

# Biblical Guidelines for Understanding and Managing Money

Money is such a complex and important part of our lives and the Bible has much to say on the subject. Having money does not make us happy but mismanagement of money can certainly make us unhappy. However, the proper use of money can provide us with financial peace, freedom, and joy especially when used in the service of others.

The Bible gives us many specific commands and examples that teach us about debt, greed, laziness, about what to give, how much to give, when to give, and to whom to give. Individually these commands and examples do not give us a complete system for managing our finances. We still need structured guidelines that tell us how to make those individual decisions. The Bible shows us five areas that can give us those guidelines.

1. **Be Content**
2. **Work Hard**
3. **Give**
4. **Get Out of Debt**
5. **Do Not Live in Fear**

Understanding these guidelines is important for spiritual reasons as well. Our financial lives are not separate from our spiritual lives but God uses money to test us for spiritual responsibilities. If we cannot be trusted with unrighteous money then why would God give us great spiritual truths and responsibilities that are of surpassing value? Many people struggle spiritually because they are not practicing biblical money management. How can we be spiritually responsible and faithful if we are not financially responsible and faithful? How we manage money deeply influences our spiritual life.

**Luke 16:10-12 (NASB)** <sup>10</sup> "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. <sup>11</sup> "Therefore if you have not been faithful in the *use of* unrighteous wealth, who will entrust the true *riches* to you? <sup>12</sup> "And if you have not been faithful in the *use of* that which is another's, who will give you that which is your own?"

## 1. **Be Content**

To be content is to be satisfied with Christ who will never leave us or forsake us. Considering the scriptures below, we see that contentment is a product of complete trust in God's love, provision, and His desire to always help us. Our goal is to find peace in God and trust in God rather than loving this world and trusting in material possessions. We also trust that God fully understands our financial situation and there is no situation too difficult for God. Wherever we are that is where we must begin our spiritual-financial journey. Our job is to adopt a biblically correct view of money and its use and a trusting contentment is the basis for that view.

**Hebrews 13:5-6 (NASB)** <sup>5</sup> *Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, "I WILL NEVER DESERT YOU, NOR WILL I EVER FORSAKE YOU,"* <sup>6</sup> so that we confidently say, "THE LORD IS MY HELPER, I WILL NOT BE AFRAID. WHAT WILL MAN DO TO ME?"

**Philippians 4:11-13 (NASB)** <sup>11</sup> Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. <sup>12</sup> I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. <sup>13</sup> I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.

**2 Corinthians 12:10 (NASB)** Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.

If Christ is our greatest treasure then contentment is a fruit of that relationship. If Christ is our treasure and we are content with Him, then we can find joy even with the loss of material possessions. If we love Christ more than this world, then we must obey Him and that includes how we manage our money. How can we obey Christ or find contentment if we love the world more than we love Him? Lust is the basis for loving this world and lust never satisfies. In contrast, proper money

management starts with contentment, which comes from knowing, trusting, loving and obeying God.

**Matthew 6:21 (NASB)** for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

**Hebrews 10:34 (NASB)** For you showed sympathy to the prisoners and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one.

**John 14:15 (NASB)** <sup>15</sup> "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.

**1 John 2:15-17 (NASB)** <sup>15</sup> Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. <sup>16</sup> For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. <sup>17</sup> The world is passing away, and *also* its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.

## 2. Work Hard

The term "work hard" is used here to describe the many different facets of "work" found in the Bible. We should be diligent, work to free oneself from debt, work with wisdom and work to help others. Such things are part of a biblically defined work ethic. The overarching "work" philosophy described in the Bible is not one of selfishness but of responsibility, stewardship, and generosity. We receive God's financial blessings in trust. We are stewards with what God gives us. As a result, biblical precepts must guide us if we are to be good stewards with what God has given us.

It is in Ephesians where we find, what is perhaps, the pinnacle of this unselfish work ethic. The Bible instructs us to work to meet our own needs but also to help others who are in need. God wants us to be a pipeline of blessing to others and not to be a storage tank of selfishness but how can we help others if we have nothing to give? We must work for our own needs so as not to burden others but we must also work so we may help others.

**Ephesians 4:28 (NASB)** He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have *something* to share with one who has need.

God blesses us financially so our needs are met and we can help others but there are those who are capable of work and do not work, and those who are just lazy and God condemns their laziness.

Indeed the Bible is clear that one who does not work should not eat. The Book of Proverbs is full of many other declarations against the sluggard, the lazy man, those who are not diligent, etc.

**2 Thessalonians 3:10 (NASB)** For even when we were with you, we used to give you this order: if anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either.

However, diligence, not brilliance, not education, but diligence is the precious possession of man. If we work hard then God can bless our labors but if we are slack then we will suffer the consequences.

**Proverbs 12:27 (NASB)** A lazy man does not roast his prey, But the precious possession of a man *is* diligence.

Many believe that work is the curse of God on mankind because of sin. This not the case because God worked in creation and Adam cultivated the Garden of Eden all before man sinned against God. The curse of God was not "work" but to cause the ground to give up its fruit with greater difficulty because of Adam's sin. In contrast, God wants to bless us so we find joy in our work and in Him.

**Genesis 3:17 (NASB)** Then to Adam He said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree about which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat from it'; Cursed is the ground because of you; In toil you will eat of it All the days of your life.

**Genesis 2:2 (NASB)** By the seventh day God completed His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done.

**Genesis 2:15 (NASB)** Then the LORD God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it.

**Ecclesiastes 2:24-25 (NASB)** <sup>24</sup> There is nothing better for a man *than* to eat and drink and tell himself that his labor is good. This also I have seen that it is from the hand of God. <sup>25</sup> For who can eat and who can have enjoyment without Him?

Another example of hard work deals with fair and honest work. We have a spiritual responsibility to deal properly and honestly with others in our business practices.

**Proverbs 11:1 (NASB)** A false balance is an abomination to the LORD, But a just weight is His delight.

In ancient times, some merchants would alter their scales (balance) so their customers would not receive the correct amount for what they paid. God called this practice an abomination. Today those

who receive eight hours of pay and do not give eight hours of work are also cheating. Does God consider this any less of an abomination? If we are content, giving at our place of worship and yet we are cheating our employer how will God deal with our financial lives? We are to work hard and deal fairly with others. Fair dealing is part of hard work.

### 3. Give

We must work hard to have something to give and giving is a major part of the Christian life. It is only on the subject of giving where God says to "test Me". God gives us very specific promises and directions and, as many who understand giving will testify, it is impossible to out give God.

Giving shows our heart to help others and our detachment from this world's goods. In many ways giving is the greatest testimony to the non-Christian world of Christian character and virtue. Giving is also a test of obedience to God. Although God does not "need" our money, He strongly desires our obedience. If we do not give we are robbing God, and God may send the "devourer" to discipline us, those unexpected problems and expenses that wreck our best laid selfish plans.

The "devourer" of Malachi 3:8-11 is touched on again in Haggai 1:5-6. We may think we are accumulating money when we do not give but it is like putting money into pockets with holes. However, if we obey God then God can open the windows of heaven and He can rebuke the devourer. What does all this mean? If we obey God and give, then we may see an increase in our income or we may see a decrease in our expenses. We may also see both.

**Malachi 3:8-11 (NASB)** <sup>8</sup> "Will a man rob God? Yet you are robbing Me! But you say, 'How have we robbed You?' In tithes and offerings. <sup>9</sup> "You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing Me, the whole nation of you! <sup>10</sup> "Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house, and test Me now in this," says the LORD of hosts, "if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows. <sup>11</sup> "Then I will rebuke the devourer for you, so that it will not destroy the fruits of the ground; nor will your vine in the field cast its grapes," says the LORD of hosts.

**Haggai 1:5-6 (NASB)** <sup>5</sup> Now therefore, thus says the LORD of hosts, "Consider your ways! <sup>6</sup> "You have sown much, but harvest little; you eat, but *there is not enough* to be satisfied;

*you drink, but there is not enough* to become drunk; you put on clothing, but no one is warm *enough*; and he who earns, earns wages *to put* into a purse with holes."

The promises of God regarding giving do not obligate Him to serve our selfishness. If we give only to receive, we should expect nothing at all.

**James 4:2b-4 (NASB)** <sup>2</sup> ... You do not have because you do not ask. <sup>3</sup> You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend *it* on your pleasures. <sup>4</sup> You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

In contrast, true obedience to God places us in a position where we can be content, survive or thrive and even have surplus to give. The biblical view of "prosperity" is not gross excess of supply but having our needs met even in the most difficult places. God prospered the work of Joseph while Joseph was a slave and later when he was in jail.

**Genesis 39:3-4 (NASB)** <sup>3</sup> Now his master saw that the LORD was with him and *how* the LORD caused all that he did to prosper in his hand. <sup>4</sup> So Joseph found favor in his sight and became his personal servant; and he made him overseer over his house, and all that he owned he put in his charge.

**Genesis 39:23 (NASB)** The chief jailer did not supervise anything under Joseph's charge because the LORD was with him; and whatever he did, the LORD made to prosper.

Later in Genesis 42, we see that God elevated Joseph and he became the second most powerful person in Egypt. God will honor His word to prosper us even if we are enslaved or in jail. In the life of Joseph, we can see God testing and teaching Joseph, preparing him for what was coming. We see contentment, hard work, faith, obedience, and faithfulness. Joseph was content and trusted God when things were very difficult and he was faithful and wise with all the things God gave him. God used Joseph's suffering and raised him up to save his family from certain death because of a great famine. God can bless our lives and give us favor with others so we may endure, and He may supply surplus above our needs so we may bless others.

### 4. Get Out of Debt

In so many cultures, debt is a way of life. We borrow for houses, cars, education, etc., but the Bible calls those with debt slaves. Debt may be the result of desperate need but all too often it is the

result of a lack of contentment, a lack of self-control, a lack of hard work and a lack of obedience regarding giving. Debt is financial slavery to this world not freedom from this world. Regardless of the reasons that may have brought debt into our lives, we should work hard to get out of debt as quickly as possible. We should also avoid guaranteeing the debt of others (co-signing). Buy less. Live on less. Pay off your debt. Debt often restricts us from fulfilling our other spiritual duties to the fullest such as giving. In this way, debt hinders obedience and often brings about fear.

**Proverbs 22:7 (NASB)** The rich rules over the poor, And the borrower *becomes* the lender's slave.

**Proverbs 3:27 (NASB)** Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, When it is in your power to do it.

**Proverbs 22:26-27 (NASB)** <sup>26</sup> Do not be among those who give pledges, Among those who become guarantors for debts. <sup>27</sup> If you have nothing with which to pay, Why should he take your bed from under you?

## 5. Do Not Live in Fear

We cannot consciously live in God's peace while fearfully expecting some horrific judgment from Him. We cannot expect God's blessings if we live in fear of mere men. If we live in fear because our financial lives are a mess then we trust God to help us fix the mess. If God says, be content, work hard, give, and get out of debt then we must obey. Like Job, we must hope in God for the promise of His word even if obedience seems extremely difficult. We must resolve ourselves to obey God without fear because such fear is not from God.

**1 John 4:18 (NASB)** There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love.

**Job 13:15a (NASB)** "Though He slay me, I will hope in Him..."

## These Five Guidelines are Connected

Contentment, trust in God and not living in fear of man are connected themes of Hebrews 13:5-6. So too all of these five guidelines are connected to each other. They are like pieces to a puzzle. Seeing and applying all of these pieces, gives us the big picture of God's money management plan. Having

some, but not all of these pieces at work, leaves us with giant gaps in our biblical understanding of money and the lessons God would teach us.

To demonstrate this connectivity, consider this example. A Christian who is not truly content with Christ will never find contentment with material things. Such a person may borrow money to buy something to fill that lack of contentment instead of working hard and saving for the item. If such a decision leaves the person with no surplus funds then the individual may think there is "nothing left to give to God". Left without a financial buffer by incurring unnecessary debt often results in financial fear. As we see when one element is out of place, such as contentment, many other financial areas may collapse in on the person. In this example, a lack of contentment and a lack of hard work may lead to decreased giving, debt, and fear.

In another example, a person may be content, work hard, give, and live debt free but still live with fear. Perhaps it is the fear of losing one's possessions or fear of financial failure. However, the promises of God's word are still at work regarding the areas that are correctly in place. God may bless the hard work, giving, etc., but by clinging to the fear, financial peace may still seem illusive.

If we ignore just one of these five parts the problems may be compounded. Failing to identify and apply all five parts may also result in a failure to discover true financial peace. Financial management is like an engine that requires all parts to be present and functioning properly. One missing or broken part may prevent the engine from starting or it may cause the engine to self-destruct. So too we need all five of these biblical money management parts to be at work at the same time.

God has tied proper money management to a significant part of our relationship with Him. If God is our greatest treasure then we will obey Him with our finances. God can then bless us and make us a blessing to others.