

HOW THEN SHALL WE LIVE?

How do we keep God first amidst all of our daily responsibilities, peer pressure, and financial concerns? Time and commitment are key ingredients to any successful relationship, and our relationship with the Lord is no different. We need to take advantage of what the Church gives us — including the Sacraments, Holy Scripture, and prayer — to give us the courage and strength we need to become a faithful steward of the gifts God has given us.

With the help of the Sacraments and a shift to a more balanced perspective, we will be ready to continue on the journey to becoming financially free!

Helpful Hints

Here are a few ideas to help get your finances on a Godly track:

- Avoid instant gratification. Think about all purchases at least overnight.
- Develop a spending plan and stick to it. If you use credit cards, use them only in accordance with your spending plan and pay them off in full every month.
- Track all your expenses. You may be surprised at where your money goes. One couple budgeted \$250 for the year for eating out, yet they had a routine of taking a family of seven out for pizza every Friday night. Tracking expenses will show you how much you are actually spending — and where.

■ Set up family budget meetings. The point isn't to talk about money, but to build relationships and agreement while discussing the deliberate use of the family resources. It's not that we can't afford something, but rather we choose not to spend our money that way.

■ Connect values with spending habits. One family decided to cancel their cable TV. Even more important than the savings of \$50 per month was the fact that they decided the cable programming from certain channels did not reflect the family's values, and the time spent in front of the TV got in the way of quality family time.

■ Recognize each other's strengths and share each other's burdens. As one wife says, "I handle the finances and my husband only knows what I tell him. I don't want to bear the burden by myself anymore." Talk about finances together and share decision-making responsibilities.



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SOME QUESTIONS TO PONDER

Balancing faith, family, and work is an ongoing effort. Why is achieving this balance important? How well are you doing at maintaining such a balance?

Work is so much of who we are, yet we often fail to recognize the role that faith should have in our work. Do you work to live or live to work? How does your work impact your family life?

Look at how you deal with money at work. Are you more careful with the budget you are allotted at work than you are with your own money? What if you truly believed that your money was from God. Would you be more careful in how you spend it?

Words of Wisdom

- Remember: you are a steward, or manager of your resources; don't let your possessions own you.
- The more things you have to have, the less freedom you have.
- When you change your habits, your life changes as well.
- It's easier to keep things in control than to get them back in control
- It's not so much about money as it is about living an abundant life in Christ.

The Steward's Prayer

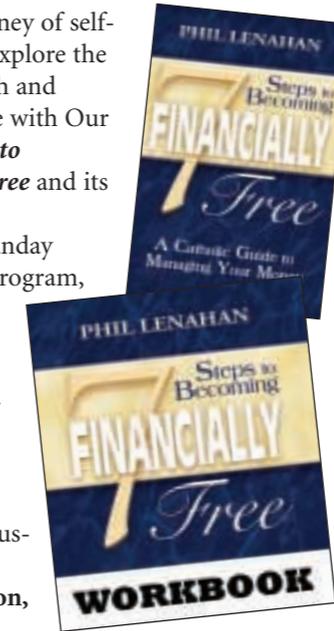
Lord,
I give you thanks for creating me and redeeming me.
Keep me close to you during all my days.
Help me to remember that life on earth is short
and the life to come eternal.
Grant me a generous spirit; may I love you well
by loving others well.
Guide me to a wise use of the gifts you have entrusted
to me — my time, my talents, and my treasure.
May I use them for your greater glory!
Divine Providence can provide.
Divine Providence did provide.
Divine Providence will provide.
Amen.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

For a personnel journey of self-discovery and analysis, explore the connection between faith and finances in your own life with Our Sunday Visitor's *7 Steps to Becoming Financially Free* and its companion workbook.

Also look for Our Sunday Visitor's newest parish program, **7 Steps to Becoming Financially Free**, a fully Catholic, small-group study on managing your money. This six-session program will help you make the most of God's gifts through group discussion and peer support.

For more information, visit www.osv.com or www.veritasfinancialministries.com.



For additional Catholic resources or to order bulk copies of this pamphlet contact:

Our Sunday Visitor

200 Noll Plaza • Huntington, IN 46750
 1-800-348-2440 • Fax: 1-800-498-6709 • www.osv.com

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By Phil Lenahan

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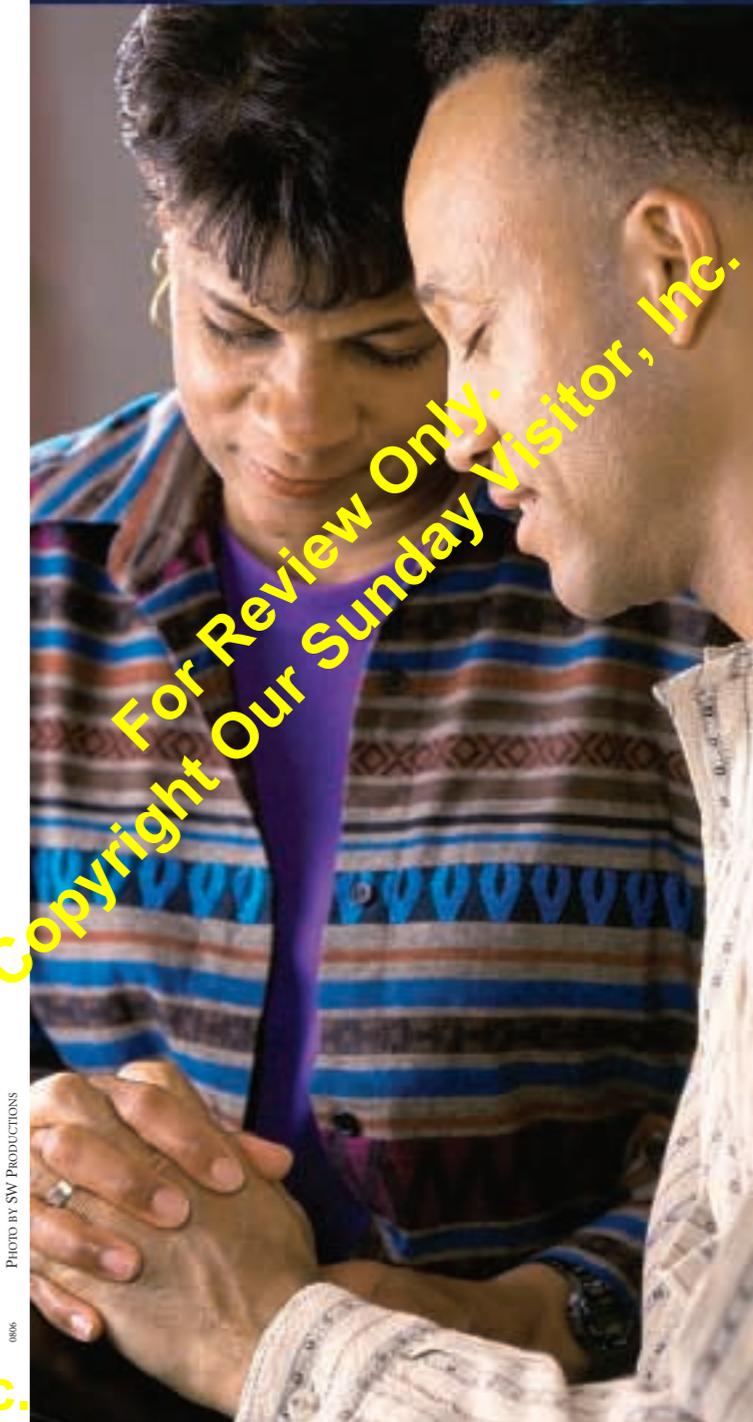
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FAITH & FINANCES



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THE IMPACT OF FAITH ON FINANCES

We've received so much from Our Lord — life, faith, freedom, and family. Along with these gifts, we've also been given the responsibility to be faithful and *faith-filled* stewards of our finances. Yet many of us have allowed a wall to separate our faith lives from our money. As one person puts it, "I felt the strength of my faith was not being reflected in my finances."

What's the biggest problem most people have with their finances? Credit card bills? Inadequate income? No savings? Too much month left at the end of the money?

While people tend to think these are their major problems, they are just symptoms. The real problem isn't so much money (or lack of it) as it is our relationship with God and how we respond to His call for us to be Stewards of Providence. This includes trusting God to provide for our financial needs and doing our part to manage our resources in ways pleasing to the Lord. How do our priorities reflect our beliefs in Him? How much do we include Him, through prayer, in our decisions?

FINANCIAL BONDAGE

Financial bondage takes many forms. Consumer credit and debt are major areas, but bondage also occurs when spouses fail to communicate about money issues, leading to a lack of unity in the marriage. It occurs when someone becomes a workaholic, or when we seek satisfaction in acquiring "stuff." This bondage then gets in the way of our relationship with God. We lose focus of the real priorities, and then communication with God either stops

or becomes one of desperation instead of one of proactive growth.

While most Americans experience some form of financial bondage, the good news is that Our Lord wants us to experience the peace and contentment that come from being truly financially free. Let's talk about how we can be set financially free with the help of our Catholic faith.

Jack and Jill Went Up the Hill ... of Debt

When Jack and Jill got married, they were both making good incomes. Once they combined their resources, they were able to afford pretty much whatever they wanted. They never needed to balance their checkbook, much less live on a budget. Then they started a family and Jill became a stay-at-home mom. Suddenly, their everyday expenses began mounting, but their spending habits continued as if they were still newlyweds with money to spare. Within a few years, their credit cards were maxed and they were having trouble making their auto loan and mortgage payments. Jack and Jill were stunned to realize that they had become one of the millions of Americans in financial bondage.



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WHAT'S FAITH GOT TO DO WITH IT?

The only way you can achieve true financial freedom and peace is to recognize that *God has a plan for your life — including your finances*. He is our Father and wants what's best for us. Our faith provides the answers we're looking for, to help us develop a healthy, wholesome, and holy attitude when it comes to how we manage our money. In fact, how you handle your money can be one of the best indicators of the strength and vitality of your spiritual life.

It's important for our financial objectives to support our goals for life. As Christians, we must always keep in mind the reason for our existence. Remember Jesus' words: "For what does it profit a man, to gain the whole world and forfeit his life?" (Mk 8:36). As

Catholics, growing in our relationship with Christ and being faithful to him and his teachings is our number one goal in life, and it should be our first financial goal as well! All the other financial goals and priorities we set will flow from our decision to be faithful to Christ.

Another important aspect of transforming our attitude toward money comes with learning to trust God as our Father and provider. In the Sermon on the Mount, Our Lord says to not worry about questions like, "What shall we eat?" or "What shall we drink?" or "What shall we wear?" For the Gentiles seek all these things; and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well" (Mt 6:31-33). Does this mean you quit your job and live off the kindness of others? Of course not. But it does mean you think twice about what is truly a need and what is simply a want. It also means you have a source of strength to resist peer pressure regarding what you buy and how much you spend.

FREE, DEBT-FREE AT LAST!

One of the first steps toward financial freedom is reducing consumer debt because too many resources will be swallowed up paying high interest charges.

Here's one technique that works for most people. List your debts in order based on interest rate, with the highest rate debt listed first. Every month make the minimum payment required on each of the loans, except for the loan at the top of the repayment list. Pay as much as possible on that bill. When it is paid off, continue to put the money you had been spending toward the next debt. Repeat this process until all of your debts are eliminated!

Remember to use your debt as an opportunity to grow closer to God as you make new choices, set different priorities, and start on the path to financial freedom. Include God in your struggle through prayer and contemplation over the toughest of choices.



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OUR ROLE: FAITHFUL STEWARDS

The first step is to commit to being a faithful steward of the gifts God has entrusted to you. It starts with getting your spiritual house in order — recognizing that all you have ultimately belongs to God, learning to be generous with the tithe as your model, applying temperance to your lifestyle, and developing effective communication in your marriage and family.

We're all in a spiritual battle in our consumer-oriented, me-first society, and how we handle our money and the other gifts God has given us is an important part of that struggle. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* recognizes the real-world fact that "our thirst for another's goods is immense, infinite, never quenched" (CCC 2536). This thirst, unless tempered by a close walk with the Lord, often leads to overspending and debt problems that wreak havoc on family life, causing a downward spiral.

Pope John Paul II often spoke of how we have become a society of "having" rather than a society of "being." He continually called us to the fully human life we're destined for. We need to grow in our understanding of what God wants for us rather than pursuing what we want.

How can you tell if you're on your way to financial freedom?

■ Write down your top ten life goals. How many of them are based on the acquisition of wealth and how many are based on building relationships and growing in faith?

■ Is your prayer life on life-support, or is it thriving?

■ Do you and your spouse disagree about money matters, or do you have common goals?

■ Are you always scrambling to make ends meet at the end of the month, or do you have a plan to accumulate savings?

■ Do you find that your charitable giving is done after all your other bills are paid, or is it the first check written?

■ Besides your mortgage and possibly your car, do you have outstanding debt, or have you found the balance to live within your means?

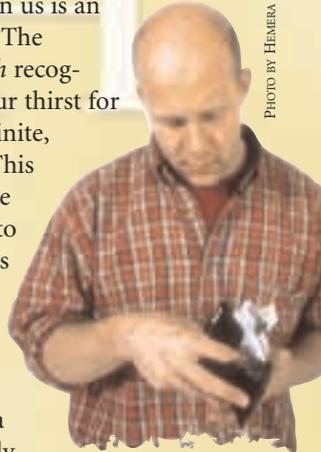


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