



STONES ON THE PATH

to Financial Fitness

Sermon Outline

Financial Fitne\$\$



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Good morning!

We all love a good money story, don't we? This was too good not to share with you. Please watch this: <http://bit.ly/12K0R85>.

Isn't that great? God blessed this guy who really needed help beyond his wildest dreams. I showed you that today so that you would get an inkling of how much God loves you and as Isaiah said, "*Longs to be gracious to you.*" He is a loving Dad who wants to give you good gifts, but sometimes we short circuit His desires by being foolish with our resources, namely our money.

Today we are going to focus on some practical things we can do to be better stewards with His money, and be in a position to be blessed by Him...so that we can give back more to His work. Money's funny...if you try to keep it, you lose it. Get rid of it and He gives you more. Remember what Jesus promised, "*Give and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, overflowing.*"

In the Old Testament, stones would frequently be used as a monument to remind the Israelites of God's deliverance and His miraculous deeds. This morning, these **7 Stones** will serve as your reminder of how to stay on the **Path to Financial Fitness**. We will keep this simple and practical so you can apply it to your life immediately.

STONE ONE

Spend Less Than You Make and Then Save It

- a. The importance of a budget: it shows you where it all went
 - A schedule manages time, a budget manages money

Do you know why superstar athletes and movie stars go broke? It's simple. Our expenses increase in proportion to our income. If you get a raise, you'll buy new clothes, cars, appliances, gadgets, trips, etc. Putting it where you cannot get at it to spend it easily is the key. You need to make it hard to spend. When you delay spending, we call that saving, and it begins with a budget, which is only a schedule for money.

You have a schedule for your time, right? A budget is just a schedule for your money. Neither should be a burden on you. They are just tools to manage your resources of time and money, and you can adjust both of them for higher priorities as they arise.

- b. Record expenses for 6 weeks to get real budget numbers
 - Keep it simple

A piece of paper and a pencil is all you need. Write down every expense to see where it all goes, then make categories with totals, then decide if each one is too high or low, adjust it accordingly, and do it again for 6 more weeks. It's that simple. Now you know real numbers and they can guide you in not overspending, but you still need more help.

- c. Be accountable ("two are better than one" Ec 4:9)
 - automatic deductions or your spouse's approval

We call this Checking & Balanced. You can still spend too much without someone checking you to make sure your spending decisions are balanced. What gets inspected gets done. Set up some method to check your expenses so you are not acting independently and buying on impulse. Consider the \$50 Rule...

Consider the \$50 rule...anything over \$50 must be approved by a spouse, roommate, or a close friend.

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d. Consider using just cash for 30 days

- you'll spend 30% less with cash than with plastic
- Your grandparents and the Cookie Jar
- Your parents and the Envelope System
- When the money is gone, the answer is NO

This is tremendous accountability. Debt begins when you fail to say NO. Using only cash in a cookie jar or envelopes for each spending category forces you to say NO to adding debt because when it's all gone, you do what your grandparents or parents did...you learn to go without. I guarantee this will work. You cannot spend what you do not have, unless you break out the plastic. Don't do it! Statistically you will spend 30% less than usual with cash over plastic, and that 30%, as we will see, goes right into your savings accounts.



STONE TWO

Commit to Save From Every Check

a. Pick a specific amount to save and do it without fail every month

- If you can't save that amount one month, save something...even \$50
- Just establish the habit of saving and pay yourself first

This is why the government takes out its taxes before you can get your hands on it. They know you will spend it before they see it, so they take it first. It's a good example for you for saving first. You need to do the same...take out your savings before you can get it! Pay yourself first.

Remember the proverbial piggy bank you had as a kid that you could not get to without your parent's help? The point was to teach you to save your money. Once you could not put another nickel in the slot, you could smash it open to see the wonder of saving money (and buy a new bike)!

I know a family that was really struggling, but the wife wanted to go to New York City with her daughter for a special Christmas, so she secretly saved \$20 a week in her drawer. It took six months, but despite their lean times, she saved enough for a

3-day trip, a nice hotel, airfare for two, and a Broadway show! Where's your money? The National Bank of Sock Drawer! And remember this...a dollar spent cannot be saved...ever. It's gone.

Money spent now cannot be used for the future is called the **Opportunity Cost of Consumption**. If you spend \$100 on coffee at Starbucks this month, that's \$1200 a year that is gone, but what if you saved it instead? Over 40 years, that is almost \$50,000 that in retirement would be worth a million dollars if invested wisely because of something called Compound Interest. What is Compound Interest?

Compound Interest works best if you start saving early. Round your \$1200 Starbucks money to \$1000 at 10% interest, and you'll make \$100 profit. That is now \$1100 in your hand.

Next year you earn \$110 ($\$1100 \times 10\%$), which is now \$1210 in your hand. You are getting interest on the principal...AND on the interest. It is compounding on itself each year. This begins to really take off as each lump multiplies upon itself over the years and you can literally become a millionaire.

We don't have time this morning to compute this over 40 years, but let's just take one minute to see what compounding can mean for you...and if you're in debt, how it works against you: <http://bit.ly/Z4ff88>.



STONE THREE

Establish an Emergency Fund

- a. At least 3 months of income for emergencies instead of a credit card

Proverbs 21:20 says, "A wise man saves for the future, but the foolish man spends whatever he gets." The average amount of money saved in actual cash per U.S. family is \$7,650. Obviously, we are not very wise as a nation at saving money.

Financial expert Ron Blue says if you save \$83 a month, in 40 years you'll have \$400,000 and if it is invested wisely, you can retire as a millionaire. Can you save \$83 a month to have a million dollars? Maybe, but you better at least have a Rainy Day Fund equal to three months of income because it will rain (job loss, accidents, and emergencies). This fund should never be used unless it's critical.

- b. Establish another savings account for big future items (car, appliances, roof)

If you save \$83 a month, in 40 years you'll have \$400,000.

This is where you save for the things you know will happen eventually (car, roof, furnace, etc.). You know things will wear out. Don't be foolish. Be prepared for this eventuality. This is your Eventuality Fund. Next is your Future Fund.

- c. Establish a retirement/kid's college fund

This one is hard to do because the first two savings accounts seem daunting enough. The only way to make this happen is an automatic deduction so you can't stop it or touch it. Otherwise, you will never do it. So long as you start early, even if you make it just \$35 a month, it will be a huge help when your kids are 18 years old and college is overwhelming. "*He who gathers money little by little makes it grow*" (Proverbs 13:11).

STONE FOUR Get Out of Debt

- a. The most important principle of all

"Don't agree to guarantee another person's debt or put up security for someone else. If you can't pay it, even your bed will be snatched from under you" (Proverbs 22:26-27).

"Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law" (Romans 13:8).

Remember the best proverb of all, "*the borrower becomes the lender's slave.*" And

if you need a lesson on this, see what happens if you stop making a car payment or a mortgage payment. You will quickly see who owns your stuff. If you feel overwhelmed by debt, commit to pay off the smallest debt first.

Continue paying all of your payments, but make a concerted effort to pay off the smallest one first with extra payments. It will have a wonderful affect on your psyche to get out from under one of them. Then do the same with the next one, and so on. You may have to go without something to do this, but you'll sleep better at night as your freedom returns to you. And don't borrow again needlessly!



STONE FIVE

Tithe and Give Generously

Then there's the story of the pastor who got up on Sunday and announced to his church: "I have good news and bad news. The good news is we have enough money to pay for our new building program!" After everyone cheered and applauded wildly about this amazing news, he finally got them to all calm down and continued. "The bad news is, it's still out there in your pockets."

We laugh, but it's true. Paul commended the Macedonian churches for their extreme generosity in 2 Corinthians 8:1-15. We should be generous in our tithes, which is only a principle under the Old Testament Law and usually amounts to 10% of our income today. In the Old Testament, the entire tithe was actually much more, about 23% when you take into account everything they gave.

But we are under Grace in the New Testament, so we should be even more generous and 10% is a minimum. Freewill Offerings, giving to extra causes you want to support, should come after the local church's support, but the point is to be like God... be generous beyond reason. Give and watch Him "*open the windows of Heaven.*"

Consider the wisdom of Proverbs:

"The generous will prosper; those who refresh others will themselves be refreshed" (Proverbs 11:25).

"Blessed are those who are generous, because they feed the poor"
(Proverbs 11:25).

"Whoever gives to the poor will lack nothing, but those who close their eyes to poverty will be cursed" (Proverbs 28:27).

Are those verses really true? Really true? Look at happened when this woman gave to the poor: <http://bit.ly/10A9K3V>.

STONE SIX

Think Long-Term

a. *"Go to the ant, O sluggard, observe her ways and be wise"* (Proverbs 6:6)

Have you ever obeyed this verse and just watched a colony of ants? What an easy verse to obey! They are constantly moving and working for the future. They are fabulous examples. We all know Aesop's fable about the hardworking ant and the frivolous grasshopper who did not prepare for the future, but goofed off all summer. Listen to the ending when the grasshopper comes to the ant for food and shelter in the winter:

"The ant looked at the grasshopper and said, 'All summer long I worked hard while you made fun of me, and sang and danced. You should have thought of winter then! Find somewhere else to sing, grasshopper! There is no warmth or food for you here!' And the ant shut the door in the grasshopper's face. It is wise to worry about tomorrow today."

We may not like the harshness or the lack of generosity of the ant, but winter is unforgiving. It is wise to plan for the future. As believers, we should not "worry" as Aesop says, but we should plan for it with hard work. Winter is coming. We call

it old age. And eternity is coming too. We need to be prepared for both by being wise with our money, saving it and using it for eternal purposes...souls, advancing the gospel, and planting churches. You'll be surprised how quickly your life is spent.

a. Time really does fly

"For we are only of yesterday and know nothing, because our days on earth are as a shadow" (Job 8:9).

Consider what will matter 100 years from now. It won't be your 401k or stocks. Only people will matter then. Be sure your portfolio has a good smattering of souls. Our time is very brief to invest in eternity and we need to make them count. What have you really stored up so far that no "moth and rust destroy?"

b. You can always give it away if you have too much

"Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy. Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed"
(1 Timothy 6:17-19).

7 STONE SEVEN Wants vs Needs

a. God promises to meet our needs if He is first in our lives

"For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds

them. Are you not worth much more than they? And who of you by being worried can add a single hour to his life? And why are you worried about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin, yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more clothe you? You of little faith! Do not worry then, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear for clothing?' For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. **But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you"** (Matthew 6:26-33).

b. *Father's love to give, give Him a chance to meet your wants (Is. 30:18)*

"Now suppose one of you fathers is asked by his son for a fish; he will not give him a snake instead of a fish, will he? Or if he is asked for an egg, he will not give him a scorpion, will he" (Luke 11:11-12)?

Don't be quick to buy the things you want. Ask the Lord to give them to you.

Don't be quick to buy things you want. Ask the Lord to give them to you. Give Him the opportunity to provide for you. He provides and protects His children. Be slow to spend and let Him grow your faith by seeing His provision.

I remember a prayer meeting in college where a friend of mine got up and shared about how much he needed a new watch for work, but he didn't have much money and decided to ask God to get him one instead. As he told this story, he held up his wrist and showed us the watch he found on the way to this very meeting! I will never forget that.

"Thus says the Lord, "Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom... let not a rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this, that he understands and knows Me" (Jeremiah 9:23-24).

c. *Consider other's needs before your wants.*

"Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others" (Philippians 2:3-4).

Learn to say, "No" to all the sales and deals. Nothing is a deal if you cannot afford it and have to borrow money to buy it. Try the 24-hour rule. If you really want to spend money on something, give it a full day to think about whether you really need it, or is it just a want? Pray about what he would have you spend it on, and learn to "No" the difference in wants and needs. Someone else may have a greater need for rent or tires or diapers than your new TV. There are a lot of hurting people in your church. Consider their needs before your wants.

Conclusion? Spend less, save more, be generous, have rainy day funds, avoid debt, think long-term, and know your wants from your needs. As the song says, "*He paid a debt He did not owe, I owed a debt I could not pay.*" We are all in debt to Him before salvation because of our sin. After we accept His payment, we are in debt voluntarily. We are bondservants who choose to serve Him out of gratitude.

When things are hard with your wallet, run to the Savior. Don't run toward money or worry about it. It is a false security. The Lord is a strong tower and hopefully these 7 Stones will lead you closer to following Him and being generous like Him.

"The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous runs into it and is safe. A rich man's wealth is his strong city, and like a high wall in his own imagination" (Proverbs 18:10-11).

And there you have it. The Seven Stones on the Path to Financial Fitness:

1. Spend Less Than You Make and Then Save It
2. Commit to Save From Every Check
3. Establish an Emergency Fund
4. Get Out of Debt
5. Tithe and Give Generously
6. Think Long-Term
7. Wants vs. Needs