

Submitting Your Finances to Christ

*and get by
with less!*

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Is it possible to be happy with having no income for four years? Yes! This is what happened in my own life.

After I quit my computer engineering job and entered the seminary in 1984, I no longer had an income. Tuition and books came to \$5,000 a year. And yet, during those four lean years, the Lord provided everything I needed to live a joyful, satisfying life. Today, I still have no financial worries whatsoever. So, what's the secret?

1. Let go of your possessions.

Then He said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."

And He told them this parable: "The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.'

"Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I'll say to myself, 'You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.'"

"But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?'

"This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God." (Luke 12:15-21)

Does one really need a fine house, a new car, a boat, TV, or Nintendo to be happy? Jesus says no. These things give you joy: seeing your children putting on the character of Christ, having a more loving, encouraging, and uplifting relationship with your spouse, seeing unbelievers won to Christ, and growing in your faith, love, joy, and hope in Jesus Christ.

How many possessions, then, do you need to be happy? Paul says, "If we have food and clothing, we will be content with that" (1 Tim. 6:8). Just food and clothing? Yes, that's it. You see, a Christian's joy has very little to do with material things.

When I entered the seminary, I needed to give up most of my possessions to make ends meet: my \$22,000 van, several pianos, a pipe organ, and \$15,000 worth of electronic equipment. But it was worth it. I felt as if a great burden was lifted. Finally, no car payments, no equipment repairs, no debts, no worries about theft. I found joy... and relief. It was just me, my clothes, and the Lord. That's when I discovered that I don't need much to be happy.

Don't misunderstand. Having many possessions is not wrong. But perhaps you need to give up the boat, the furniture, and cable TV to pay off your debts. Perhaps you need to give up the house to relieve the financial stress off your family and marriage. Perhaps you need to give up the designer clothes in order to give more to those in need. Perhaps you need to spend more time loving your children, rather than just buying them the latest toys. Key: Don't sacrifice your spiritual growth, your marriage, your family, and your church, just to support a lifestyle. It's just not worth it.

2. Pray.

And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it. (John 14:13,14)

This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us - whatever we ask - we know that we have what we asked of Him. (1 John 5:14,15)

God wants us to pray. All work, and no prayer means that you are trusting your hands more than you are trusting God.

In the 1800's, George Muller was a man famous for building a great orphanage on prayer alone. No donations were solicited. No funds were raised. Financial needs were never made public. Rather, he just prayed.

George Muller wrote: "The funds are exhausted. We had been reduced so low as to be at the point of selling those things which could be spared..." They prayed for four days. Then a woman arrived who had been traveling four days, bringing with her sufficient funds for the orphanage.

Under these circumstances, Muller wrote: "That the money had been so near the orphan house for several days without being given, is a plain proof that it was from the beginning in the heart of God to help us; but because He delights in the prayers of His children, He had allowed us to pray so long; also to try our faith, and to make an answer so much sweeter." (Muller, *Autobiography* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981], p.110)

3. Believe in Christ's promise that God will provide.

So do not worry, saying, "What shall we eat?" or "What shall we drink?" or "What shall we wear?" For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. (Matthew 6:32,33)

This is where true security comes from: not by believing in your bankbook, but by believing that God will provide. God has put a strong net under you if you ever fall. Your security then depends on how much you believe that God's net will hold you.

4. Avoid borrowing money.

The rich rule over the poor, and the borrower is servant to the lender. (Prov. 22:7)

He who puts up security for another will surely suffer, but whoever refuses to strike hands in pledge is safe. (Prov. 11:15)

A man lacking in judgment strikes hands in pledge and puts up security for his neighbor. (Prov. 17:18)

Every time you borrow money, or buy on credit, you always assume that you will have the money tomorrow to pay for it. But how do you know that? During hard economic times, anyone can lose a job, anyone can lose customers, and anyone can suddenly lose his/her ability to work.

Besides, why waste your money in interest? Remember, you might be paying over \$300,000 to pay off a \$100,000 loan.

Please understand. I'm not saying that borrowing money is a sin. But it is foolish to buy non-essentials on credit. Limit your borrowing to purchase necessities such as a home, when there is no other way to buy it. Avoid buying such non-essentials as furniture, TV sets, electronics, phones, and decorations on credit. For myself, I've even avoided buying a car on credit. I'll consider paying cash for an ugly, but reliable car for \$3,000, before considering making payments to get a new \$30,000 car. Remember, if you can't afford it, don't buy it.

I know I'm stepping on some toes. But my heart goes out to those of you whose marriages are breaking up over a \$20,000 debt on your credit cards. I just want you to experience the peace of staying debt-free, by following the wisdom of God.

5. Save.

Go to the ant, you sluggard; consider its ways and be wise! It has no commander, no overseer or ruler, yet it stores its provisions in summer and gathers its food at harvest. (Prov. 6:6-8)

In the house of the wise are stores of choice food and oil, but a foolish man devours all he has. (Prov. 21:20)

Ants are creatures of little strength, yet they store up their food in the summer. (Prov. 30:25)

You can save, if you are willing to live on less. If you are salaried, you should have 3 months of expenses saved in an interest-bearing savings account to use in case of emergency. If you are self-employed, or if you are prone to being laid-off, or if you have a fluctuating income, you need 9 months of expenses saved.

6. Give.

Honor the Lord with your wealth, with the first fruits of all your crops; then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine. (Prov. 3:9-10)

One man gives freely, yet gains even more; another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty. (Prov. 11:24)

A generous man will himself be blessed, for he shares his food with the poor. (Prov. 22:9)

A stingy man is eager to get rich and is unaware that poverty awaits him. (Prov. 28:22)

A greedy man stirs up dissension, but he who trusts in the Lord will prosper. (Prov. 28:25)

“Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,” says the Lord Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it.” (Mal. 3:10)

You receive more when you give more. From an accounting standpoint, this principle doesn't make sense.

God's principles are sometimes baffling, but true. When I was a young pastor leading my first church over twenty-eight years ago, I was giving only 5% of my income to the church. I thought that this was the most I could afford to give, since I just bought a new home, and was making mortgage payments for the first time. For almost two years, I just couldn't save any money. Each month, I was spending all that I earned.

Then, I decided to take a step of faith. I was convinced that I was not trusting in His promises in Malachi and Proverbs. So I decided to increase my giving from 5% to 10%. In a few months, I mysteriously had more in my checking account than I ever had before. Then I increased my giving to the church to 12%. Again, in a few months, my checking account grew. It grew so much that I had to open a new savings account. Then, a year later, I gave 21% of my gross income directly to the church, which does not even include my personal gifts to church members, donations to other Christian ministries, and my own professional expenses (e.g. journals, books, computers). And yet, I had been saving more than I ever had before! My savings had grown from \$5,000 to \$22,000 in just two years!

Where did this money come from? God. The analyst in me was still trying to figure this out. Perhaps it was because I had learned to make do with less. Maybe the practice of giving had made me more disciplined with my money. Or maybe it was simply – a miracle. Whatever the explanation, I know the Lord provides, just as He said.

Some church members said, “Well, Pastor Randy, you are able to give because you aren’t married and have no children.” No, this is not the reason. God’s promises are true whether you are married or single, rich or poor, black or white, male or female, young or old.

I now challenge you to believe in the Lord. Please consider along with me all the promises the Lord has made to you in the Scriptures. Take a step of faith. See what the Lord does. He... will... provide!

7. Budget.

Now about the collection for God's people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do. On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made. (1 Cor. 16:1-2)

To bake a cake, you need a recipe - a step by step plan to tell you when to pre-heat the oven, how much water to mix with the flour, and how much sugar is enough.

The same is with your finances. Without a well, thought-out plan, you will probably be in the same financial situation as you are now. You may have hopes and dreams, but nothing will ever happen because you have no "recipe" to follow.

First, make an annual budget. Write out how much money you plan to make, spend, and save for the next 12 months. You may need to review your spending habits for the previous year. And then make adjustments to your spending habits for the next year so that you could meet your goals. Fill out the enclosed annual budget form.

Second, make a monthly budget. If you are paid once or twice a month, as most people are, the monthly budget plan is a smaller, manageable, less-intimidating step towards fulfilling your annual budget plan. Plan how much of your monthly paycheck goes towards such expenditures as your mortgage (or rent), taxes, food, clothing, giving, debt repayment, insurance, children, transportation, entertainment, recreation, medicine, and savings. After making such a plan, stick to it, by immediately setting aside from your paycheck what you planned to spend for each category. For help in filling out the annual and monthly budget planning forms, please contact a deacon in the church.

Personal Annual Budget

Income	Current Year	Next Year
Husband		
Wife		
Other		
Total Income		
Expenditures	Current Year	Next Year
Housing		
Utilities		
Food		
Clothing		
Transportation		
Entertain/Recreation		
Medical		
Insurance		
Children		
Professional exp.		
Debt repayment 1		
Debt repayment 2		
Debt repayment 3		
Personal gifts		
Giving, church		
Giving, other charity		
Savings acct. 1		
Savings acct. 2		
Taxes		
Total Expenditures *		

*Total annual expenditures must match total annual income for a balanced budget.

Personal Monthly Budget

Income	Current Year	Next Year
Husband		
Wife		
Other		
Total Monthly Income		
Expenditures	Current Year	Next Year
Housing		
Utilities		
Food		
Clothing		
Transportation		
Entertain/Recreation		
Medical		
Insurance		
Children		
Professional exp.		
Debt repayment 1		
Debt repayment 2		
Debt repayment 3		
Personal gifts		
Giving, church		
Giving, other charity		
Savings acct. 1		
Savings acct. 2		
Taxes		
Total Monthly Expend. *		

*Total monthly expenditures must match total monthly income for a balanced budget.

Group Discussion:

Will the following financial moves help you?

1. Trading down to a smaller, less expensive house.
2. Relocate to an area with lower living costs.
3. Join a health maintenance organization.
4. Repaying plastic and other personal debt with a home-equity line of credit with a lower interest rate.

What other savings tips can you offer the rest of the group?

For Further Study:

Christian Credit Counselors,

www.christiancreditcounselors.org – This is a non-profit organization that can help you through their certified credit counselors. They will analyze your debt, while offering prayer, guidance, and resources.

Crown Financial Ministries, www.crown.org, founded by Larry Burkett - This is a website packed with resources for budgeting, calculating mortgage payments, money management software, articles, and information about the popular call-in radio program.

Ron Blue Institute, www.ronblueinstitute.com – Practical and Biblical wisdom for life's financial decisions. Teaches extensively about goal-setting, budgeting, compound interest, investments, tithing, and how much to save.