

What's in Your Wallet? (Stewardship Series)

Save - November 11, 2018

Matthew 25:14-30 (Parable Talents)

"*What's in Your Wallet?*" This is the question we're answering in our series on caring for what God has given us. The topic may seem dry and boring, but all of us have more than enough and we all need to be able to manage it well or it will manage us. John Wesley was the founder of Methodism, and he gave a famous sermon that he titled "[The Use of Money](#)." The main points of this sermon are that believers should *earn all we can, save all we can, and give all we can*. Last week, we learned about being good financial stewards--supervisors or managers over the resources God entrusted us with. One important way to manage money is NOT to spend every dime we get! We need to have a handle on what's coming in and what's going out.

We all would love to consistently have a smooth and comfortable income without stress, without worry and preferably without hard work. There are some people who have that luxury, but for most of us, we will have to earn and save some money on our financial sunny days to help get us through life's rainy days.

Being good stewards and accounting for our money has been difficult for centuries. The servants in today's Bible passage all had varying degrees of success with financial management, particularly with saving and investing. Statistics show us that Americans today are still struggling to hold on to the money we earn and to make it work for us. So that no one here will think that we're alone in our struggles to put resources away for a rainy day, let's look at some statistics on American consumer savings.

- As of 2017, about 50% of American workers are living paycheck to paycheck with no emergency savings. Many Americans do not have a savings account at all.
- About 60% of Americans report that they don't have a six-months savings cushion, even though a full year's salary is recommended as a safety net by most financial advisors.
- One number to remember is \$5,200. According to [Business Insider](#) magazine, \$5,200 is the median balance in American savings accounts. That means that of the people who actually have a savings account--and many Americans do not--only half of us have balances of over \$5,200. That is nowhere near one year or even six months of expenses for most people.
- The median savings for retirees was only around \$10,000. That's not a lot if you are past the years where you can earn more money if you need to.
- Even with lower unemployment and increasing wage growth in recent years, [CNBC and Bankrate](#) reported in March 2018 that 20% of Americans don't save any of their income. About 21% of people say they only save about 5% of their income and another 25% of people save less than 10%. If the surveys hold true, then about 65% of Americans are saving next to nothing or very little. They won't be able to afford even a modest emergency let alone finance their retirement.
- Even for people who do manage to save, the bad news is that we tend to spend what we save after we put it away. That's not really saving--that's just spending later.

And then there are the wealth disparities and inequalities that make saving for some people much more difficult than it is for other people. Everyone's ability to save is not the same. [MarketWatch](#) reports that in the improved economy, people who already had money saved more, and people who did not have a lot of money saved less. Wealthier people were able to save a larger percentage of their income than middle class or working-class people. [Systemic issues](#), such as income and wealth inequality and discrimination based on race and gender, make a difference in how much people are genuinely able to save and still get by day to day.

Women make 30% less than men do, and the savings rates show that. Households led by women are the least likely to have enough savings. White people are able to save about 7 times as much as African Americans and about 5 times as much as Hispanics. For these groups, saving or a lack thereof is not a matter of having a poor financial education, a lack of discipline, or a list full of excuses - it's about the real hardships that come from just trying to make ends meet. Unfortunately, "rainy days" as we call them--broken cars, evictions, catastrophic illness, job loss--these days come more

often from people who are living day to day on the economic margins. Those who have less money have to be even more prepared for the unexpected. So how do we do this? Let's take a look at [Matthew 25:14-30](#) and what we can learn about saving and financial preparation from this passage?

We know that: **Servants are entrusted with God's financial resources.**

"He called together his servants and entrusted his money to them while he was gone." - Matthew 25:14

This parable is more about us and our responsibilities toward God and less about the money. No matter how much or how little money you have, God trusts you to take care of it. And one thing we all know--we know that managing our resources does not happen on its own.

Building financial resources means working and investing.

"The servant who received the five bags of silver began to invest the money and earned five more. The servant with two bags of silver also went to work and earned two more." - Matthew 25:16-17

No matter which of the financial gurus you listen to, the message on saving is largely the same: start immediately and keep at it. You want to first have a small emergency fund, then keep saving toward about 3-6 months' worth of living expenses. Once you have that, you can move into investing for longer-term savings such as retirement. To yield more money, you need more time, and that's the investment.

Savings is long-term and it's a lifestyle. We're likely to be saving for the rest of our lives--for ourselves and for others. We're going to have to work to earn the money, and we'll need to put enough aside with investments to be sure we have some for the future. Thinking about saving forever can be overwhelming, but the good news is that:

God wants us to succeed financially.

"The master was full of praise. 'Well done, my good and faithful servant. You have been faithful in handling this small amount, so now I will give you many more responsibilities. Let's celebrate together!'" - Matthew 25:21

When we are better stewards of our money, we'll see more--more in our accounts, more in our pockets. From Dave Ramsey's **Financial Peace** courses that we teach here at the church, there are testimonies about people who have made a strong and clear commitment to financial education. They were able to start saving more and they became better financial stewards. Their savings accumulates more quickly than they expected, and they're able to do more than they ever thought. That is God giving them not only more money but more trust and more ability and responsibility with their finances.

Now, everyone's circumstances are different, so it's important that we seek wise counsel about our particular financial situation and ways to succeed with what we have. A person who has five bags of money, for example, will need different information and strategies than someone with one bag. But we all need to know what we're doing. That means we may need to get uncomfortable and ask for help. We may have to admit that we're not sure how to do this "money thing" well. We have to believe that God wants us to do well with what He's given us. The Bible has wisdom about our finances, and the Holy Spirit can guide us in our choices. But we also need real, practical help with things like budgets and savings plans and money tracking. It can be overwhelming to consider our financial status. A lot of times we just ignore it and hope it gets better. When that happens,

Financial fears keep us stuck right where we are.

"I was afraid I would lose your money, so I hid it in the earth. Look, here is your money back." - Matthew 25:25

In this parable, we can see a lot of issues that kept the one servant from doing well while the master was away. In Verse 25, the servant says, "I was afraid." He didn't invest it so that it could make more money, like the servant with five bags of money. He didn't work for it, like the servant with two bags of money. He didn't even spend it and enjoy it! At least he understood that it wasn't his to waste. The servant was just stuck, as many of us can be at times. We don't get

ahead because we don't take the time and make the commitment to put at least a little bit of our money away in savings along the way.

Verse 29 says, "*But from those who do nothing, even what little they have will be taken away.*" The master in the passage took the money away, but in today's economy, money can be taken away easily. Money is taken from us in the form of high-interest loans, repossessions, and bankruptcies that come from emergencies and needs when we are unprepared with a savings cushion. We could be going to work every day, at more than one job, and have nothing to show for it because we had an emergency and not enough savings or investment to cover it.

Let's be real, we know that fear of financial stress and ruin is real. But for all of us at any level of income, the question is still the same: *What is it that you plan to do with that trust that God is placed in you?* When we remember that we are people watching out for what God owns, it becomes much more important to handle money well and that includes saving well. So how do we save well? It's not so much the amount, but the dedication and the consistency. We need to plan our savings and then – work the plan, no matter what.

Saving strategically leads to abundance.

"To those who use well what they are given, even more will be given, and they will have an abundance..." - Matthew 25:29

The main thing is just to start if we haven't already. People with much lower incomes are likely to have already cut out unnecessary expenses. The strategy there might be to just save \$5 or \$10 or 1% of your earnings for a year without touching it.

People in the middle can often do much better with savings. In most homes and households, we can find an unnecessary expense or two to cut in order to increase our savings. We talked in our series "How Do I Know?" about how to tell the difference between what a want is and what a true need is. We have to decide what it looks like to be a good steward or money manager to a God who trusts us.

Set a goal for every dollar you have, to *earn all you can, save all you can, and then give all you can.* The only way to keep our spiritual and practical priorities in order is to save what we can so that we can have enough to make those right decisions, have enough to live on, and also have enough to share with others. Don't let fear and procrastination keep you from saving! Take one small step today!