



Stewardship: *Financial Planning*

Lesson # 5

There is an old adage that says, “If you don’t know where you’re going, it doesn’t matter which road you take!” While some might argue the point it seems undeniable that if you don’t know where you’re going how will you know when or if you get there? One of the most severe problems we face is operating our lives without a plan, just sort of going with the flow. In fact many Christians will argue that we should depend totally on God’s direction. While that is true it does not mean that He wants us to be totally without input. Otherwise why would He give each of us such different gifts, talents and capabilities? The reality is that He expects us to look to Him for guidance, but for us to chart our own course, to use the gifts He’s given us to finalize where, when and how we’re headed. This applies to our finances, our talent development, our time utilization and our attitudes. We see this stated clearly in **Prov. 24: 3-5** “³ *By wisdom a house is built, and through understanding it is established;* ⁴ *through knowledge its rooms are filled with rare and beautiful treasures.* ⁵ *A wise man has great power, and a man of knowledge increases strength;* & **Prov. 27:23-24.**”²³ *Be sure you know the condition of your flocks, give careful attention to your herds;* ²⁴ *for riches do not endure forever, and a crown is not secure for all generations.”*

Here we see the need to plan as well as the three essential steps in sound planning, which are: wisdom, understanding and knowledge. The first step in good planning is to correctly assess the situation, which will require more than a one-time effort. Don’t be too general or too specific so that your plan becomes difficult to measure on the one hand or inflexible on the other. Remember future events and life in general are not always easily predicted.

In **James 1:2-3** “² *Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds,* ³ *because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance.”* We learn to “*Consider it all joy when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance.*” For a plan to succeed God’s wisdom must be weighed and incorporated before every decision and that wisdom can only be found in His Word. (See **Psalms 119:130**) “¹³⁰ *The unfolding of your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple.”*

His first piece of wisdom on this issue is, in fact, to plan and is characterized by orderliness and excellence and is found in **Luke 14:28**²⁸ *“Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it?”*

Plans and goals should cover both short and long range time periods and we'll cover both. For clarification, goals are what you wish to accomplish, while a plan is the method or steps needed to accomplish the goal. There are six essential steps to **Short Range Goals and Your Plan**.

1. **Establish Written Plans And Goals.** Putting them in writing provides a visible, objective and measurable standard with which to work. In the area of finance we call it a budget. See **Prov. 16:3 & 9** ³ *Commit to the LORD whatever you do, and your plans will succeed,* ⁹ *In his heart a man plans his course, but the LORD determines his steps.* You'll learn that our job in biblically based planning is to develop our goals and it's God's job to direct our steps toward their completion.
2. **Commit God's Portion First.** In **Prov. 3:9-10** ⁹ *Honor the LORD with your wealth, with the first fruits of all your crops;* ¹⁰ *then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine.* We see that the purpose of committing God's portion first is to honor Him, be it with our finances, our time or our talents.
3. **Control Or Eliminate The Use Of Credit.** In today's society the use of credit is out of control. Debt equates to bondage and is the number one destroyer of marriages. Over committing one's time or activity involvement can be just as harmful, forcing us to focus on the urgent at the expense of the important. See **Prov. 15:16** ¹⁶ *Better a little with the fear of the LORD than great wealth with turmoil.*
4. **Learn To Be Content.** Most financial difficulties arise from over spending, not insufficient income. In many cases extra income from, say adding another job or wage earner, can and usually does exacerbate the problem because the net result comes at too high a cost, either in more expense or less time for the important. Two key actions are required. **First**, reduce expenses. **Prov. 21:17** gives you solid and stern direction in this area. ¹⁷ *He who loves pleasure will become poor; whoever loves wine and oil will never be rich.* **Second**, pray for God's guidance for new purchases. His miraculous powers may provide the actual need without having to make the desired purchase. See **Psalms 37:7** ⁷ *Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him; do not fret when men succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes.*
5. **Set The Goals God Has For You.** If you allow others to establish your priorities, plans and goals, you will be frustrated and unhappy. Remember, God has a plan for your life. Follow His plan-not your neighbor's. See **Jer. 29:11.** ¹¹ *For I know the plans I have for you,* declares the LORD, *plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.* It has been said, "When Jesus is all you've got, Jesus is all you need!" The basis of this wisdom is

found in **Prov. 3:13-14** “¹³ *Blessed is the man who finds wisdom, the man who gains understanding,* ¹⁴ *for she is more profitable than silver and yields better returns than gold.*” & **Prov. 2:6** “⁶ *For the LORD gives wisdom, and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding.*”

6. **Seek Good Christian Counsel.** All too often we allow our pride to hold us back from asking for and receiving guidance or counsel. All people have needs from time to time and need advice to find the proper answer. Don't allow your pride to rob you of such a solution. See **Prov. 19:20** “²⁰ *Listen to advice and accept instruction, and in the end you will be wise.*” & **Eph. 5:31.** “³¹ *For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.*” Remember however, there is a difference between opinion and advice. Use **Titus 1:7-9** “⁷ *Since an overseer is entrusted with God's work, he must be blameless—not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain.* ⁸ *Rather he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined.* ⁹ *He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.*”

In **Prov. 29:18** the King James version says, “*He who has no vision shall perish.*” That seems awfully harsh and for many of us is not fully understood. It is not until you go back to the original Hebrew translation that it's full meaning can be understood. In Hebrew the word vision means to be a dreamer, or to have a revelation or to be an oracle capable seeing into the future. The word perish means to be purposeless, to run wild, to not be focused. In short this verse when properly translated says He who has no focus on the future will wander aimlessly through life without direction or sense of accomplishment. That sounds a lot like no goals and no plan, doesn't it?

Long Range Goals and Your Plan are merely numerous short-range goals & plans linked together back to back. Rarely do people develop short-range goals or plans and even more infrequently do they create long-range goals and plans. In fact it is said that most of us spend more time planning our vacations than we do planning for retirement or college educations for our children or many other significant parts of our lives.

Typically as our incomes rise we expand our spending or better said, our consumption. We tend to buy more insurance than is needed, buy more toys, and more expensive clothing etc. and we try to create an estate for our children. When our surpluses grow we have a tendency to want to accumulate even more and naturally morph into a hoarding mentality.

Proper planning helps us to meet specific and important goals such as freedom from debt, children's education, retirement and giving, but without a plan we tend to function without discipline, be it financial or time and talent usage.

In the final analysis we are dealing with our needs, our wants and our desires. The later two are the ones that create all the havoc in our lives. Effective long-range goals and planning boils down to three steps;

1. **A Written Goal (S) And Plan Is Always Best.** Focus on the three areas of need, wants and desires. To help prioritize your thinking while doing this refer to **I Tim. 6:6-8,** ⁶ *But godliness with contentment is great gain.* ⁷ *For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it.* ⁸ *But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that.*

I John 2 15-16 ¹⁵ *Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.* ¹⁶ *For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world.”*

2. **Establish Maximum Financial Goals.** Often we make money doing what we enjoy but later the motive becomes accumulating money for security. The question is, “How much is enough?” Set that amount in advance, before you make the money. That frees you from chasing the almighty dollar and lets you better direct your resources and energy to building God’s Kingdom. See **I Tim. 6: 18-19** ¹⁸ *Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share.* ¹⁹ *In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.”* & **Luke 8:18.** ¹⁸ *Therefore consider carefully how you listen. Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what he thinks he has will be taken from him.”*
3. **Establish A Long-Range Family Plan.** Inheritance is more than financial resources. Pass on the Christian values and principles that you deem important and put them in writing. See **I Cor. 3:13** ¹³ *his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man’s work.”* & **Prov. 13:22** ²² *A good man leaves an inheritance for his children’s children, but a sinner’s wealth is stored up for the righteous.”*

There are numerous other elements that comprise solid planning. We will list seven for your consideration.

- **A Family Living Plan :** Establish a spending plan for your family. Set the boundaries, in advance, within which family members can operate. Failure to do so will ultimately lead to overspending. See **I Pet. 3:3-4** ³ *Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes.* ⁴ *Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God’s sight.”* & **Matt. 6:32** ³² *For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them..”* & **I Tim 6:6-8** ⁶ *But godliness with contentment is great gain.* ⁷ *For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it.* ⁸ *But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with*

that.” & **I John 2:15-16** ¹⁵ *Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.* ¹⁶ *For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world.”*

- **A Family Savings Plan:** Many families fail to save and are consequently forced into debt by even the most basic financial crisis. Creating a savings plan for the important elements of your life is warranted and advised but there is a difference between saving and hoarding and the line can sometimes become very fine. See **Prov. 6:6-8** ⁶ *Go to the ant, you sluggard; consider its ways and be wise!* ⁷ *It has no commander, no overseer or ruler,* ⁸ *yet it stores its provisions in summer and gathers its food at harvest.”*
- **A Family Inheritance Plan:** God instructs us to provide for our families but He doesn't say coddle them. Our obsession with leaving a substantial inheritance may be as much of a detriment as a benefit. We must think about the depth of our belief that God will provide when we set our inheritance goals.

Luke 9:59-62 ⁵⁹ *He said to another man, “Follow me.” But the man replied, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.”* ⁶⁰ *Jesus said to him, “Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God.”* ⁶¹ *Still another said, “I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say good-bye to my family.”* ⁶² *Jesus replied, “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.”* & **Psalm 37: 25** ²⁵ *I was young and now I am old, yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread.”*

- **A Long Range-Earning Plan:** Too often money becomes our god. We tend to lose focus on what God's purpose for our being here is and we replace it with our own. Think in advance; determine where your priorities are and how closely they fit God's. Then determine your earning plan. See **Psalm 49: 16-17** ¹⁶ *Do not be overawed when a man grows rich, when the splendor of his house increases;* ¹⁷ *for he will take nothing with him when he dies, his splendor will not descend with him.”* & **Heb. 13:5** ⁵ *Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.”*
- **A Contingency Or Surplus Plan:** Once a limit on spending is established and adhered to, most Christians can expect to accumulate a surplus. How that surplus is to be used must be determined in advance or else it will typically be diverted as adjustments in lifestyle or hoarded. God knows to whom He can entrust riches. See **Matt. 25:23** ²³ *“His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!’”*

- **Establish Some Absolutes In Your Life:**. God will accept nothing less than complete honesty. Christians who are otherwise, especially in money or tax matters, where we have a propensity to veil dishonesty with so-called shrewdness, will not escape His watchful eye. See **Rom. 13: 6-7** ⁶ *This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing.* ⁷ *Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.* “
- **Husbands And Wives Must Plan Together:**. God will not bless divisiveness between husband and wife. Read carefully **Gen. 2:24** ²⁴ *For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh*”. & **I Pet. 3:1 & 7** . ¹ *Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word,* ⁷ *they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives,* ⁷ *Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.* “

Regardless of whether you find yourself mired in debt with many problem issues or if your desire is to avoid that situation or even if you are enjoying excesses, these pearls of wisdom and instruction from God's Word will guide you to a more fulfilling, less stressful and more productive life. You are urged to begin your own goal setting and planning process. Once you do, God will bless you beyond your wildest dreams.

May God richly bless us all,

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