

*Wisdom and Finance*  
Proverbs 21.5,20,21  
Luke 15.11-16  
October 21, 2012  
Centennial United Methodist Church  
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In 1959, Nicholson Hilton was scheduled to speak at a reunion of the old American football league. He was introduced as having made \$100,000 in the baseball business in L.A. (That was a lot more money in 1959!) Mr. Hilton stepped up to the microphone and said he needed to correct what had been said. This was a case of mistaken identity. He wasn't the one who had the experience, it was his brother. And it wasn't in Los Angeles, it was in San Diego. And it wasn't baseball, it was football. And it wasn't \$100,000 it was \$1,000,000. And... he didn't make it, he lost it! It's a lot easier to lose money than to make it! The easiest way to lose money is to spend it.

How are you at spending money? I'm pretty good at it. We get a lot of practice. The prodigal son in the story from the Gospel of Luke which you just heard is very good at spending money. In fact, the word *prodigal* means someone who wastes money, a squanderer. The son wanted his inheritance immediately.

Many of us struggle with that problem too. Advertisers constantly encourage us to "Get it today!" In fact, Amazon and Walmart are working on same day delivery so we can actually go online, buy something and receive it the same day, without ever leaving home. That thinking entices us to get it today and pay for it later, often out of next year's paycheck. The prodigal son took his property and squandered it all. Instead of caring for his inheritance so that it would be there to care for his aging father, he forgot who he was, lost *his* true identity. When a famine hit he was left with nothing. Like the prodigal son, we face a financial "famine" when we spend all our the income from the current year, then use our credit cards, going further and further into debt.

The children at Roger Kleinheksel's church had a lesson on the Lord's Prayer one Sunday. When they got to "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors" the teacher asked the children "What is a debtor?" Rachel who was five answered, "It's someone who is really, really dead." Debt *is* deadly and can sap the spirit right out of us. As our desire to consume more and more accelerates, it can empty our wallet and our spirit. So, where's your spirit spent?

Robert E. Lane , a political scientist retired from Yale, examined the long-term rise of unhappiness and even depression in prosperous democracies. He found that once we're above the poverty line, money doesn't make us happy. People in prosperous countries suffer "a kind of famine of warm interpersonal relations, of easy-to-reach neighbors, of encircling, inclusive memberships and of solidarity in family life." He says we spend so much of our time working to try to become richer that we have less time for friends and family. Relationships with others are what make us happier and more resilient (From Robert E. Lane *The Loss of Happiness in Market Democracies*, Yale University, 2000 and D.W. Miller, "Can't Buy Me Contentment," from The Chronicle of Higher Education, [chronicle.com](http://chronicle.com)).

Whether you are doing pretty well financially or facing a financial crisis, ask yourself: Are you using what you have well or are you wasting what you have here or there?

Today we continue our sermon series on how to find joy through simplicity and generosity. This is a very practical series exploring how we can manage our financial resources and truly experience that *God is Enough*. Today, we'll look at biblical wisdom and some basic money management principles. You'll recognize many of them. This series can encourage all of us to look at our relationship to money and possessions and become better stewards of all of the gifts of God. It can help us realize that the money we waste without thinking can be used to make a difference in a lasting way.

Before we can manage our money we need to know where it is. So, where does it all go?

When Bob and I were first married, living on a shoestring, we knew pretty much where every dime went. Today, we spend a little here or there without paying much attention.

Very often the more a person makes the more they waste. When we are more financially secure we don't worry too much about spending a little here or there. There are lots of ways to waste money. What would you say are the most common money-wasters? The two primary ways we waste money are impulse buying and eating out. We don't need to get rid of these altogether, but we should make sure this is really how we want to use our money. You've heard some of these tips for avoiding impulse buying: Don't grocery shop when you're hungry. Buy only what you need. Make a list. Wait 24 hours before you buy something on impulse.

Eating out is getting more popular and more expensive. The average American eats out 4-5 times a week. A family of four would save approximately \$6000 a year by eating those meals at home. That's money that could be spent on something more significant or given to make a difference. This isn't to say that we should never eat out, but maybe we do eat out too often. Think about how much money you spent last year eating out.

Before we can look clearly at how to use our resources, we need to be clear about who we are and our purpose. You're much more than an economic buying unit. You are not called to be a consumer. You were created to love God and to care for others and creation.

Our call is greater than ourselves and our own self-interest. Like Lane's study, the Bible reminds us that our true joy comes not from our possessions, but our relationships: to God, to creation and to each other. The amazing thing about clarifying and living out our purpose beyond ourselves: we end up being fulfilled. Our spirit becomes filled with God's Spirit!

Think about God's purpose for your life. When was the last time you took yourself and the significance of your life seriously? Why do you exist? We don't have to look for some hidden purpose. Just start with the wisdom from scripture. What does the Lord require? Micah 6:8 tells us: to seek justice, love kindness and walk humbly with God. Jesus says, focus on loving God and loving our neighbors like we love ourselves.

Look at your goals in life. What are they? You were created with a divine purpose, to carry out the love of God in the world. We do that through the ministry of the church, reaching out into the world in love, and in our daily lives. Every day we have opportunities to use what we have to make a positive difference in the lives of those we meet. We can see our dedication to our purpose by how we dedicate our resources and possessions to fulfilling that call. Sam knew he had greater goals and a deeper purpose.

In 1998, *Sports Illustrated* ran an article on a talented, seven-foot basketball player. Jeff Pearlman wrote, "Sam Randolph prays -- but won't play -- on his Sabbath. For a practicing Seventh-Day Adventist, this means no keg parties. No premarital sex. It also means no work from sundown Friday to sundown Saturday. Seriously, none." So Randolph, despite his talent, chose the team at Columbia Union College, an Adventist school, instead of big-time college basketball with Saturday games. He chose his relationship with God. He knew it could cost him a shot at the NBA with an average salary of \$2 million per year at that time. He hoped one day to study medicine. "I'm okay with not making a career of basketball. I mean, it would be great. But I have higher aspirations" (From Jeff Pearlman, "Never on Saturday," *Sports Illustrated*, March 9, 1998). That was in 1998. Today Dr. Samuel Randolph is a radiologist in Loma Linda, CA.

Notice how Sam's clarity 14 years ago has made such a difference in the impact of his life today. Look again at your purpose and goals this week. We have a life purpose greater than our own self-interests. Let the way you use what God has given you reflect that great purpose. Work from your goals to a specific plan. Adam Hamilton and Dr. Clayton Smith have condensed many healthy financial strategies into six principles that can help you define your plan.

1. Pay your tithe and offering *first*.

Put God first in your living and your giving. Give your tithe and offering from the “top” of your paycheck, and then live on whatever remains. When Bob and I began to tithe, giving 10% of our income to God's work we had a deeper peace in our life. Take a step toward greater peace.

2. Create a budget and track your expenses.

Creating a budget is simply developing a plan in which you tell your money what you want it to do. Tracking your expenses is like getting on the scales: It allows you to see how you are doing and motivates you to keep it up.

3. Simplify your lifestyle (live below your means).

Since this discipline is critical to the success of any financial plan, next Sunday's sermon will be devoted to this topic. Invite someone you know who is having difficulty living within their means to come with you to church.

4. Establish an emergency fund.

An emergency fund is separate from checking or long-term savings, and set aside specifically for emergencies. When you have this amount, you won't need to use your credit cards anymore.

5. Pay off your credit cards, use cash/debit cards for purchases, and use credit wisely.

As you build your emergency fund, begin to pay off your credit card debt and start using cash or debit cards for purchases. If you have to use a credit card be sure to pay off the debt monthly. If you can't do this, then it's better for you to cut up your cards, so you're not tempted like the prodigal son to trap yourself again.

#### 6. Practice long-term savings and investing habits.

Saving money is the number-one wise money management principle everyone should practice. Saving is done for a purpose. We should have three types of savings: 1) emergency savings, 2) savings for wants and goals, and 3) retirement savings.

You'll receive a cling that lists these principles and the related Bible verses. Take it home and put in somewhere you'll see it often, on your mirror, on your windshield next to your oil change sticker.

Take time this week to think about all the good you can do through your life. Use *the Life and Financial Goals Worksheet* in your bulletin. The other side has a budget worksheet that can help you determine where your hard earned money is going now and how you want to use your resources in the future.

Thomas Ellsworth's pastor was preaching on the prodigal son one Sunday. He preached about how the son remembered who he was, came back to himself and returned home. Ellsworth said, "When he got to the point where the father sees his son returning and races out to meet him, our pastor said, "Throwing wide his arms, the father said ..." and my young son leaned over to me and whispered, "YOU'RE GROUNDED!" Aren't you glad that's not how the story ends? Let your life be grounded in the love of God, who welcomes you home, reminding you who you are, giving you an opportunity to make a difference every day. Amen.