



Money & Possessions

And what the Bible says about Stewardship

Reed and Elizabeth Hewitt

Creators of LivingStrategically.com

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	<u>A Note from the Authors</u>
Section 1	<u>The Ultimate Paradigm Shift</u>
Section 2	<u>Biblical Stewardship</u>
Section 3	<u>Cultivating Contentment</u>
Section 4	<u>Debt-Free Living</u>
Section 5	<u>Reaching Financial Freedom</u>
Closing	<u>About Us</u>

Helping you strategically pursue your God-given purpose.

www.LivingStrategically.com

INTRODUCTION

When I, Reed, was about 8 or 9 years old, I first encountered an ad for a get-rich-quick scheme. It was chock full of smart-sounding financial words and promises of easy money. It all sounded so simple! Just follow their program and become fabulously wealthy in no time flat. Why wasn't everybody doing this?

Thankfully my dad took the time to explain to me that this "too good to be true" offer was exactly that.

I can look back and smile at the naiveté of my third-grade self, but unfortunately not every scam is so easy to spot. This world is full of subtle lies and empty promises when it comes to money and possessions, and countless people get caught up in them every day.



But we're not in this alone. We have a heavenly Father who has taken the time to warn us about financial pitfalls. God knew that money would be one of our biggest struggles, so His Word is full of principles and instructions to guide us. He explains how to get back on track when we've gone astray, and He tells us exactly what it takes to become a success in His eyes.

The Study of Stewardship

My wife, Liz, and I have been intrigued by what the Bible says about money and possessions for the past 20 years. It's a topic that has grown near and dear to our hearts! We have followed a spending plan our entire marriage, which has made it possible to live a debt-free lifestyle.

Around the time that we started our courtship, we also started listening to Christian financial experts like Larry Burkett and Dave Ramsey. Since then, we've continued to study the topic of Biblical stewardship as well as teach it and put into practice. (But we should give a disclaimer that we are not financial advisors. We'll share Biblical wisdom with you in this e-book, but please also seek a licensed professional for help with your specific situation.)

In 2020, we recorded [a podcast series](#) taking a look at the key elements for a Biblical understanding of personal finances. If you listen to the podcast, you'll hear us talk about *stewardship* a lot. It is an old-timey word, but it's still very useful today because whether you realize it or not, a *steward* is exactly what you are.

A steward is a person who manages something that belongs to someone else. A steward's job is

to act according to the instructions and interests of the owner. Sure, we all have things that belong to us, but the Bible says that, in the ultimate sense, *everything* belongs to God simply because He created it all. When you follow that truth to its logical conclusion, it has a profound influence on how you should handle money.

A Spiritual Perspective

For one thing, we realize that how we spend “our” money really comes down to spiritual decisions. And if our job is to be stewards, then we probably can’t do a very good job unless our priorities are aligned with those of our Boss.

We also find reassurance in the fact that we are dependent on God, and that He is completely trustworthy. When we do things His way, it actually works out really well for us. (But we also find out how much trouble we can get into if we think we can control things on our own.)

Above all, the Bible shows us that all the money and all the material possessions that pass through our hands are temporary, but we have an opportunity to use them to accomplish things that will last for eternity.

We hope you’ll join us and embrace what we call *the ultimate paradigm shift* in your financial life. It may seem daunting at first, but God is faithful to help His children walk in His ways.

Don’t get discouraged, and don’t give up. The reward is treasure that will outlast this world!

Reed & Liz Hewitt

Suggested Resources

- [Video: Why Has America Been Blessed](#) by Reed and Liz Hewitt
- [Class: Financial Peace University](#) by Dave Ramsey
- [Master Your Money](#) written by Ron Blue and published by Moody Publishers in 1986/updated in 2016.
- [Debt-Free Living](#) written by Larry Burkett and published by Moody Publishers in 1999/updated in 2010.
- [Managing God’s Money: A Biblical Guide](#) written by Randy Alcorn and published by Tyndale House in 2011.

This page contains affiliate links from ChristianBook.com. If you choose to make a purchase, your price will not be affected and we receive a small commission. Thank you for your support!

THE ULTIMATE PARADIGM SHIFT

*Acknowledging that everything under our care ultimately belongs to the Lord.
We are merely His managers, also known as stewards.*

As Christians, we believe that financial decisions are really spiritual decisions. What we do with our money and how we use our possessions shows the condition of our hearts. It all comes down to giving full ownership back to the Lord.

For Christians who are new to the topic of stewardship, this is *the ultimate paradigm shift!* How about you...are you seeking God for the answers to your financial questions? Are you relying on Him for your provision? You may be struggling with some major financial decisions:



- Should we buy a home or keep renting?
- Should/can we get out of debt?
- Should we invest in the stock market? Or is that too risky?
- Should we take a vacation this year or go on a mission trip?
- Should I take a higher paying job that will take time away from my family, or should I stay where I am?

These are all very serious financial decisions. Where do you find the answers? In God's Word.

We read in the Bible that God owns everything, and that He rules over everything.

"The earth is the Lord's and everything in it. The world and all who live in it. For He founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters." Psalm 24:1-2 (NIV)

"Both riches and honor come from You and You rule over all, and in Your hand is power and might. And it lies in Your hand to make great and to strengthen everyone. Now therefore, our God, we thank You and praise Your glorious name." 1 Chron. 29:12-13 (NASB)

This is a great reminder that God is our provider. We are dependent on Him, not on our own strength.

Spiritual Decisions

God has a plan for us and we must seek His will in all areas of our lives, in order to stay in His will and not get off course. This really takes a paradigm shift. It is completely different from the way that American culture and the world in general operates.

Our culture says it is all about me...“I earn my paycheck. It is all mine.” Compare that to what the Bible says: you are supposed to work hard, but God is the One who provides the income.

Culturally we say, “I own my home.” But Scripturally, God owns everything as the Creator of the universe. His ownership supersedes every other claim to ownership.

Ultimately it is God who provides, and we need to completely trust Him for that. It can be stressful for those who want to maintain control, but our Heavenly Father knows best and is the most trustworthy Being that we will ever meet.

Giving full ownership back to the Lord takes a series of changes in our actions and habits, until we truly see ourselves as a manager or a steward of all the possessions and money that God has placed into our care.

When we practice being managers on a daily basis instead of thinking of ourselves as owners, we will seek God’s will in our decisions, look to His Holy Word for guidance, and go to Him in prayer as a first resort and not as a last resort. We will look for ways to invest His resources in things that will impact eternity.

Realizing that everything belongs to God makes us stop and ask what is important to God.

We read in Proverbs 19:21, "Many plans are in a man’s heart, but the council of the Lord will stand." God’s Word includes over 2,300 verses about handling money and possessions. God has given us this great resource to learn from His council. But we must apply that wisdom to our lives.

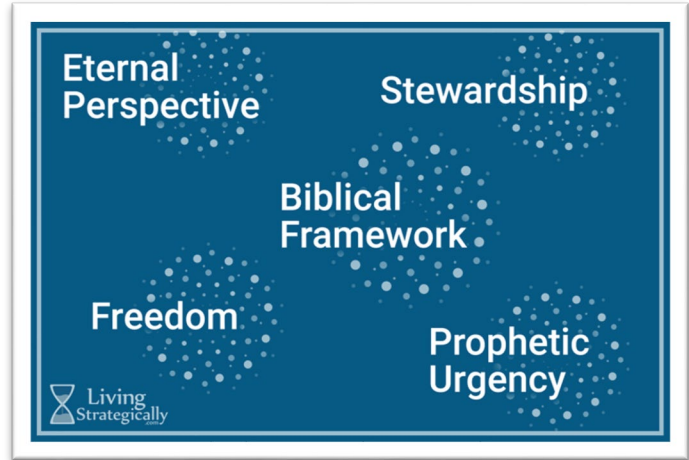
Giving full ownership back to the Lord takes a series of changes in our actions and habits.

Five Pillars

Money is tremendously important to study and to think about intentionally because it intersects with every other area of our lives.

Here at Living Strategically we have what we call the *five pillars of living a strategic life*. Each one of these five pillars absolutely applies to money, as well as to any other area of life.

1. **Eternal Prospective** – We want to have an eternal prospective when it comes to how we use our money. How will our financial decisions be contributing to the Kingdom of God that will last forever?
2. **Stewardship** – We are stewards of God’s resources. This one seems pretty obvious because stewardship and money go hand in hand. While ultimately stewardship is a bigger topic than just money, money is a big part of it.
3. **Prophetic Urgency** – Where are we on God’s prophetic clock? Biblically, we are in the last days, and that should have a tremendous impact on shaping our priorities.
4. **Freedom** – As in all areas of life, we want to have financial freedom as opposed to living in financial bondage.
5. **Biblical Framework** – We look to the Bible to guide us in how we view, interact with, and handle money and possessions.



Priorities

It's important that we get our priorities straight. We need to make sure that we are living with a strategic mindset in the area of finances. Too many in our culture are being wasteful, piling up debt, and essentially living in financial bondage.

There is a financial pattern in our world that is not in alignment with God’s Word. The paradigm shift starts when we give ownership of our possessions back to God. This is not what the world teaches us, but it is what wisdom teaches us.

In his book *Master Your Money*, Christian financial advisor Ron Blue writes, “Money is a tool that God has blessed us with to accomplish His purposes on this earth.”

The ultimate question is, are we accomplishing God’s purposes with our resources during our time on earth?

*"Money is a tool that God has blessed us with to accomplish His purposes on this earth."
- Ron Blue*

BIBLICAL STEWARDSHIP

Christians managing God's resources in accordance with Biblical priorities.

Biblical stewardship can be defined as Christians managing God's resources in accordance with Biblical priorities. It requires the conversion of our hearts, minds, calendars, and pocketbooks. It means that decisions on how to invest our resources are really spiritual decisions at their root, and they require faithfulness and wisdom.

It can be difficult to keep a biblical stewardship perspective in today's culture. But in the end, godliness and contentment are key to living a strategic life!

The truth is that one day we are all going to stand before the Lord and give an account of how we managed worldly assets and how we managed the short time that we are given on this earth. As it says in I Corinthians 3, our investments are going to be tested by fire. Only those things that were built on the foundation of Jesus Christ will stand the test and receive a reward.



Loosening Your Grip

One of our favorite stewardship books is *Managing God's Money: A Biblical Guide*. In it, author Randy Alcorn says, "In contrast to materialism's emptiness, there is joyful liberty in Christ. Those who hold tightly to the true God will loosen their grip on money – and thereby loosen money's grip on them."

*"Those who hold tightly to the true God will loosen their grip on money – and thereby loosen money's grip on them."
- Randy Alcorn*

This is a good challenge for us all. Are we keeping a tight grip on our possessions or are we holding them loosely? Contrary to worldly thinking, the Bible tells us that we are not the ultimate owners of physical possessions or financial assets. We are supposed to be operating as managers of not only our money but also our time and energy and any talents or skills that God has given us.

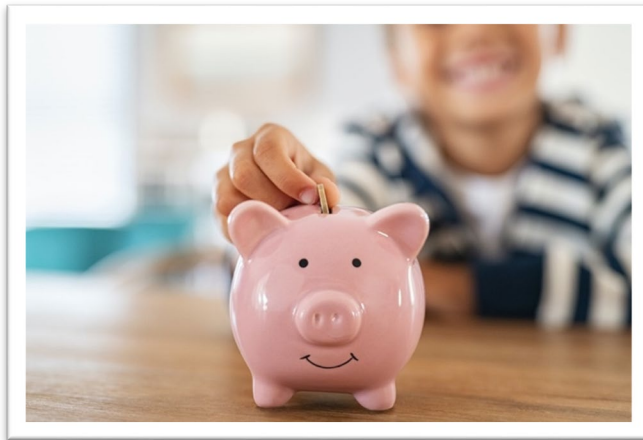
It says in I Corinthians 4:1-2, "Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. In this case moreover it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy." So we want to make sure we are found trustworthy before the Lord.

Secular vs. Eternal

The late Christian financial expert Larry Burkett made the unfortunate observation that the Christian world is no different from the secular world when it comes to debt, bankruptcy, and divorce because priorities are misplaced.

We live in a world that promises comfort, security, and happiness as a result of accumulating more and more stuff and building wealth. But increasing our lifestyle is not what life is truly all about.

Jesus tells us in Luke 12:15, "Beware and be on your guard against every form of greed for not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions."



Jesus is pointing out that we are not going to find fulfillment in stuff. If we want to find contentment we have to look at where true abundance comes from, which is found in seeking first His kingdom and abiding in Him.

In the end, godliness and contentment are key. We brought nothing into this world and the Bible tells us that we can take nothing with us when we die. We will avoid a lot of grief if we can keep our priorities straight.

"But godliness actually is a means of great gain when accompanied by contentment. For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it, either. If we have food and covering, with these we shall be content." I Timothy 6:6-8 (NASB)

Now we do want to mention that the Bible does not teach us that it is more holy to be poor. The Bible is not against people having either a lot or a little that they are stewarding for God. That's not the core issue here. Most of the time people are drawn into accumulation and greed much more easily than they are drawn into an ascetic "poverty is holy" line of thinking.

Continuing in I Timothy 6, Paul has this to say...

"Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to set their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy. Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life." I Timothy 6:17-19 (NASB)

Ultimately, living as a wise Biblical steward is for our own good. It is the only way to make the best investments of the resources that God has called us to manage. It is the best way to bring God glory and advance kingdom purposes.

Wise Investments

When we mention the idea of investing the resources that God has entrusted to us, you may think of putting money into the stock market and making a profit. But we are really using the word in a broader sense.

You may be making an eternal investment by going and helping an elderly widow mow her yard or to do some repairs on her house. That is an investment of time, maybe some of your money, an investment of your skills and talents. The result is an eternal reward because you have spent that time doing something pleasing to God in accordance with His Word, instead of only focusing on yourself and how you can accumulate more for your own enjoyment.

This is really what managing resources with a kingdom mindset is all about. As we have mentioned, our God-given resources include our time, our energy, our money, and our talents. In all of these areas, it is wise to monitor where we are now, where we are heading, and to diligently work toward goals that align with Biblical priorities and with our God-given purpose.

Planning Your Spending



A stewardship verse that has really spoken to us is: "Know the state of your flocks. Put your heart into caring for your herds. For riches do not last forever and a crown may not be passed to the next generation." Proverbs 27:23 (NLT)

When it comes to our financial resources, many stewards have found that a monthly spending

plan, or budget, is necessary in keeping track of household expenditures and long-term goals. Being a faithful asset manager requires careful planning, routine monitoring, and living below your means.

And an important part of the budgeting process is to account for giving of first fruits to the Lord. We read in Proverbs 3:9-10: "Honor the Lord with your wealth, with the first fruits of all your crops, then your barns will be filled to overflowing."

By first giving a portion of our income back to God, we are acknowledging that He is the source of all our resources. We are dependent on His provision. This keeps our flesh from taking ownership and it reminds us that we are stewards and not owners.

God promises to bless His children that honor Him through tithing. We encourage you to put this principle into practice, if you aren't already doing so.



Sacrificial Giving

Along with giving to the Lord, some of the resources that God puts under our management are to be allocated for others. We should not use it all for ourselves but rather look for ways to help others.

"God's money manager doesn't ask, 'How much more can I keep?' but 'How much more can I give?' "
- Randy Alcorn

"You ask and you do not receive because you ask with wrong motives so that you may spend it on your pleasures."

James 4:3

"As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God."

1 Peter 4:10

"The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully." 2 Corinthians 9:6

To kick it up another notch, we can practice sacrificial giving. Randy Alcorn has written, "God's money manager doesn't ask, 'How much more can I keep?' but 'How much more can I give?' "

Whenever we start to get comfortable with our level of giving, it is time to ask God if He wants us to raise it again. Now how is that for a challenge?

Planning for the Future

You will also hear from financial advisors that we should have three to six months of savings set aside for emergencies. Living paycheck to paycheck or using up all of our financial resources is simply foolish. We cannot predict the future, but we should plan for one. It is wise to set aside resources for unplanned mishaps or for future emergencies.

"In the house of the wise, are stores of choice food and oil. But a foolish man devours all that he has." Proverbs 21:20

"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 the summer and gathers its food at harvest." Proverbs 6:6-8

Another way of devouring our resources and presuming upon the future, is to accumulate debt. While the Bible never prohibits debt, it cautions against it.

"Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another." Romans 13:8

"The rich rules over the poor and the borrower becomes the lender's slave."
Proverbs 22:7

Debt is to be avoided whenever possible. Unnecessary debt-fueled spending is basically like telling God that He has not provided enough to cover our basic needs. If a steward is managing God's resources, and God has promised to provide all that we need, then a lack of funds is typically a result of poor management. It is not because God is not doing His part.

And that is why it is our personal conviction that consumer debt is not necessary for American families. Like our government, too many of us simply have a problem with overspending.



With creative and strategic planning, mixed with delayed gratification and personal discipline, Christians can live debt free and not be in bondage to lenders. To find true financial freedom, we need to live below our means and set aside a portion for the future.

The Big Picture



Finally, Biblical stewardship points us to our eternal future. Heaven is our real home. This world is just a temporary dwelling place. Our culture is completely focused on the things of this world because our culture does not account for anything outside of the natural which we experience in the flesh. As Christians, we need to keep the bigger picture in mind.

The things of this earth will ultimately all pass away. Investing in treasures that will last forever really makes a lot more sense. In the end that is what is going to matter and what is going to pay the ultimate dividend.

In Matthew 6, Jesus said it better than anyone. He declared, "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

To share another quote from Randy Alcorn, "Kingdom currency is the only medium of exchange recognized by the Son of God, whose government will last forever. That currency is our present faithful service and sacrificial use of our resources for Him."

When we finally reach our eternal home, may we all hear our Master say, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter into the joy of thy Lord."

Matthew 25:21 (KJV)

*"Kingdom currency
is the only medium
of exchange
recognized by the
Son of God."
- Randy Alcorn*

CULTIVATING CONTENTMENT

Living with the attitude of gratefully accepting what God gives, while gracefully releasing what He withholds.

The story is told about an oil tycoon, back in the day, who was asked if his net worth had reached a *billion* dollars. And he replied, “I suppose so, but remember, a billion doesn’t go as far as it used to.”

Isn’t that typical of how people are? It seems like enough is never enough. As Christians, we have to realize that it is not about a number but the answer is found in contentment.



At Living Strategically, we define contentment as: the attitude of gratefully accepting what God gives, while gracefully releasing what He withholds.

Contentment has several building blocks:

- First of all, **Love** allows us to put others first and de-emphasize our own desires.
- **Joy and Peace** - finding these in God releases us from seeking them in possessions.
- **Patience** - because even when we want a good thing, we cannot always have it now. This requires practicing delayed gratification.
- **Faith** - because we must believe that God will provide for all that we need.
- **Self-control** - which keeps our wants in check.

Living with the attitude of gratefully accepting what God gives, while gracefully releasing what He withholds.

If these character traits sound familiar, it is because they are all found in the list of the fruit of the Spirit from Galatians 5:22-23. A life lived by the Holy Spirit will bear these traits and they collectively result in contentment. You could say they are the building blocks and contentment is the house.

But this does not make contentment any easier. That has been the case from the beginning. Humans are created to want things—good things like knowledge, food, and fellowship.

These desires motivate us to learn, to work, and to love our neighbors. But we run into trouble when our desires get focused on the wrong objects.

Adam and Eve listened to the serpent's lie that they would find ultimate fulfillment in the forbidden fruit. Genesis 3:6 says, "When the woman saw that the tree was good for food and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate."

Let's apply that to current day life in American culture. For one thing, many Americans live a consumptive lifestyle. That is shown by our enormous accumulation of possessions. How many people can even park their car in their garage these days? Pastor and author John Piper calls it "accumulations of comforts".



As a consequence, our culture is drowning in debt, with consumer debt in the *trillions* of dollars. The four main areas of debt for an American household include mortgages, auto loans, student loans, and credit cards. And all of these forms of debt collectively create an artificial standard of living that is really not sustainable.

We have access to far greater purchasing power than any generation before us. But why do we *need* to own so much? Is it really a necessity? We have to ask ourselves, "Are there lifestyle changes that God wants us to make? Do we need to redefine what it takes for us to be content?"

Here are some things that you can use to test yourself:

1. Do you trust God for your provision, or do you maintain control?
2. Are you wearing yourself out to gain wealth?
3. Do you have more than you need and more than your family needs, but at the end of the day, you still feel unsatisfied?

Christian financial advisor Ron Blue summarizes contentment in this way:

"No financial principal can have a greater impact on you or free you up more than this truth: Money is not the key to contentment! Contentment has everything to do with your relationship with God and nothing to do with your money. Once you are free from

the love of money and the pursuit of it, you can have a lot or a little and be content all the same. At that point you have learned the secret to contentment."

To find contentment, we must prioritize our relationship with God. We have to get our priorities straight and that means seeking after God's will for our lives and following His design.

Godly Wisdom

Let's look at a few Scripture passages and uncover what God's Word says about cultivating contentment.

In Ecclesiastes, King Solomon is cataloging everything under the sun that is vanity, worthless, and an empty pursuit. He says, "He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves abundance with its income. This too is vanity." Ecclesiastes 5:10 (NASB)



King Solomon was someone who knew what it meant to have wealth beyond anyone's wildest dreams and he still came to this conclusion. Therefore, it is safe to say that none of us could ever find true fulfillment in accumulating wealth. We should just take it from Solomon. This is not the path to happiness.

Our next passage is when the Lord was establishing guidelines for the nation of Israel, found in Deuteronomy chapter 8.

"Beware that you do not forget the Lord your God by not keeping His commandments and His ordinances, and His statutes which I am commanding you today; otherwise, when you have eaten and are satisfied, and have built good houses and lived in them, and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and gold multiply, and all that you have multiplies, then your heart will become proud, and you will forget the Lord your God, who brought you out from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery." (v. 11-14)

"Otherwise you may say in your heart, 'My power and the strength of my hand made me this wealth.' " (v.17)

"But you shall remember the Lord your God for it is He who has given you power to make wealth that He may confirm His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as it is this day." (v.18)

The reality is that what we have, and even our ability to earn a living, comes from God. And this passage also reminds us that accumulating wealth, just for the sake of wealth, is dangerous because it turns our attention and our hearts away from God.

And sometimes we have to realize when God does not give us the material things that we want, He knows better than we do that we would not be able to hold up under that temptation. He knows that it is better for our soul to not have wealth distracting us from Him.

Our final contentment passage comes from I Timothy 6, which we covered in the last section of this e-book but is worth covering again.

“But godliness actually is a means of great gain when accompanied by contentment. For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either. If we have food and covering, with these we shall be content. But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.” (v.6-10)

“Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy. Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed.” (v.17-19)

There is profound wisdom in these verses, and what it all comes down to is that contentment is not about a number. It is not about achieving a specific amount of wealth. It is not about avoiding wealth. It is about the attitude of the heart, that whatever God blesses you with, with that you are to be thankful and content.

Practical Steps

That's the spiritual foundation for contentment and now we also want to share some concrete ideas as to how you may build up contentment in your own life.

One of the best ways to do this is to go on a mission trip or serve in some ministry activity where you get to serve people who are less fortunate than you, who have less material wealth in their lives. When you see how people live in other cultures, and that they can be content or find joy even in a situation where they lack a lot of things that we take for granted, that adjusts your perspective. Just as comparing yourself with someone who has a lot more than

When you go and serve someone who has less, it recalibrates your priorities and how you see what you do have.

you can create discontentment, when you go and serve someone who has less, it recalibrates your priorities and how you see what you do have.

Going on a mission trip is a great antidote to the "prosperity gospel", because if someone is teaching something about wealth and prosperity that does not work for the church worldwide, if it only works for the American church, then it is not Biblical.

In other countries, you can visit people who are living by faith, because that is all that they have. They are not blessed with a super abundance of money just reigning down from Heaven, but God absolutely takes care of them.

What Truly Matters

Scripture warns us that money can block our ability to rely on God, because we transfer our trust to money. We start to love money instead of loving God. Money can very easily become an idol in our lives, especially in a culture that prizes wealth above all else. The world is constantly telling us to buy more, that we need to have more, that status is all tied up in the car we drive, the clothes we wear, and material possessions. The Bible gives us the complete opposite view.

The Lord says that man looks at the outward appearance but that He looks at the heart. And above all else, we want our hearts to be pleasing to God.



Contentment is a starting point of having an attitude of the heart that pleases God. Those possessions will never satisfy our desires because the Bible says that our lives do not consist of our possessions.

The Bible warns that we can fall into ruin and destruction if we seek after riches. If we want to take hold of that which is life indeed, we need to seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness.

We want to challenge you, just as we challenge ourselves, to prioritize the things that truly matter in life, because then the things of this world will lose their hold on us.

It's good to ask ourselves: "Can we say that we have enough, and that we are satisfied?"

DEBT-FREE LIVING

Viewing debt as bondage and hazardous to our financial health.

When it comes to personal finance, one of the most important lessons to learn is avoiding the use of debt. Debt has become widely accepted in our culture, to the point that some people would argue that they cannot survive without it. But we are here to say there is a better way!

In America, we live in an age of excess that is fueled by debt. But it used to be rare to borrow money. Families were forced to save up for major purchases, because banks had much more conservative standards for lending money. (This was before credit cards became popular, starting in the 1950s.) And this helped to limit the consumptive lifestyles that are so common in today's age.

As time went on, families became more and more comfortable with taking out loans or buying things with payment plans. Fewer Americans practiced delayed gratification, which led to purchasing items that they really could not afford. In this way, they were presuming upon the future.

This debt-oriented mentality kept growing, and now every segment of our economy relies on debt or credit to survive!

Americans have accepted debt as the norm. The problem is whether we can afford such spending. How much debt can our nation have before it destroys us?



Debt also destroys marriages. Did you know that money problems are one of the most common reasons that marriages end in divorce? It's no wonder that you can track the American divorce rate on a curve that matches American debt levels.

Blessings or Curses

In the context of Scripture, debt is never called an actual sin, but we are warned against it. Debt is associated with bondage.

In Deuteronomy, we're told that God will bless those who follow His commands but curse those who do not follow His commands...and borrowing is considered one of those curses.

"Now it shall be, if you diligently obey the Lord your God, being careful to do all His commandments which I command you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth. All these blessings will come upon you and overtake you if you obey the Lord your God..." Deuteronomy 28:1-2 (NASB)

"The Lord will open for you His good storehouse, the heavens, to give rain to your land in its season and to bless all the work of your hand; and you shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow." Deuteronomy 28:12

"But it shall come about, if you do not obey the Lord your God, to observe to do all His commandments and His statutes with which I charge you today, that all these curses will come upon you and overtake you..." Deuteronomy 28:15

"He shall lend to you, but you will not lend to him; he shall be the head, and you will be the tail." Deuteronomy 28:44

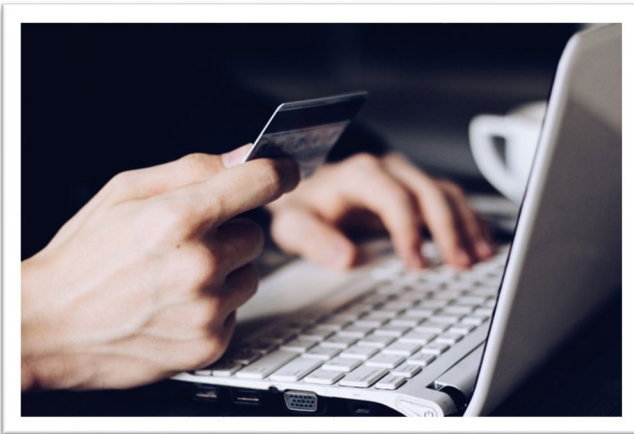
Through these verses, we see examples of the bondage that happens with debt. We also see an important comparison for the nation as a whole. The nation that is following God's commands will be blessed, and part of that blessing is to be a lender. The tables turn when the nation stops obeying the Lord, then they become a borrower.



We have seen this change in America. Our nation used to lend to many nations, but now that our culture has turned from honoring God and following His commands, we are now a debtor nation. It's important to remember the wisdom found in Proverbs 22:7, "The rich rules over the poor, and the borrower becomes the lender's slave." (NASB)

Hitting Home

In our own lives, we can choose freedom or bondage. Debt may not feel like bondage at first, but the Bible says that it is. Debt can be easy to get into but very difficult to get out of. It also creates bondage to the world's system. You are always better off with the freedom that you will find when you follow God's plan.



Ron Blue warns of the many dangers from debt in his book *Master Your Money*:

- It presumes upon the future.
- It can prohibit a lifestyle of generosity.
- It can ruin relationships.
- It can cause you to not be able to provide for your own family.
- It can cause you to rely on things for your sense of worth and accomplishment.
- And it can fund greed.

Ron Blue goes on to share, "Debt is blasphemous when we rely on it and deny God an opportunity to work."

If we meet our own wants in our own way (borrowing debt), then we may be denying God an opportunity to provide what is best for us in His perfect timing.

Take a moment and meditate on these two verses:

" 'For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,' declares the Lord. 'For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts.' "

Isaiah 55:8-9

"And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus." Philippians 4:19

*Biblical wisdom
tells us to wait on
God's timing and
He will meet all our
needs in His timing.*

Biblical wisdom tells us to wait on God's timing and He will meet all our needs in His timing. But His ways are higher than our ways, so things may look differently than what we are expecting.

When we purchase things on credit, it is not a sin. However, God cautions us against it. It's our choice to heed that warning.

Behavior Management

Some people get into debt by poor planning or overspending, or maybe a medical emergency comes up. Sometimes debt can't be avoided in this context. But living a debt-free lifestyle is possible. It just takes a change in behaviors.

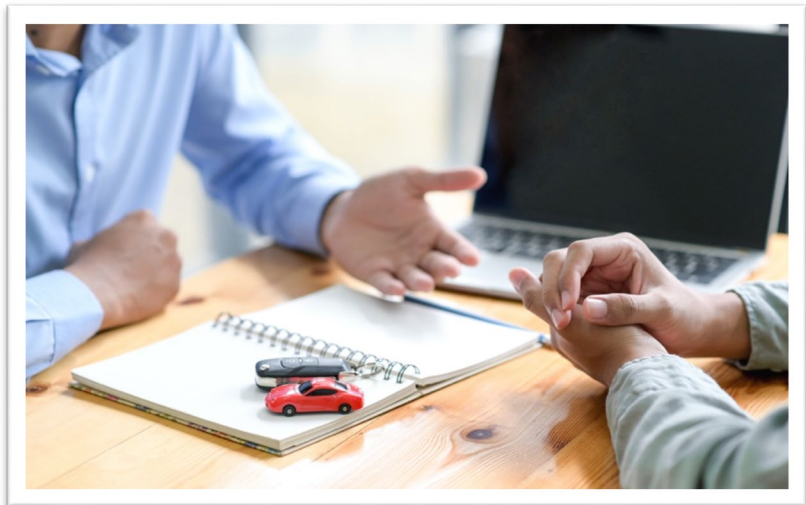
For example, when we have a large purchase coming up, we usually know about it in advance, and we can save for it. (Sometimes saving up for many years ahead of time!) This requires us to be proactive rather than reactive.

And if we can't get enough saved up, then we see how to increase cash flow. It may require temporarily taking on a side job. Or perhaps we own extra things that we can sell to make up the difference. (We have definitely sold our share of items on Craigslist!)

Sometimes we need to reduce our monthly expenses. We will make lifestyle adjustments in order to lower line items in our spending plan to save money.

Being aware of your financial situation is so much better than burying your head in the sand and just hoping for the best. Dave Ramsey says, "You will either learn to manage money, or the lack of it will always manage you."

In reality, you may not be able to purchase a new iPhone every year. You may need to purchase a reliable used vehicle that you can pay cash for. (After all, a brand new car tends to lose 25-35% of its value in the first year!) You might need to cut up your credit cards, to stop the temptation of impulse buying. It all depends on your financial goals and your specific income range.



We are here to tell you that it is possible to live debt free. It takes changes in daily behaviors. It takes some planning. But most importantly, it requires bringing God into your finances.

REACHING FINANCIAL FREEDOM

Christians managing God's resources in accordance with Biblical priorities.

The idea of financial freedom can seem like a lofty or even impossible goal. But in the Biblical sense, financial freedom doesn't mean having enough money to do anything and everything that you want; it means you are free from money's control on you and instead you are controlling your money according to Biblical principles. It means that you have had a heart change and see your assets as kingdom resources rather than personal possessions. It means you have changed your focus from the temporal to the eternal.

Jesus spoke directly to His disciples about putting money in its proper place in our lives.

"But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Matthew 6:20-21

"No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth." Matthew 6:24

What it comes down to is that one of those two will be the means and the other will be the end. You can either use wealth as a means to serve God, or you can use God as a means to try and obtain wealth.

And that is the flaw of the "prosperity gospel": trying to use God as the means and wealth as the end, when we should be doing the opposite. Whether we have a lot or a little, whatever resources we have are a means to serve, worship, and honor God.



False Sense of Security

A lot of couples get comfort and security from what they own, their career, or perhaps trusting in the government to take care of them. But really, as Christians, we need to be putting our security and trust in the Lord.

*"Financial freedom comes from having an open hand with our money and trusting God to direct us in how to use it."
- Ron Blue*

Ron Blue shares in *Master Your Money*, "Financial freedom comes from having an open hand with our money and trusting God to direct us in how to use it."

God should be our *why*. Everything we do should be giving glory to Him. Should be pleasing to Him. And should be fueled by the wisdom that we find in the Bible.

The 7 Baby Steps by Dave Ramsey

The best resource that we have found in practically applying Biblical wisdom to our financial lives is to follow Dave Ramsey's 7 Baby Steps.

We attended Dave Ramsey's Financial Peace University (FPU) early in our marriage and it set us up on a solid financial foundation. It's an outstanding resource that we highly recommend! Dave Ramsey will motivate you to get your financial life in order by applying Scripture to your finances. His steps to financial freedom include:

Step 1: Save \$1,000 for a starter emergency fund.

Step 2: Pay off all debt, besides your home mortgage, using the debt snowball.

Step 3: Save 3 to 6 months of expenses for a fully funded emergency fund.

Step 4: Invest 15% of your household income for retirement.

Step 5: Save for your children's college fund.

Step 6: Pay off your home mortgage early.

Step 7: Build wealth and be generous.

(You can learn more about the Baby Steps at [this link](#).)

At FPU, Dave Ramsey taught us that "personal finance is 20% head knowledge and 80% behavior." And we have seen first-hand that if you can tame your spending habits, you can conquer your budget.

*"Personal finance is 20% head knowledge and 80% behavior."
- Dave Ramsey*

Character Traits

From personal experience we've seen that it takes certain character traits to reach financial freedom. All of these character traits work together. You can't take some and leave others.

- **Faithfulness and diligence** - You have to have faith in God and His ability to take care of you. And you have to be diligent in your duties as a steward of the resources that God has put you in charge of. Wealth that lasts is built on steady, faithful, and consistent work over time. There is no get-rich-quick trick in God's plan.

"The plans of the diligent lead surely to advantage, but everyone who is hasty comes surely to poverty."
Proverbs 21:5 (NASB)



- **Self-discipline and self-control** - We live in a society that is materialistic and many homes have a lot of excess. Christians should focus on what truly matters in life, which is not things of this earth.

"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect." Romans 12:2 (NASB)

- **Delayed gratification** - If you work now, you can enjoy later. If you enjoy now, then you work a lot harder later on to pay for it. It's best to wait on God's timing.

"The Lord is good to those who await Him, to the person who seeks Him."
Lamentations 3:25 (NASB)

- **Contentment** - The attitude of gratefully accepting what God gives, while gracefully releasing what God withholds. It's about the attitude of your heart, being content with whatever God blesses us with to manage for His glory.

"For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs."
I Timothy 6:10 (NASB)

These character traits form a whole picture of what a faithful steward looks like. And once you

have put them into practice in your life, then we can look at the financial goals that we are working towards.

Financial Goals

Why do you want financial freedom? What is the goal at the end of the road?

For Liz, as a woman, financial security means a great deal. She wants to be ready for the next rainy day. (Because it's only a matter of when, not if, something will happen.)

For instance, when there are economic downturns in our nation, she wants to know that we have a healthy emergency fund and stable financial plan to help us ride it out.



That security is not placed in money itself, but in knowing that we have practiced sound Biblical principles. And we know that whatever we encounter, God will make our emergency fund stretch as much as it needs to, or He will provide in some other way!

We recognize that our financial foundation comes from God and that He will provide for us, through finances or through other means.

Debt-free living is another financial goal that we maintain. We are committed to not live in bondage to debt. This means that we live below our means, with financial margin, to make sure that we set aside money for the next rainy day. It also means that we do not spend what we do not have. We make sure we can afford everything we own, otherwise we don't purchase it.

This attitude requires a sense of humility. You won't find us trying to maximize our lifestyle but rather living in moderation. We have drawn a line at *contentment* and declared "this is enough". God has abundantly provided for our every need and we do not need more.

There's a Biblical principle when you humble yourself and lower yourself below what you think you can grab...because then God is the One who lifts you up. It just doesn't work as well when we try to lift ourselves to a higher position.

And our final goal is generosity. If we live within our means, then we will have excess that we can share with others in need. We want to have excess money, resources, and time for kingdom benefit!

Living the Abundant Life

The truth is that there is work to be done in the Kingdom of God. There are people to be reached with the Gospel. There are people in need. There are widows and orphans that need a defender. This is the work that we do as stewards and servants of God.

It all starts with managing our own affairs in such a way that we have margin to give, rather than spending all that we have and becoming a burden or debtors to someone.

So the ultimate goal is living the abundant life! We want to honor the Lord with our wealth. We want to be thriving in our finances, not just surviving.



And this requires us to connect our faith with our finances. The Bible tells us "when you walk by the Spirit, you will not gratify the desires of the flesh." (Galatians 5:16) The world has different priorities than Christ-followers. Though it may be tempting to follow the flesh, it leads to destruction in the end. God's ways may look harder at the beginning, but they end up being better and more abundant for the long haul.

God Owns It All

In closing, we have a final quote from *Master Your Money* by Ron Blue. He says stewardship is using "God-given resources (time, talent, treasure, truth, relationship, etc.) for the accomplishment of God-given goals".

*"Stewardship is the use of God-given resources for the accomplishment of God-given goals."
- Ron Blue*

If you are relying on God, being directed by God, and living your life to serve God, then you are on your way to financial freedom!

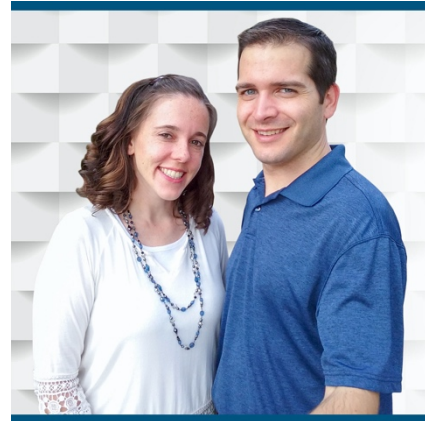
We are placed on this earth to give God glory. It's all about Him. God gave His one and only Son for our sins, and we owe Him everything in return. Therefore, we should honor the Lord in all areas of our lives.

When it comes to money and possessions, a wise steward gives God ownership of it all.

ABOUT US

Living Strategically is not an organization or company. It is a strategic mindset that we attempt to live by and share with other Christians.

We are Reed and Elizabeth Hewitt, a husband and wife team that lives in South Texas. For our day jobs, we are Communications Consultants. In 2013, we felt led to create LivingStrategically.com to utilize our backgrounds in education and communications to influence our culture for Christ.



Our foundational verses are Ephesians 5:15-17:

“Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise,
making the most of your time, because the days are evil.
So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.”

We define *living strategically* as using our time, energy, money, and talents in ways that make an impact for eternity. It is investing our temporal assets to gain eternal dividends. It is acting with great intention and purpose, knowing that one day we will give an account to the Lord for our stewardship of His assets.

We hope you will join us on this journey, as we help you strategically pursue your God-given purpose and make the most of your time on earth. If you'd like to get in touch, email us at info@livingstrategically.com.

Alright y'all, until next time...
keep living strategically!

Reed & Liz Hewitt

Helping you strategically pursue your God-given purpose.

www.LivingStrategically.com