considers assets as well, not just income. As noted in passages we reviewed earlier in this small group study (see Acts 2:44-45, Acts 4:32-37, Matthew 19:16-26, Luke 19:8-9), everything is God's and available for God's purposes. One word of caution is that the Bible does not call everyone to a life of asceticism (i.e., self-denial, extreme abstinence); rather, God wants to provide for us and for us to enjoy His provision. (See Proverbs 30:7-9, Ecclesiastes 5:10-19.)

After completing the initial portion of this session's study, take some time to journal what you are feeling right now – for example, encouragement about what you have been doing in the past, changed conceptions about what the Bible has to say about giving, new objectives, etc.

M O N E Y W I S E

At this point, people will often say, "I really want to be faithful in this area of life, but it is hard." That is completely understandable. Below are some common reasons why it is hard, as well as God's antidote for the difficulty. Identify the common challenges that strike closest to home for you and meditate on the passages that you can lean on to hand over all your worries and cares to God.

CHALLENGE	GOD'S ANSWER
I am not sure God has my best interest in mind.	Jeremiah 29:11, Romans 8:28
I enjoy the things money provides.	Ecclesiastes 5:10-15
Giving removes my ability to control.	1 Timothy 6:9-10
There are no good examples for me to learn from.	Matthew 5:15-16, 2 Corinthians 8, Mark 12:41-44
Money is a private matter, so I won't share my struggles with other people.	Proverbs 27:17, Proverbs 28:26, Proverbs 18:1-2, Proverbs 11:14

How are you being challenged? What steps can you take to gain victory over your struggles?

By now, hopefully it is becoming clear that stewarding is at its core no different than any other aspect of our lives. We want to use our tongue to love God and love others. We want to use our time to love God and love others. We want to use our money to love God and love others. In order to be successful in all these matters, the following is critical:

- Understand and believe that nothing belongs to you. (See Job 41:11, Psalm 24:1, 2 Corinthians 8:2, 2 Samuel 24:24.)
- Desire to do good for others in response to the incredible grace you have received in Christ. (See Ephesians 2:8-9, Matthew 19:21, Luke 19:8-9, Ephesians 2:10.)



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- Desire to avoid the pitfalls of greed. (See Luke 12:15, Luke 6:38.)
- Understand and believe what God promises to those who sacrifice for Him. (See Matthew 10:39, Mark 9:35, Luke 9:23-24.)

At this point, we hope you feel like you have a clearer understanding of how you decide how much to give to godly causes God puts before you. But now you might say, I get overwhelmed with requests for money from organizations. They all seem to be doing such great work, so I feel like I should give to all of them. I want to honor Christ by partnering with the right organizations. How do I assess an organization to decide whether or not to steward resources through them? That is a great question to ask! Before we answer the question, list all of the organizations that you have recently given to or are considering giving to.

Randy Alcorn, a well known author on the subject of financial stewardship, developed a list of nineteen questions to use in assessing a ministry before providing resources to the organization. We have copied this list from Randy's book *Money, Possessions and Eternity* and included it here for your use.

1. Are you fulfilling your primary giving responsibility to your local church?
2. What things about this ministry make it uniquely worth investing in?
3. In addition to reading the literature from this ministry, who have you talked with who knows it close up but have no vested interests in it?
4. Have you considered a ministry or vision trip to see and participate in what this ministry is actually doing on field?
5. How does the ministry's staff demonstrate a servant-hearted concern for those to whom they minister?
6. How do the organization's workers demonstrate a sense of unity, camaraderie and mutual respect? (Ask employees, "For what reasons have people left this organization in the last few years?")
7. Whom have you talked directly with at the lower levels of this ministry, not just executives and PR people? How do they feel about the ministry?
8. Is this ministry biblically sound and Christ-centered? Do people call upon the Lord to ask His guidance and the Holy Spirit's empowerment to do their work?
9. What kind of character, integrity, purity and humility is demonstrated by the ministry leaders?

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10. What kind of accountability structures (just using the word accountability isn't enough) does the organization have?
11. If this is a secular or semi-Christian organization rather than a distinctively Christian one, why would you give to it rather than to another?
12. How clear are this organization's goals and objectives, strategies, and tactics, and how effective are they in carrying them out?
13. Is this organization teachable and open to improvement to become more strategic? What examples have you seen?
14. Are you certain you've gotten an objective view of this ministry, or have you seen only the positives without the negatives? (Ask them, "What are your weaknesses?")
15. What ethics and what view of God and people are demonstrated in this organization's fund-raising techniques?
16. How much money does the organization spend on overhead expenses and fund-raising, and how much in actual ministry to people?
17. In what way does this ministry show a clear understanding of cross-cultural ministry factors and local conditions and how the flow of money may affect them?
18. What examples do you have that this organization speaks well of others and cooperates with them?
19. How do you know this ministry is pervaded by a distinctly eternal perspective?

Let's wrap up this session by journaling what is on your mind at this point.

Remember, if you have any questions about giving, the MoneyWise team would be happy to meet with your community group.



RECAP: PERSONAL APPLICATIONS MENTIONED IN SESSION FOUR

- Review the scripture on pages 26-28 regarding giving.
- Make a list of your recent giving.
- Review your last 12 months income, as well as your total assets in relationship to your giving.
- Journal about what you feel as you assess your giving—encouragement about what you have been doing and/or discouragement and fear as you are being challenged.
- Address the hard questions that keep you from fully trusting God in this area.
- Journal about how you are being challenged in this area, and discuss with your community group.
- To assess an organization when deciding whether or not to support it, review the questions on pages 28-29.

RECAP: SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Provide each community group member with a copy of each worksheet you completed for this session. (Note: Do so at least two days in advance of your group meeting to discuss this session.) Each person should review everyone's worksheets to fully understand current circumstances and come prepared to ask questions.
2. Share with the group one encouragement about what you have been doing in this area and one way in which you are being challenged (or even discouraged) in this area.

SESSION FIVE

SAVING, INVESTING AND ASSETS

Note: As a reminder, all worksheets in this small group study are available in electronic spreadsheet format from a download on the Watermark MoneyWise website (www.watermark.org/ministries/care/moneywise-ministry/) in the Small Group Study session.

Memory verse Ecclesiastes 5:10 “He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves abundance with its income. This too is vanity.”

Is saving a biblical concept? On the one hand, Scripture seems to encourage us to save for a season. (See Proverbs 6:6-8.) On the other hand, when a man builds towers to store up grain for many years to come, Christ rebukes him and calls him a fool. (See Luke 12:16-21.) So what is a proper balance? How much should I save? Based on the two passages listed above, journal your initial impressions of a biblical view of saving.

Your definition likely includes an understanding that the Bible both encourages us to save for specific reasons in specific circumstances and also warns us about the dangers of saving for other reasons. As with many issues in life, it is important to have a complete understanding of what God says about storing financial resources for future use, so you can make the proper decisions for His circumstances.

In preparation for a deeper discussion on saving, investing, and assets, prepare a balance sheet listing all your assets and liabilities (note: you listed all of your liabilities in session three).

ASSETS

- House: \$ _____
- Cars: \$ _____



M O N E Y W I S E

- 401k, IRA, etc \$_____
- Other stocks, bonds, etc \$_____
- Additional real estate \$_____
- Checking account \$_____
- Savings account \$_____
- Other \$_____
- TOTAL ASSETS \$_____

LIABILITIES

- Mortgage \$_____
- Student loans \$_____
- Car notes \$_____
- Credit cards \$_____
- Other \$_____
- TOTAL LIABILITIES \$_____
- Net Worth \$_____
- (Assets – Liabilities)

Scripture offers many warnings about the potential distractions that one can experience as a result of accumulating money. For example, review the following passages:

- 1 Timothy 6:6-10
- Ecclesiastes 5:10-16
- Matthew 19:23-24

After meditating on the above verses, journal how specifically money might be distracting you?

M O N E Y W I S E

Fortunately, we know that when we seek the Lord, He can use all things for our good and His glory. (See Romans 8:28-30.) With this in mind, let's review some Scriptural examples of God's purposes for excess funds He supplies to His people:

- 2 Corinthians 8:1-5, 12-15
- Luke 12:48
- Acts 11:29
- Proverbs 3:9-10
- Proverbs 22:9
- Acts 2:42-47

Based on the above, how can you celebrate ground you have taken in stewarding assets? What are some specific ways you can grow in this area?

Develop and prioritize (with your spouse if appropriate) a list of significant areas (house, retirement, school tuition, etc.) you are currently saving for or hope to be saving for.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

Based on your study of this session up to this point, review the following questions and then journal your responses.

- What does God want you to do with the resources He has entrusted to you?
- What are you saving for – a rainy day (i.e., a season) or a rainy lifetime?
- Are your investments and savings a reflection of the fool in Luke 12:16-21?
- How do you justify each thing you are holding onto?
- How are your savings and investments a way for you to protect against something God may bring into my life? Are you trusting Him, trusting your resources, or trying to trust both?



M O N E Y W I S E

As a final exercise before meeting with your community group, develop a plan for what assets you should keep and what assets you should release. Be sure to consider each of your assets and explain your reasoning for each of your decisions. Allow your biblical community to speak into this plan – affirming or helping expose potential blind spots.

RECAP: PERSONAL APPLICATIONS MENTIONED IN SESSION FIVE

- Journal your initial impressions about the biblical view of saving by reviewing the scriptures on page 31.
- List all of your assets and liabilities.
- Review the scriptures on page 32 and journal about how money might be distracting you.
- Review the scriptures on the top of page 33 and journal about how you can celebrate taking ground as you steward your assets. Discuss with your community group how you can grow in this area.
- Develop and prioritize a list of significant areas (house, retirement, school tuition, etc.) you are currently saving for or hope to be saving for.
- Review the following questions, journaling and then discussing with your community group:
 - What does God want you to do with the resources He has entrusted to you?
 - What are you saving for – a rainy day (i.e. a season) or a rainy lifetime?
 - Are your investments and savings a reflection of the fool in Luke 12:16-21?
 - How do you justify each thing you are holding onto?
 - How are your savings and investments a way for you to protect against

something God may bring into my life? Are you trusting Him, trusting your resources, or trusting both?

- Develop a plan for what assets you should keep and what assets you should release. Explain your reasoning for each decision. Discuss with your community group so they can affirm or expose blind spots.
- Revisit your budget and adjust as necessary.

RECAP: SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Provide each community group member with a copy of each worksheet you completed for this session. (Note: Do so at least two days in advance of your group meeting to discuss this session.) Each person should review everyone's worksheets to fully understand current circumstances and planned changes. Come prepared to ask questions, encourage, and gently guide where appropriate.
2. How are you doing at finding all of your security in Christ and not finding any security in your financial resources?
3. Come prepared to share with your community group your current savings plan as well as whether and why you feel comfortable with your plan. Ask them to speak wisdom into your situation.



CLOSING

If you are overwhelmed by all of the action items in this study, don't be discouraged! This is a lot of information to digest. For those of you who would like a more narrowed down checklist of action items, here is a subset of the entire study's action items that is a good place for many people to start:

- **God's Purpose.** Start being financially transparent with your community group – both the numbers and your heart.
- **God's Purpose.** Praise God daily for His provision in your life and ask for His guidance in stewarding His resources for your good and His glory.
- **Spending.** Understand where you currently spend money by tracking your spending for a month or two. Begin making changes where necessary.
- **Spending.** Begin setting aside a modest amount of money for unexpected expenses such as auto or home repairs. Start with a goal of \$1,000 and eventually grow the emergency fund to 3-6 months of expenses.
- **Debt.** List all of your debts and develop a detailed plan to pay down all of your debts, especially credit card debt and auto loans.
- **Giving.** Start giving proactively and out of your first fruits. Only give to ministries where you have done your homework and feel good about their stewardship of God's resources.
- **Savings.** Develop a list of God-honoring future needs and desires you would like to save resources for. Reassess all savings in light of your list, and release assets that aren't being held onto for purposeful and God-honoring things.

Respond faithfully and let us know how we can help you and your community group. If you would like to listen to Watermark sermon series on stewardship, please go to www.watermarkradio.org to listen to the following two series:

Consumed – 11.13.2005 Todd Wagner

The Green, The Grey & The Gold – 4.27.2003/5.4.2003 Todd Wagner

In closing, we hope this five session study has blessed you, your family, and your community group. We are committed to excellence and would appreciate any feedback you might have about this curriculum.

– The Watermark MoneyWise Team



APPENDIX OF FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

PURPOSE

How does my financial stewardship relate to my walk with Christ?

God makes it clear that there is an intimate correlation between how one handles resources He entrusts a person with and how that reflects a person's commitment to follow Him. This is most clearly seen in Christ's words in Matthew 6:19-24. It is also seen in the ways scripture gives us other examples of financial stewardship being a reflection of where a person's heart is in relation to Christ. Meditate on the following verses that present stewardship as a reflection of one's relationship with Christ – Luke 19:8-9, Acts 2:45, Matthew 19:20-21, Acts 4:32-37, 1 Timothy 6:9-10.

God tells us in His word that He owns all resources (see below) and we are accountable to Him for how we manage/steward His resources (see below). For example, God shares the following with us through His written revelation:

- Psalm 24:1 Earth and all it contains is the Lord's
- 1 Chronicles 29:11-12 God has dominion over earth and riches
- Duet. 8:17-18 God makes wealth, not our wisdom and strength
- Luke 12:48 To whom much is given, much is expected
- 2 Corinthians 5:10 Must all give an account to Christ at judgment
- Matt 25:14-29 Accountable to the Master for how we handle His money
- 1 Corinthians 4:2 Must be trustworthy stewards
- Luke 16:10-11 If we are unfaithful with world's wealth we are untrustworthy with true riches

God also warns us of the dangers of materialism and how the love of money will pull us away from Him. (See Ecclesiastes 5:8-16, 1 Timothy 6:5-11, Ephesians 5:5-14, 1 Timothy 3:3, Luke 16:13, Proverbs 11:24-28)



We will all give an account for how we steward God's resources and faithful stewardship of His resources is intimately tied with being filled with His grace. (See Luke 16:9-13.)

If I can't give joyfully, should I give at all?

If one is not feeling joy in giving, there is a strong probability that his joy is rooted in the things of this world rather than the things of God. (See Colossians 3:1-3.) If one's treasure is in the things this world has to offer, then releasing them will be difficult and not joyful. (See Matthew 6:21.) Joy is often an outgrowth of obedience to God's principles (see Philippians 2:2, 2 Corinthians 9:7) and a result of being filled by His Spirit (see Galatians 5:16-24, 2 Corinthians 8:1-5).

In addition, giving is an act of worship (see Proverbs 3:9, 1 John 5:3), and as we obediently follow Christ and discipline ourselves for the purpose of godliness (see 1 Timothy 4:7-10), we will experience the joy that comes from stewarding well the Master's resources. (See Matthew 25:21.)

DEBT/BUDGETING

How do you determine an appropriate lifestyle? When does a lifestyle become indulgent?

A good starting point in assessing appropriate spending is the same as any other issue in life; that is, you should assess all decisions based on whether they bring glory to God (1 Corinthians 10:31). However, this needs to be understood within the whole of Scripture to avoid coming to the incorrect conclusion that God calls everyone to an ascetic lifestyle in order to deny ourselves and give everything away to ministry needs. While God calls us to do all things for His glory, He also tells us to personally enjoy God's financial provision for our lives. (See Ecclesiastes 5:18-20.) It is also worth noting that Scripture does not define a specific standard of living or outline a common standard of living such that we all have lifestyles that are identical. Furthermore, in 1 Timothy 5:8 we are even called to spend money on our families. (See 1 Timothy 6:8 for a definition of "needs" as used in Scripture.)

In processing your lifestyle, considering the following biblical principles:

- God does not want us to seek fulfillment through wealth. (See Luke 12:15, Ecclesiastes 5:10.)
- Our contentment in life should be driven by our relationship with Christ, not our standard of living. (See 1 Timothy 6:6-8, Philippians 4:11-13.)

- God often provides wealth to one person to meet the needs of others (see 2 Corinthians 8:14-15), not to increase our standard of living.
- An extravagant lifestyle threatens to pull our attention away from God. (See Proverbs 30:7-9.)

In addition, here are some good questions to process in considering all spending decisions. These questions should be viewed as informative inputs only, not questions that must be answered a certain way in order to allow for spending.

- Will it benefit me spiritually? (1 Corinthians 10:23)
- Will it bring bondage? (1 Corinthians 6:12)
- Will it defile God's temple? (1 Corinthians 6:19-20, Romans 6:13)
- Will it cause anyone to stumble? (1 Corinthians 8:8-9, Romans 13:10)
- Will it further the cause of evangelism? (1 Corinthians 10:32-33)
- Will it violate my conscience? (Romans 14:23, James 4:17)
- Will it bring glory to God? (1 Corinthians 10:31)

I'm struggling to make ends meet. If I stopped giving, I could use that money to pay off debt (credit cards, auto). Should I stop giving and focus on paying down debt?

If a person is struggling financially, they are right to make every effort possible to pay their debts. Scripture is clear that we should keep our commitments to people, including debtors. (See Psalm 37:21, Proverbs 3:27-28, Romans 13:7, Ecclesiastes 5:4-5.) In addition, as followers of Christ, we are to be a living testament to a lost and hurting world. (See Matthew 5:16, 2 Corinthians 6:3, Colossians 4:5.)

It is also understandable that a person uses the word "struggling" in speaking of repaying debts. Scripture frequently alarms us of the dangers of debt. (See Proverbs 22:7, Proverbs 22:26-27.) We should explore our heart for any unhealthy underlying conditions that led to our current circumstance and deal with those issues to prevent future unnecessary incurrence of debt. (Meditate on Galatians 5:1, 1 Timothy 6:6-19, 1 Corinthians 7:23-24.)

Recognizing the struggles associated with being in debt, one should still give to God's work in the midst of his or her financial bondage since we are called to give of our first fruits. (See Proverbs 3:9-10, Matthew 23:23.) In processing your potential decision to not give to God's work while you are in financial bondage, process the following questions:



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- Have I removed all non-essential expenses before considering eliminating giving? (See 1 Timothy 6:8 for a definition of essential needs.)
- Am I choosing to temporarily eliminate giving because I feel that is an appropriate way to glorify God? Will it further the cause of Christ? (See 1 Corinthians 10:31-33, Matthew 5:16.)
- Recognizing that all I have is really God's, do I feel that not giving is what He would have me do with His resources? (See Psalm 24:1, 1 Chronicles 29:11-12.)
- Have I considered the impact this will have on my walk with Christ? Will it benefit me spiritually? (See Luke 16:10-13, 1 Corinthians 10:23.)
- Am I struggling with trusting that God can provide for me and trying to take the situation into my own hands? (See Matthew 6:25-34.)
- By not giving, am I trying to avoid the benefit of God's discipline? Am I trying to avoid the fact that God, through His love, providentially uses hard circumstances and the consequences of our poor choices to grow us?
- Would I miss out on an opportunity to strip away idols in my life? (See James 1:2-4, Hebrews 12:4-11, 2 Corinthians 1:9-10.)
- Are my circumstances worse than the poor widow Jesus encounters (see Mark 12:41-44) or the Christians at Macedonia (see 2 Corinthians 8:1-5.)?
- Am I setting a Christ-like example for my children and those on my Top 10 list? (See 1 Corinthians 11:1.)

SAVINGS

When does the Bible say it is prudent to save? How much should I save?

The Bible both encourages us to save in specific circumstances and also warns us about the dangers of saving too much or for the wrong reasons. As with many issues in life, it is important to have a complete understanding of what God says about storing financial resources for future use, so one can make the proper decisions for his circumstances.

God cautions against being consumed with worldly possessions since it might redirect one's heart from God to possessions, and He cautions that unnecessary savings can be quickly lost. (See Matthew 6:19-34, Luke 12:13-21, 1 Timothy 6:9-10, Exodus 16:16-20.) In addition, God warns against storing up too much. (See James 5:1-5, Ecclesiastes 5:10-15, Proverbs 30:7-9.) On the other hand, God provides many examples of the wisdom of wisely preparing for future needs. (See Proverbs 6:6-8, Proverbs 21:20, Genesis 41:25-57.) It is worth noting that all of these examples of saving were related to needs (i.e., food), not unnecessary but nice benefits.

So the answer to the question is yes—it could be prudent to save. However, one needs to ask “how much?” and “for what?” In addition, it is wise to ask “why” one feels a need to save for future use and whether there is a lack of trust that God will provide.

What does the Bible say about retirement?

Retirement is not a concept specifically contemplated in Scripture; however, Scripture offers a lot of direction on the subject.

God calls us all to work. (See 2 Thessalonians 3:10-14, Genesis 3:19, Exodus 20:9-11, Exodus 23:12, Proverbs 14:23, Proverbs 10:4.) In addition, we are called to glorify God in all things. (See 1 Corinthians 10:31, Matthew 28:18-20.) As such, the modern retirement concept of self indulgence and relaxation is inconsistent with God’s calling for His followers.

On the other hand, it might be reasonable for a follower of Christ to serve God with his time without earning an income due to some savings allowing for income free work. That form of “retirement” might be consistent with Scripture and God’s calling on one’s life.

For a broader understanding of savings, see the FAQ about savings.

PROVIDING/TRUSTS

I want to make sure my wife is provided for in the event I can’t work (disabled) or I die. Is it Godly to purchase disability/life insurance, and if so, how much should I buy?

It is completely understandable that you want to provide for your wife in the event of an untimely accident or even death, and it is encouraging that you want to process this through the lens of Scripture.

The greatest danger of insurance is it has the potential to undermine our dependence on God and His provision for us through community and the local church. (See Acts 2:42-45, Acts 4:32-37, 2 Corinthians 8-9.) One must continually evaluate motives when considering insurance. The following questions should be processed as part of the decision making process:

- Am I trusting insurance to protect me in case God does something unexpected, or is insurance part of God’s provision for me to be wise according to His word? In other words, is insurance a legitimate tool of God or a substitute for Him?
- Is it wise to buy enough insurance to provide food and shelter for my wife and kids (see 1 Timothy 5:8, 1 Timothy 6:8) in the event of tragedy in a manner consistent with the way I provide for them today?



It all depends on our heart and motives for what we are trying to accomplish.

In digging further into this topic, you are encouraged to meditate on Matthew 6:25-34 as a good guide to use in considering where you are placing your reliance.

I'm updating my will and trying to determine how much money to leave to my kids. I want to bless them with what we have been provided. Also, I'm trying to decide if a trust is the best way to do this. Any advice?

The greatest inheritance parents can leave their kids is a life well stewarded as a parent (see 1 Corinthians 11:1). Study the following passage describing how we can best provide for our children – Deuteronomy 6:3-9, Proverbs 22:6, Proverbs 27:23, Proverbs 13:24, Proverbs 20:11.

One should exercise extreme caution in passing on money to their kids. The Lord entrusted us to steward our wealth, not delegate this responsibility to our kids. God desires His people to be active and engaged with how they are faithful in stewarding all He entrusts to them. Delegating this responsibility to ones kids could be analogous to the unfaithful steward who did nothing with his talent but bury it. (See Matthew 25:14-30.) The Master referred to this man as wicked and lazy. (See Matthew 25:26.) Scripture reminds believers of their accountability in this regard. (See Luke 16:9-13.)

Furthermore, if God desires for one's kids to have wealth He can easily provide it to them, and Scripture warns of the dangers of an inheritance gained easily. (See Proverbs 20:21.) God desires for all His children to work and provide for themselves and their families, and an inheritance can circumvent this model (see 2 Thessalonians 3:7-13).

More directly, automatically thinking of money as a blessing parents can pass down to children is not consistent with Scripture. Money can just as easily be a curse and a root of evil (see 1 Timothy 6:9-10) as it can be a blessing. It is the giving and stewarding of money well that is a blessing and joy (see 2 Corinthians 8:2-5).

Asking oneself "why" he would want to pass on money to children is a great place to start. Is it because one treasures it and it brings him security? Is one trying to keep his children secure in this world? (See James 4:4.) Is this the heritage one wants to encumber his children with? (See Ecclesiastes 5:10-17.)

Lastly, Proverbs 13:22 can be easily misunderstood and misapplied due to a lack of consideration for the context of the passage. The common inheritance at this time was agrarian assets (e.g., land, animals). The purpose of the inheritance was to allow one's descendants to work to provide for needs. Common inheritances today are not provisions to allow for descendants to work.

GIVING CHOICES

How do you decide how much money to give? Do percentages matter?

This is a very common question. To really wrestle through this topic, you are encouraged to first read the FAQ entitled “How does my financial stewardship relate to my walk with Christ?” It is important to understand that the right question is not “how much should I give?” Rather, the right question to ask is “how much should I keep?”

The Bible does not provide a precise percentage for giving. However, the Bible does provide lots of examples to help one understand how he should process what God would have him do. Here are a few examples to meditate on:

- 2 Corinthians 9:7 – Give according to the heart
- Luke 21:1-4 – Could be called to give all resources
- Luke 12:16-21 – Are to be rich towards God, not build bigger barns
- Acts 2:44-45; 4:32-37 – Give of assets, not just income
- 2 Corinthians 8:1-5 – Give beyond ones ability

Many will look to the Old Testament calling to tithe and anchor on the tithe as the appropriate level of giving. In Matthew 23:22-24, Jesus did not ignore the tithe and affirmed it as acceptable for the Pharisees. While we are no longer under the law (see Romans 6:14; Romans 10:4; Galatians 3:23-24; Ephesians 2:15), it is always wise to understand the Old Testament law since Christ consistently called us to a higher standard of living than the law. However, if one is going to start with an understanding of the Old Testament tithe as the foundation for determining how much to give, then it is important to have a thorough understanding of what the Old Testament says about giving.

- There was an annual tithe to support the priests and Levites. (See Numbers 18:21, 24.)
- There was an annual tithe to provide for sacred festivals. (See Deuteronomy 12:17-18; Deuteronomy 14:23.)
- There was a tithe every three years to support the orphans, widows, and the poor. (See Deuteronomy 14:28-29; Deuteronomy 26:12-13.)
- Not providing the 23% of tithes was considered robbing God. (See Malachi 3:8-10.)
- There were freewill offerings beyond the tithes. (See 1 Chronicles 29:9; Deuteronomy 12:6.)

The Old Testament set a floor for giving and allowed for giving significantly beyond that through the freewill offerings. As we enter the New Testament, once again God does not set a ceiling on giving, and He does not talk about a set percentage.

The tithe is probably a great starting point for giving, but for many people, it will not be the finish line. As we consider faithful stewardship, we should:

- Recognize God owns everything.
- Pray God would expose and soften your heart to His purposes.
- Spend time in God’s Word. (See Matthew 6:19-21, Luke 12:18-21, Acts 2:42-47, Acts



4:32-35, 1 Timothy 6:6-10, 1 Timothy 6:17-18, Deuteronomy 8:18, 2 Corinthians 8:2-5, 2 Corinthians 9:6-11, Proverbs 11:25, Ecclesiastes 5:10-12, Revelations 3:17-18.)

- Review your cash flow.
- Inventory all you have.
- Involve community.
- Respond faithfully.

Also, ask yourselves:

- Am I building bigger barns? (See Luke 12:15-21.)
- Am I finding great joy in giving? (See 2 Corinthians 8:14-15.)
- How am I sowing? (See 2 Corinthians 9:6-7.)
- Do I understand God's expectations? (see Luke 12:48.)

What does sacrificial giving look like?

Sacrificial giving is giving beyond one's ability. It is giving when the numbers don't necessarily make sense, when the world around you would say you should not give that much, when you give what you don't want to part with, etc. While sacrificial giving might look different for each of us, we are given many great examples of sacrificial giving or giving beyond abilities in scripture:

- Luke 21:1-4 – The widow was poor and gave all she possessed.
- Acts 2:44-45; 4:32-37 – Early Christians liquidated their possessions to take care of the needy among them.
- 2 Corinthians 8:1-5 – The Macedonians, though poor, gave beyond their ability with great joy.
- Matthew 19:16-26 – Jesus calls the Rich Young Ruler to sell all his possessions and give to the poor.
- Luke 19:8-9 – Zaccheus gave half of his possessions the day he accepted Christ. (Note: it is not clear this was sacrificial giving)

In each of these examples, we see the act of obedience of following God's will and the transformation of life that results. God promises us life when we sacrifice our desires for His will. We are promised that we will receive God's blessing a "hundred-fold" (Mark 10:29-31) when we sacrifice and follow Him. God further instructs us on what sacrifice looks like and warns of what it means to follow him (Luke 9:23-27).

While Scripture calls us to give generously and sacrificially, God does not command us to give so much that we live in ascetic poverty (Proverbs 30:7-9; Eccles 5:10-19). In order to give sacrificially, you must:

- Understand and believe that nothing belongs to you. (See Job 41:11; Psalm 24:1; 2 Corinthians 8:2; 2 Samuel 24:24.)
- Desire to do good for others in response to the incredible grace you have received in Christ. (See Ephesians 2:8-9; Matthew 19:21; Luke 19:8-9; Ephesians 2:10.)

- Desire to avoid the pitfalls of greed. (See Luke 12:15; Luke 6:38.)
- Understand and believe what God promises to those who sacrifice for Him. (See Matthew 10:39; Mark 9:35; Luke 9:23-24.)

What questions should I be asking when determining where to give money? Why should I give to the local church? Should my giving to the church be a higher priority over other ministries?

In one's desire to be a faithful steward of God's resources, it is great to process where to give (church, Christian charities, other charities, etc.), and Scripture certainly gives us some direction.

A person is right to make his local church a priority in his giving. 2 Corinthians 9:7 says God loves cheerful givers, and all followers of Christ should find a church home where he or she can give to the church joyfully. If a person can not give to his or her church joyfully, that issue should be dealt with immediately. 1 Timothy 5:17-18, Galatians 6:10, Acts 4:34-35, and 1 Corinthians 16:1-2 provide some guidance and insight into the importance of the local church in stewarding God's resources. Even when sending money to ministries in other cities, the Bible often shows this money being given collectively through a local church. As such, the local church should be a prominent part of one's giving. In addition, God may use the local church to help fulfill and grow an individual's passion for specific needs around the world by establishing new ministries within the local church. Ultimately, if one is not comfortable stewarding a significant part of his resources through his local church, he should ask himself whether he has chosen the appropriate local church to yoke with.

It is also appropriate to seek the will of the Lord in identifying other Christ-centered opportunities outside of the local church. (See Philippians 1:9-10.) Acts 2:45 provides an example of believers providing for the needs of others in a way that was obedient and God-glorifying. In assessing all giving opportunities, it is wise to partner with Christ honoring organizations that are trying to fulfill the Great Commission (see Matthew 28:18-20) and Great Commandment (see Mark 12:29-31).

As with all things in life, we are accountable for our stewardship of resources. With that in mind, Randy Alcorn (in *Money, Possessions and Eternity*) provides a list of nineteen questions to consider before providing resources to any organization.

1. Am I fulfilling my primary giving responsibility to my local church?
2. Are there things about this ministry that make it uniquely worth investing in?
3. Have I not only read the literature from this ministry, but talked with others who know it close up but have no vested interests in it?
4. Have I considered a ministry or vision trip to see and participate in what this ministry is actually doing on field?
5. Does the ministry's staff demonstrate a servant-hearted concern for those to whom they minister?



6. Do the organization's workers demonstrate a sense of unity, camaraderie and mutual respect? (Ask employees, "For what reasons have people left this organization in the last few years?")
7. Have I talked directly with people at the lower levels of this ministry, not just executives and PR people? How do they feel about the ministry?
8. Is this ministry biblically sound and Christ-centered? Do people call upon the Lord to ask His guidance and the Holy Spirit's empowerment to do their work?
9. What kind of character, integrity, purity and humility is demonstrated by the ministry leaders?
10. What kind of accountability structures (just using the word accountability isn't enough) does the organization have?
11. If this is a secular or semi-Christian organization rather than a distinctively Christian one, why would I give to it rather than to another?
12. How clear are this organization's goals and objectives, strategies, and tactics, and how effective are they in carrying them out?
13. Is this organization teachable and open to improvement to become more strategic?
14. Am I certain I've gotten an objective view of this ministry, or have I seen only the positives without the negatives? (Ask them, "What are your weaknesses?")
15. What ethics and what view of God and people are demonstrated in this organization's fund-raising techniques?
16. How much money does the organization spend on overhead expenses and fund-raising, and how much in actual ministry to people?
17. Does this ministry show a clear understanding of cross-cultural ministry factors and local conditions and how the flow of money may affect them?
18. Does this organization speak well of others and cooperate with them?
19. Is this ministry pervaded by a distinctly eternal perspective?

Is establishing a foundation and giving through it a good way to give? It allows me time to think about how much to give and where to give.

The first question one should ask in considering the establishment of a foundation is what his motive is for establishing the foundation (Proverbs 16:2). As with all decisions, a follower of Christ should assess the condition of his heart. For example, is the reason for establishing a foundation (instead of simply deploying the resources immediately) driven by a desire to retain control, prominence and stature? Also, is the foundation set up such that the donor can tap into the money for his own benefit?

Meditate on the following passages in assessing how the Lord would have you structure giving to His work.

- Matthew 6:19-21 – Is an endowment a form of storing up treasures on earth?
- Proverbs 16:9 – Is delayed giving through an endowment presuming upon the future?
- Matthew 25:14-30 – Recognizing the Lord will return unexpectedly (see 2 Peter 3:10-13), are you comfortable with giving an account of where your resources are? Are

you potentially guilty of “burying it for the future” (see Matthew 25:25) without gaining an eternal return?

- Mark 12:43-44 – Does an endowment put you in a position where you always “give out of your wealth” and avoid the blessing of “putting in everything”?
- Matthew 9:36-38 – Have you not found enough godly opportunities to use today’s wealth for today’s needs?
- James 4:17 – Do you feel like you should really give immediately, and if so, are you giving through a foundation as a way to delay giving up control?

COMMUNITY

Why should I share my finances with others when Matthew 6:3 tells me that I should give to God’s work confidentially?

Matthew 6:3-4 states, “But when you give to the poor, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving will be in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.” Looking at these verses in isolation would clearly lead you to believe that all giving should be done confidentially. However, as with all Scripture, these verses should be read within context, both the context of the broader passage and the whole of Scripture.

Context of passage. This passage pictures Jesus speaking to a crowd of Jews in what is known as the Sermon on the Mount. Matthew 6:1 sets up the purpose of this portion of the Sermon on the Mount, “Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them [emphasis added]; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven.” The purpose of God warning against letting your giving (or prayer or fasting which are also mentioned in this passage) be known to others is related to sharing this information with the wrong motives. Specifically, Jesus is warning against acts of righteousness being done with the motive of being recognized and rewarded by others. Jesus spoke specifically of giving, prayer and fasting in this passage because these were common issues of the day where Jesus recognized many Jews doing them with the motive of temporal recognition. In addition, it was also common amongst first century Jews to teach lessons with three examples, hence giving, prayer, and fasting. It is also worth noting that Jesus was clearly speaking in hyperbole, since it is obvious that a left hand and right hand don’t do things secretly from one another or have the ability to reason for that matter.

Context of the whole of Scripture. The obvious question is whether Scripture shows specific positive examples of others knowing of a person’s giving. There are examples of this in the Bible, including Acts 2:45, Acts 4:32-37, Numbers 7, 1 Chronicles 29:1-9, and 2 Corinthians 8:2-3. Similarly, we can see the same thing with prayer (compare Matthew 6:6 to Matthew 18:19-20 and Acts 2:42). Another question to consider is whether God calls us to share with others what it looks like to follow Christ. We see many examples of Scripture calling us to be a light to others providing them an example of what it means to follow Christ. (See Matthew 5:16, Hebrews 10:24, 1 Corinthians 11:1, 1 Timothy 3.)



In summary, we should not share with others about our giving (or anything else for that matter) where our motive is anything other than to bring glory to God. Giving, like all things, should be an act of worship. If we are sharing information with others to receive recognition, affirmation or reward from them, then we need to recognize this grieves God and negates any eternal rewards.

What are the benefits of sharing my financial information with others? What if it causes others in my community group to be uncomfortable?

In order to assess the benefits of involving others in discussing finances (or any other aspect of our Christian walk), we need to begin by understanding the nature of man. We all have sinful hearts, so we can easily deceive ourselves and rebel against God's will. (See Jeremiah 17:9, Proverbs 28:26.)

In addition to understanding the natural tendency of man, we must recognize that God's plan is for us to be in community, not in isolation. God is very clear that we benefit from connecting with the body of Christ and suffer from isolation. (See Proverbs 11:14, Ecclesiastes 4:9-12, Proverbs 27:17, Ephesians 4:16, 1 Corinthians 11:1.)

Practically speaking, Scripture shares an example of people being inspired and changed by being exposed to the details of how others are giving (see 2 Corinthians 9:2). We can benefit in the same way.

If a member of your community group does not want to participate in group discussions about finances, it is best to begin by asking questions about the motives for his or her concern. (See Proverbs 16:2.) Ask the person to reference Scripture as much as possible in sharing with you why it is best to not share about this issue. Also, try to understand why they have concerns about sharing on this topic while being comfortable sharing about other topics such as marriage, parenting and work.

How do I share my financial information with others? How does the group use this information going forward?

As with all information you share with your community group, there are certain ground rules for healthy group dynamics. Here are a few to remember as you begin sharing financial information:

- Begin by explaining to them why your faithfulness in stewardship is important to you and as such why you are trying to gain counsel from others. (See Luke 12:47-48, Luke 16:10-15, Matthew 12:33-36.) Also, help them understand their responsibility for sharpening you. (See Ezekiel 33:6-9, Proverbs 27:17, 1 Timothy 4:15-16.)
- Involve as many community members together as possible in the discussions rather than trying to meet with people individually. (See Proverbs 12:15, Proverbs 13:20, Proverbs 11:14.)

- Everyone should come in with humble, teachable spirits and be prepared to offer truthful but gentle words. (See Proverbs 27:6, Proverbs 18:5, Proverbs 12:1, Proverbs 10:19, Proverbs 15:1, Proverbs 12:18.)
- While unconditional confidentiality should not be promised or expected (see Proverbs 16:9, Matthew 12:36), everyone should steward each other's financial information wisely. If you feel you need to involve another person, you should first inform the one whose finances you are discussing so they won't be surprised. To be clear, involving others is rare.
- All conversations should be grounded in the Word and in prayer. (See 2 Timothy 3:16-17, Hebrews 4:12, Matthew 18:20, Psalm 43:3.)

With a proper perspective and heart about community, you are now ready to discuss one another's finances. Here are some practical tips specifically related to finances.

- Begin by collectively reviewing some key biblical passages related to financial stewardship. We should recognize that stewardship is intimately related to our walk with Christ. (See Matthew 6:19-24, 1 Timothy 6:6-19, Ecclesiastes 5:8-20.)
- You want to make sure you have complete financial information before offering any counsel with respect to stewardship. (See Proverbs 18:13.) This means you want details on giving, saving, spending and debt including recent historical personal balance sheets and cash flow statements.
- On giving, you want to understand where they are giving, why they chose the specific organizations, how they determined the amount of giving, and what the giving has looked like over the last three to five years. See the "Giving Choices" section of the FAQs for more advice on this aspect of stewardship.
- On saving, you want to understand how much they are saving, the details of how they are investing their savings, how they have come to the determination that their savings amount is the proper amount, and what specific future needs and/or desires they are saving for (note: also helpful to see a prioritization of big ticket items that one is saving for). See the "Savings" and "Providing/Trusts" sections of the FAQs for more advice on this aspect of stewardship.
- On spending, you want to understand how much they are spending, the details of where they are spending (for example, break spending detail into several categories), their philosophy of when it is appropriate to spend money, and how they process large ticket spending decisions. See the "Debt/Budgeting" section of the FAQs for more advice on this aspect of stewardship.
- On debt, you want to understand how much debt they have, the nature of the debt (e.g., mortgage, auto, credit card, student), the payment history (i.e., any late or past due payments), and the plan for paying down the debt. See the "Debt/Budgeting" section of the FAQs for more advice on this aspect of stewardship.

Do not rush through this exercise as it is a foundational issue to understand as you help one another process many issues. For example, you wouldn't want to process issues like car purchases, family vacations, kids summer camps, job changes, etc. without having a solid understanding of the person's stewardship. In addition, recognizing both that financial situations change quickly and that stewardship is a key aspect of our walk with Christ, we should revisit the stewardship question periodically.



MONEYWISE
