

Which verses do you choose to guide finances?

By Carrie Joynton
Texas Baptist Standard

Two national Christian financial advisers both name the Bible as their primary resource for money advice and base their money management programs in scripture.

Howard Dayton, cofounder of Crown Financial Ministries, says more than 2,000 scripture verses concern money. And, using the Bible for instruction on financial management seems like a no-brainer to Dave Ramsey, creator of Financial Peace University.

"It works, if you bother," Ramsey said. "It's worth studying ... to learn what God says about money and then start doing it, because it works."

But which verses? The ones about wealth and prosperity as part of a life with God? What about Jesus' instruction to the rich young man to sell all he owns? Those messages seem contradictory to some Christians.

Author and speaker Tony Campolo, founder of the Evangelical Association for the Promotion of Education, says that in the New Testament "we have some real problems with the accumulation of wealth."

"Wealth can do things to people," Campolo says. "It alters the way you see the world. ... I don't think we realize the impact wealth has on us and on our spiritual lives."

Though Campolo explained he considers neither poverty nor wealth conditions for salvation, he expressed skepticism about maintaining wealth in Christian life.

Ramsey disagreed.

"If you take (the story) as an indictment of the rich, then you'd have to say no rich people ever

went to heaven," he said.

"The idea that we're not supposed to manage money — lots of it — is crazy. But God does also call people to poverty," Ramsey said. "You find people on all points of the spectrum who are walking with God."

Darin Petersen works with Shane Claiborne, author of *Irresistible Revolution* and founder of The Simple Way community, to experiment with ways Christians can share resources and support one another spiritually and financially.

"Wealth can give you a sense of independence and a sense of self-sufficiency to where you are no longer living in a community of interdependency," Petersen said.

Petersen and Claiborne cofounded Relational Tithe, a community network that developed from conversations about responsibly handling resources. Relational Tithe is an economically diverse Christian community of 35 people who tithe 10 percent of their resources to a community fund and redistribute it among themselves according to need.

Relational Tithe also networks hundreds of similar groups to share experiences and new ideas, and they're working to develop technological tools to "enhance the process of redistribution" and help groups in collaboration.

The community encourages "a healthy understanding of a theology of 'enough,'" Petersen said.

Relationships are central to the community's resource management process.

"There's no more than one degree of separation between the recipient and the giver," Petersen said. "It's not that the rich and poor no longer care about one another; it's that they don't know one another. We're trying to create a place where people can know one another."

One way Petersen challenges congregations



BR photo by Dianna L. Cagle

to give creatively is to put a limit on how much money in offerings goes to the church itself. Money received above that limit is distributed to the poor. When churches have tried the method, the result is astounding, Petersen said.

"Giving goes through the roof, because people's imaginations are sparked," he observed. "It really starts to challenge people's ideas of needs and wants."

Teaching seven pillars of financial wisdom for pastors

By Michael K. Moore

Texas Gov. John Connally is remembered by most people for being in the presidential limo with John F. Kennedy when he was assassinated. Connally himself was hit and almost lost his life. Yet, he recovered, served three terms as governor, helped elect three presidents, served two cabinet posts, and died at age 76.

This man who held powerful cabinet posts, who governed the

second largest state in the union, who controlled billions of dollars belonging to America as Treasury Secretary, in July 1987 declared personal bankruptcy!

His pathway is familiar. He made an unwise alliance with an ambitious business partner and overextended himself in building housing developments, shopping centers, and office buildings. These projects were funded on borrowed money. At one time he owed three hundred million dollars! The end result for John and Nellie Connally was the selling of all their personal belongings at public auction. Can you imagine?

Although the Apostle Paul had

our spiritual life in mind, when I read Connally's story, I think of I Cor. 9:27: "I discipline my life, lest after I lead others, I might fail." That's my paraphrase.

Several years ago I developed a seminar for pastors called "Seven Pillars of Financial Wisdom for the Pastor." Let me sketch these out for you.

1. Beyond providing the basic necessities of life, money stokes ego. Understand the psychology of money.
2. Your labor is your business. Make yourself valuable.
3. Pay off your house before you are 45 years old. (Never take on a housing debt that is in total (principal, interest, taxes, insurance, upkeep) greater than 30 percent of your pay.)
4. Take mastery over debt. Don't rent money from someone else.
5. Practice the principle of accumulation over time.

6. Work a plan on what to do with your money. You may have to start small, but start or you never get there.

Tithe and beyond

- 10 percent to savings for "a rainy day" or "I quit" fund equal to six months pay.
- 10 percent for long term investment.
- 10 percent to bless the lives of others which will change your spirit from poverty to prosperity.

7. Learn the principle of compound interest in investments over time.

These are time tested, honored, proven, and biblical. It always amazes people who know a lot about money, but not much about the Bible to learn how much the Bible has to say about money. Incorporate these into your life and God will bless you.

Michael Moore, a retired pastor and director of missions, leads Life Renewal Ministries. Contact him at (910) 458-7146.

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Financial tips help newlyweds avoid credit potholes

By Howard Dayton

Crown Financial Ministries

GAINESVILLE, Ga. — (BP) Newly married couples should be able to accomplish more in harmony in every way than they ever could accomplish separately — and that certainly includes the way finances are handled. So, it's important that both wife and husband understand that it's not to be "my" money and "your" money; it needs to be seen as "our" money.

Although many people have credit card problems, the real problem is in the misuse of credit cards. Credit cards are not essential, but they can be a great convenience.

If newlyweds will agree, the following simple guidelines will help avoid difficulties.

- Never use credit cards to buy anything that is not in your budget for the month. Obviously, that means you should have a budget.

- Pay your credit cards off every month — no exceptions.

- The first month you're unable to pay the balances on your credit cards, destroy them.

Yes, it's simplistic and it works.



Photo by Ddani Simmonds

Commit yourselves to do this and it's unlikely that you'll ever have credit card trouble.

There are several common problem areas to watch for in other money issues:

- Don't become extreme or legalistic with financial matters and don't try to control the other spouse's spending.

- Maintain the discipline neces-

sary to stay on your budget — the spending plan together.

- Beware of the "more-money-in, more-money-out" syndrome. Don't spend more simply because you have more, especially if the extra money is temporary income or income generated by the wife, because this kind of money: 1) could be needed if you and your spouse become pregnant, 2) might evaporate if you're laid off,

3) could be lost through a job transfer, or 4) could be needed through a variety of other fill-in-the-blank circumstances.

- Don't include the wife's income in your monthly budget. Instead, use that money for savings and one-time purchases such as a car or a down payment on a house.

- Don't think that "a little debt won't hurt."

- Don't use automatic overdrafts of your checking account. By design they become bank loans and can run into thousands of dollars before you realize it.

- Avoid ATMs if possible. If you fail to log ATM withdrawals in your checkbook, you'll end up writing bad checks. Also, it's easy to develop the habit of using cash withdrawals to buffer your budget when you've overspent your original allocations.

- Be absolutely committed to balance your checkbook monthly — to the penny.

- Don't become discouraged if your budget doesn't work the first month you try it. Developing a realistic spending plan takes time.

(EDITOR'S NOTE — Dayton is co-founder of Crown Financial Ministries.)

Do pastors avoid teaching stewardship?

By Steve DeVane

BR Managing Editor

Pastors often hesitate to preach about stewardship. Some know their members don't want to hear it. Others fear a perceived conflict of interest since their salaries are paid by church members' offerings.

Pedro Rosario, eastern area director for Crown Financial Ministries, feels there's another reason.

"We're discovering that some pastors don't preach stewardship because they don't have their own financial house in order," he said.

A series of seminars across North Carolina could help pastors order their financial households, and put them in a position to help their members.

The meetings are sponsored by the partnership with Crown, the Baptist State Convention and the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). The schedule is:

- **March 9** — Fruitland Baptist Bible Institute in Hendersonville;

- **March 10** — Southside Baptist Church in Greensboro;

- **March 12** — Raleigh Baptist Association in Raleigh; and

- **March 13** — Wilmington Baptist Association in Wilmington.

A seminar in Spanish will be March 14 at the Raleigh Baptist Association in Raleigh.

The meetings will last from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. and be taught by trained instructors.

Participation is \$20 per individual or couple and includes materials and lunch. Register online at www.sbc.net/newday.

Rosario said he heard about a pastor who told a friend that he didn't preach about stewardship. The other pastor asked him what other parts of the Bible he neglected, leading the first to reconsider his position.

The meetings in March will be for pastors and associate pastors, Rosario said. Ministers who go through the seminar see the importance of teaching about stewardship, he said.

Rosario said he hopes the gatherings will begin a "drilling down effect" that impacts churches in North Carolina so that members will become better stewards in their own lives and be able to slip from the shackles of debt.

Rosario hopes pastors take the one-day seminar, then preach on stewardship for four Sundays, then begin 10-week studies for church members.

Rosario said Crown has stewardship material for children, teens, college students and single moms, but the North Carolina effort is meant for adults. The seminars are part of the SBC's emphasis called "It's a New Day."

Mike Creswell coordinates the "It's a New Day" efforts at the Baptist State Convention. His telephone number is 919-459-5541 and e-mail is mcreswell@ncbaptist.org.

Ashley Clayton, associate vice president for stewardship at the SBC Executive Committee, told Baptist Press that people are in more debt than ever. The unfortunate truth, he said, is that conditions inside the church are no different than outside.

The "It's a New Day" initiative addresses personal finances, helping people get out of debt, Clayton said.

"When you look at the economy around us, the sagging real estate market and the mortgage companies that are failing and having to be bailed out by the government and by large banks, the cutting of interest rates, all of this is an attempt to bolster a sagging economy that frankly is laboring under debt," Clayton said. "Debt is what's driving it."

Rosario said the seminars, sermons and studies are geared toward teaching biblical principles about stewardship.

Christians need to learn their part and understand God's part, Rosario said. "He owns everything," he said. "Our part is we're stewards."

Rosario said Christians should understand the difference between want and need. They might need a car, and want a \$30,000 version. But can they do with a \$10,000 car?

"You need a house, but do you really need a \$500,000 house?" he said.

Holman produces New Testament for family financial health

Baptist Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — To help families reduce their financial debt, LifeWay Christian Resources and the Southern Baptist Convention's Executive Committee hope to see a New Testament become a valuable resource. If so, churches will benefit.

The Executive Committee worked with LifeWay's Holman Bible Outreach International (HBOI) to develop a copy of the New Testament that includes 30 daily devotions written

by Crown Financial Ministries to be used by churches with the "It's a New Day" curriculum series.

It's a New Day curriculum includes a 10-week Bible study that leads individuals through the biblical principles of money management. Churches that implement a four-week emphasis on financial



freedom also may use sermons provided on a DVD that teach foundational principles for handling money God's way.

Phill Burgess, executive director of HBOI, believes the New Day New Testaments encourage a sense of community for those learning about biblical principles of money management.

"With the entire congregation going through the series together, a sense of oneness within the church can be created, like we are all in this together," Burgess said. "Using the New Day New Testaments during the series is like a tender walk through God's word that can lead an entire congregation into a life-changing commitment that will bring peace in their lives."

The New Day New Testaments are available by bulk order through LifeWay Christian Stores or through the HBOI web site at www.holmanbibleoutreach.com.



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