

“GETTING UNSTUCK IN MY FINANCES”

by Rom A. Pegram (9/15/19)

Folks, today we're talking about Getting Unstuck in Our Finances. And if I don't get right to it today, I won't get through everything I need to say, so let me start here: One of the reasons we get stuck in our finances is because we live in a culture based on 'instant gratification.' Whenever we see something we want, we want it NOW and that causes all kinds of problems. I would say ... this is the #1 reason people get stuck in their finances—PERSONAL DEBT, particularly unsecured credit card kind of debt...

Today, when you look at the statistics in America, here's what we find: American consumer debt is at \$13.86 trillion by the second quarter of this year. That's NOT U.S. debt; that's how much we, as consumers, owe in America. \$13.86 trillion! The average household in America has \$8,402 worth of credit card debt, as of May of this year. This is the reason we're talking today about getting 'stuck' financially, as followers of Christ. This kind of debt is real; it's all around us! And God's word has plenty to say about how we handle our finances—how those who are Christ-followers need to steward what God has blessed them with.

Now, in Romans 13:8a (NLT), we find a very, very powerful command. And I want you to read this with me today, as we begin...

Owe nothing to anyone—except for your obligation to love one another....

So, God says owe nothing to anyone except LOVE... And here's what I love about God. *God never commands you to do anything he doesn't give you the power to do!* Let me repeat that: *God never commands you to do anything he doesn't give you the power to do!* So, basically—for our purposes this morning, God says ... if you want to get UNSTUCK in your finances, *you must become debt free, and get to the point where you owe nothing to anyone...*

And maybe some of you are wondering at this point ... what's the danger in debt? It's the American way, isn't it? Well, I went to the dictionary and looked up the word 'debt.' Here are some synonyms for 'debt' that I found: owe, obligated, liable, in deficit, in default, insolvent, in over one's head, tied up, pauper, destitute, penniless, needy, lacking, distressed, having a wolf at the door, living hand to mouth, empty, and I could add just as many more descriptions. But, are you getting the idea? Don't you feel better for having come to Trinity today? Well, it's no wonder we get stuck; financial 'stuckness' is happening all around us ... and this is why no one wants to talk about 'debt.' But yet, debt is very dangerous, and God says you can get out of debt with his power! You can get UNSTUCK and owe nothing but love. So, what are the danger signs? Here's a few to help jump-start our thinking—*debt danger signs*:

- *Living on credit instead of paying cash.* This is where you begin to live on credit and depend on credit to maintain your lifestyle. If you're doing that, you're in bad shape—stuck is what we're calling it. And God doesn't want you there. Listen: Proverbs 27:1 says, "Don't brag about tomorrow, since you don't know what the day will bring." So often we think 'we can handle this (debt)' and then we purchase what we want. Did you know studies now show that if you go into a

store with the intention of buying on credit, you spend 23% more than if you went in willing to pay cash. Living on credit is a big danger sign! Next...

- *Delaying payments or paying the minimum due*. If this sign pops up, you're paying the minimum due or worse—missing payments or making late payments. It's a sign you're really stuck in this debt danger zone... Next:
- *Unable to tithe or save*. This is when you're in so much debt that you can't put money aside for anything—either God or yourself. And, this is where God comes into the picture, because God's word clearly says the first 10% (tithe) of what you own goes back to him; it's actually God's money. So, the first 10% you earn is your tithe. But if you're in such financial straights that you're having to take that first 10% and send it to creditors, God isn't getting what's his ... and the prophet Malachi says that's actually 'robbing God.' 'Strongs words from the last book of the Old Testament. And this lifestyle will cause problems, because it prevents God's blessing on your finances. Proverbs 21:20 says, "The wise have wealth and luxury, but fools spend whatever they get." Not only does God need to be receiving what's his, but we need to be saving too. Here's another sign:
- *Unable to pay taxes*. I know some who've got to this point—a definite danger sign. And what does Jesus say in Matthew (22:21)? "...give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and give to God what belongs to God." Another sign:
- *Extravagant Spending*. Folks, this is A BIG ONE! We live in a world of instant gratification ... and plenty of opportunities to indulge! Almost every single commercial on TV ... almost every single billboard ... almost every single ad in magazines or newspapers. And way too many fall for the slick advertising—especially if it's promising a better life. As a friend of mine says, what we do is this: *We buy things we don't need ... with money we don't have ... to impress people we don't even like!* (Repeat.) That's extravagant spending ... and it'll put us over the edge when it comes to a life of debt. Here's the last danger sign:
- *Looking for 'get rich quick' ideas*. This is late night television, isn't it? They always have those infomercials where they tell you if you'll just send in ... not \$199, not \$99, but just \$49 ... they'll get you into a program where in 30 days you can turn your life around financially! Do you know those late-night shows or infomercials? My dad used to have a saying that he'd share with—when I was a much younger man and fell for some of these schemes. He'd always say, "If something seems to good to be true, it usually is." And he was right...

So, these are the danger signs. Look back at this list. Are any of these showing up in your life? Is there anyone here today who's stuck in their finances (no hands raised, please)? I'm very passionate about this subject, not because I elected to be, but because I've made some mistakes over the years ... and Jane's loved me anyway, but both God and Jane have expected me to change, and I've received help from both. Several years ago now, Jane and I signed up for a Financial Peace University class, by Dave Ramsey. It was a remote class that was held at a church near us. And, folks, the principles we learned in that class—even though it's still a process—have changed my life and I want to share some of that with you today, because 'Financial Stuckness' is a reality and God doesn't want you there!

I know it looks—by the note sheet—like it's a 15-point message today ... and how long is that going to take, right? I told Jane I'd make it up to you with next week's

message; I'll just plan on that one being 'pointless.' Would that help? Here's what I believe is God's plan for you in this area of your life, if you're stuck financially...

Commit to becoming debt free now! Make a commitment to become debt free; this is where it all starts. You have to say, "You know what, I'm tired of being stuck in my finances; I'm no longer going to go down that path." Psalm 37:21 tells us, "The wicked borrow and never repay, but the godly are generous givers." So, how are you living today? Like the wicked ... or the godly?

I believe God wants you to become debt free; he wants you to learn to be content; God wants you to experience the fulfillment, the peace, and the freedom that comes from being debt free. Now, God's not down on money; let's be clear about this; God's down on our abuse of money—poor stewardship. God wants to teach us about 'delayed gratification' ... and God will help you do that; your part is the commitment ... to becoming debt free NOW! Here's the second step to debt free living—God's way...

List all that I own and all I owe. If you haven't ever put these things down on paper, you need to do that! This is the second very important step...

It may be as simple as taking out a piece of paper and drawing a line down the middle. Label one column 'own' and the other one 'owe' ... and see how you come out. I know at one point in our financial life, Jane and I had to do this; what it does is *it forces you to face the brutal facts!*

Proverbs 24:3 (NIV) says, "By wisdom a house is built, and through understanding it is established." When you have your Bibles open, make sure you circle the words 'wisdom' and 'understanding.' That's what we're trying to get when we're compiling this list of steps to debt free living. You've got to make the list though. That's an important step in this process—so you know exactly where you're at. More words of wisdom from Proverbs (18:13) say: "Spouting off before listening to the facts is both shameful and foolish." Make the list; get the facts... Next:

Have a sale! (This step is brought to you by ... eBay!) So, you come to the realization that you own some stuff you don't really need ... and you can sell that stuff to help pay down what you owe. It's not a new concept, but fairly effective...

There's an old joke out there and I bet most of you've already heard it, but it's truth still rings true: What do they say? The two greatest days in the life of a boat owner are ... the day they buy the boat and ... the day they sell the boat!

Sometimes we have all this stuff that we don't really need. Maybe you bought the boat for the wrong reasons. I don't know, but if you can sell a few things to help the debt load, that would be great! Ezekiel 20:7 (TEV) says, "I told them to throw away the disgusting idols they loved...." Throw out (or sell) the idols! Next:

Start paying God and yourself first. Now, listen to me when I say this: You'll never get out of debt until you start doing this—both of these things (paying God/paying yourself)! Paying God comes first; that's called a 'tithe' ... and the Bible's very clear about who the tithe (the first 10th) belongs to; the first 10% of what you earn goes to God. Paying yourself is all about saving; it's about setting money aside for another day.

Do you remember the danger sign that I gave you that says ... you're unable to tithe ... and you're unable to save? This is what we're talking about here; and that must change. You see, most people live on about 110% of their income; that's where they get into trouble. It's a real problem...

Many people's attitude is ... 'if I just made more, I'd be able to get out of debt.' But that is absolutely not true. If you made more, you'd probably just spend more. You need to learn to live on what you make right now.

So, if we make a change in this area of our life, what's it going to look like? What is God's plan for us? Here it is: You've got to learn to live on 80%, or less, and you'll be in the freedom zone (instead of the danger zone). Why would you do this? So, you can live a life obedient to God—a life that God can bless ... and so you'll be prepared for the future. If you adopt this plan at 40 years old, making \$60,000, by the time you reach 60 year old, you'll have given \$120,000 to God—for his purposes, and you'll have a half million in the bank—set aside for investments, etc. Do the math. But, as followers of Christ, we have to do the math ... God's way. If you learn to live on 80%, you can pay God (first 10%) and then yourself (next 10%). But you'll never get out of debt and know the freedom God wants you to know if you don't make some moves right now to live as God's called us to live. Deuteronomy 14:22-23 lays it out. Here scripture tells us to set aside a tithe to take into the place of worship; then at the end of v. 23, it tells us why: Doing this will teach you always to honor the Lord your God... *Do you want to be stuck financially for the rest of your life?* I don't think so ... and God doesn't want you to be stuck either. God wants you to know freedom in this area of your life. Here's a few more steps, very briefly...

Set up a repayment plan. Proverbs 21:5 – “Good planning and hard work lead to prosperity, but hasty shortcuts lead to poverty.” Work on your plan; you've got to have one! Proverbs 20:18a – “Plans succeed through good counsel....” If you need help getting a plan together, there are plenty of good financial counselors (Christian ones!) that can help with that plan. Then, get Dave Ramsey's book: “The Total Money Makeover” ... and if you can't afford it, contact me and I'll get you a copy. Here's some final steps—just the list...

Decide to do it in half the time. Luke 18:27 says, “...what is impossible for people is possible with God.” Realistically, it may take a year (or two) to get out of debt, but how much are you willing to trust God for this process? With God's help, you can do much more than you think you can!

Share my plans with my creditors. Have you ever tried to hide from creditors? You know, you have caller ID and you see it's one of your creditors ... and what do you do? Creditors, I've found, are much more open to working with you if they know you have a plan; if it works into the process, share your plan with them!

Add no new debt as you go along. This'd be like shooting yourself in the foot while trying to run a marathon! Again, Hebrews 13:5b tells us, “...be satisfied with what you have.” Folks, join me in praying for the gift of ‘contentment’—that we might be satisfied with just what we have (freedom)! And finally...

Stick to it and trust God. You didn't get stuck financially overnight, so you're not going to get out of it overnight; there's no magic solution ... and here's why: As you go through the process of getting out of debt, God wants you to grow; you see, **the person you are now *in debt* is not the person God needs you to be *out of debt*.** It's a process and God wants to work with you every step of the way, but you can know the freedom God wants for you if you'll be obedient to his word (those we've talked about today)...

Galatians 6:9 encourages us: "So let's not get tired of doing what is good. At just the right time we will reap a harvest of blessing if we don't give up." Today, for those you who may be financially stuck, this could be your gateway to freedom! Maybe you've never heard some of these practical biblical principles before. But God knows where you're at ... and wants you UNSTUCK! Know that. And know this, too, as we're reminded of the words of Paul in Romans 13:8a...

Owe nothing to anyone—except for your obligation to love one another....

Have you learned to give God complete control of this area of your life? This is the life God wants you to have—the UNSTUCK life he desires for you...