

Money Talks

Week 2: “Stressor and Stress Reliever”

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This message was shared by Pastor Kurt Jacobson at Trinity Lutheran Church, Eau Claire, WI.

Dear Sisters and Brothers, grace and peace be with you all.

Last week we started this three-part series “Money Talks.” The goal is to help us all gain a faithful understanding of God’s goodness in giving us money to manage and enjoy. Last week we considered this important truth about Ownership and Management: **we don’t own our money, but we are in charge of it** and God wants us to figure these two things out.

The truth is God owns all things – including our money. But we have the important and holy task of being managers of it. God give us money to enjoy, to secure our needs and bless others through how we manage it. Yet, for many people money is a source of stress.

The American Psychological Association reports the top source of stress in our lives is money with 71% say this applies to them. (*from stressinamerica.org February 2013*) Maybe some of the stress comes from the fact that money can buy and sell almost anything these days. Human eggs and sperm are for sale. We pay kids to get good grades. You can even sell your forehead for advertising space. True story: Kari Smith auctioned her forehead on eBay for \$10,000 and a Canadian Internet gambling company bit.

Today we are diving into what it means to manage our money the best we can, avoid stress and find stress relief. So the first thing we face is: **we all have a choice with our money**. We can control money or it will control us. Like never before, you have to know your values or the choices you make with money will be defined for you. One research firm (Yankelovich Research) states that we are exposed to up to 3,000 money messages in a day. Every time you pass by a label in a grocery store, all the ads in your mailbox, to the label on the clothes you wear, they all possess a money related message.

In having a choice with money, I wonder where you learned to handle money? Who taught you about money choices? Was it at home, at school from a good finance teacher? Did you learn to connect money, values and faith at church? Or did your money choices get shaped by the culture that always wants you to spend and not worry about managing money. (Video here)

You know, the world around us doesn’t want us to manage money closely or stick to a budget. We live surrounded by a mantra that doesn’t want us to make good choices with money. “Why wait when you can have it now?” “Buy now—pay later!” “Easy credit terms!” “No interest, no payments until the day after Jesus comes again.” It all seems very enticing—and even more so when it means that you can have anything you want today! If you’re being controlled by that message and your money choices are defined by others, then money is standing right in between you and God. My hope is to provide you some tools and encouragement for developing a budget, getting control of spending and becoming a God-pleasing manager of money.

The Bible is full of examples of God teaching us to be bold managers. They include directives to make money grow and manage it aggressively. According to God, being a manager of money is non-negotiable. Don't let money call the shots. Manage it – and do it faithfully.

The best way to do this is with the highly spiritual, sacred ritual of creating a budget. I want to introduce you to Jared and Rachel who learned the importance of becoming managers of money early in their marriage by making a budget. (Video about learning in Financial Peace University the importance and benefits to having a household budget)

It's estimated that only 40% of American families have a budget. But it's worth the effort. Lutheran Social Services (lssmn.org) offers free budget and debt counseling. You can access it via phone, online or in person. In developing a budget, you will define goals that combine your faith and values in God.

There's a verse in Proverbs (21:20) that says "*The wise have wealth and luxury, but fools spend whatever they get.*" (NLT). Life can be much less stressful we plan and manage. In building a household budget, God doesn't promise that you're going to be rich. But God does have some goals for how you manage money. They're all over the bible! Here are a few of the goals God sets for us in managing money:

Goal: live free from unsecured debt

Romans 13:8 "Owe no one anything, except to love each other" The magnitude of unsecured debt is a huge issue for many Americans. The average US household credit card debt stands at \$15,607. It is the third largest source of household indebtedness. Only mortgage and student loan debt markets are larger. (from www.nerdwallet.com). Have you looked at your credit card statement and noticed the little calculator on it that shows how many YEARS and how much INTEREST you'll pay by making only the required minimum payment each month? Unsecured debt robs us of the ability to use our income for good things right now. Unsecured debt takes away ability the ability to gain control over money and be a good manager today.

Goal: Building a savings equal to 3-6 months of income and investing responsibly for your future.

I Cor. 16:2 "On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up."

The idea of having a savings account seems impossible for some people. I remember a day when I busied myself praying that my car wouldn't break down because I had nothing saved to pay for a repair. But what was I thinking – that if it did break down, God would pay for it? God, in giving us money to manage also wants us to engage our brains. Planning ahead and doing the work of saving is a God-honoring effort.

Developing a healthy savings account for the unexpected, as well as for the future, is part of being a good manager and faithful follower of Jesus. I'm one of the 76 million baby boomers and my generation is coming into the retirement years. By all forecasts, we will overwhelm health systems and

long-term care facilities in the next 30 years. We all know Medicare isn't prepared to handle this and Medicare is nowhere close to being able to provide long-term care for those who haven't saved for it. Huge issues face our country – and as people of faith called by God to manage money, building savings now to care for ourselves – rather than expecting someone else or the government will take care of us, is a faithful goal for today. Making a goal now of having savings of at least 3-6 months of income can extend God's mercy to others – especially those who have to live with us when we get stressed about money!

Goal: return the first tenth of your income to God in gratitude

Deuteronomy 16:17 (NLT) *All must give as they are able, according to the blessings given to them by the Lord your God.*

The next time you have some money in your hand, look closely at what it says. *"In God we Trust."* Let that statement confront each time you hold some money. I used to be content to think that if each month I was able to pay rent and utilities, car insurance and the student loan, and save a little for the future, then I'd give something to God. But God says on our money, it's a matter of trust. Trust that God has your back. So make a goal of giving .10 cents of every dollar you earn to God first, and trust that God will bring everything else along in your life, too.

Finally, after all the above, **live contentedly on the rest of your income.**

Matthew 6:25 Jesus: *"Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes?"*

After setting the goals to get out of credit card debt, build some savings, and giving just 10 cents of each dollar to God, we have this final goal. Live contentedly on all the rest. All of it is up for your management discretion. Learn to live on what you earn and not on what you yearn. When you do, you'll experience a peace and joy that cannot be taken away from you.

Becoming a manager of money takes discipline, prayer, a wise budget and a good dose of trust in God. But when you manage with these goals, you'll be free from being controlled by money and being led by your wants, and freed to be a blessing to others. Amen.