

## **Escaping From Economic Hell: Debt and Consumerism**

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Sane Money: Sane Living in an Insane World Series

Luke 12:13-21

Over the last several months I've been doing a series on Living Sanely In An Insane World. I've talked about sane sexuality and sane parenting. Last week we began talking about handling money sanely in an insane world. This week and next week I want to talk about two financial issues that absolutely squeeze the joy and life out of millions of Americans. The two issues are debt and consumerism.

I grew up in a home that was destroyed by debt and consumerism. My dad was in construction. He had a little business of home building and home repair. Like lots of folks in the building trade, he was always robbing Peter to pay Paul; waiting for checks to come in. He always had too many jobs going and he was always on the verge of financial ruin.

Not only was he a pretty awful businessman, but he was married to a world class shopper! If there was an Olympics for shopping, my mother would be a gold-medal winner. For her, shopping was not just a hobby; it was also a vocation. If you want to know where my mother is at any particular time, she is either on her way to a store, in a store, or she's on her way out of a store. It is dangerous to open up my mother's closet because it is spring-loaded. It just explodes out when she opens the door. It is the kind of closet with the double rods on each side. The closet rods are sagging from the weight of the clothes.

So you have a bad businessman married to the ultimate consumer – nitro and glycerin being mixed together. It was not a very stable combination! At various times growing up we had the phone shut off, the electricity shut off. It was a regular occurrence that our cars would be repossessed. We'd get up in the morning and there would be no car. Our house was foreclosed on. We literally were pushed out on the street. One winter in New York Dad failed to pay the oil bill for our heating. He could not understand why the oil company refused to deliver oil. So we had no heat. But that didn't keep my mom from shopping.

I had a picture in my mind's eye of what it was like to grow up in my home as a result of all the financial chaos. It was the picture of a jaw. The top row of teeth would be called debt. The bottom row of teeth would be called consumerism. This jaw of debt and consumerism could be called the Jaws of Hell, which so many Americans are living in. Not only did my parents eventually lose everything as a result of out of control debt and consumerism, but their financial problems eventually destroyed their marriage.

Now, my family situation growing up is probably on the extreme side of things. Some of you may have experienced worse. Many of you have probably done better, but it is not uncommon for financial problems to destroy a family. The Gallup organization says that 55% of all divorces can be traced to financial problems. Certainly, a profound loss of joy in life is linked to these two great problems: debt and consumerism.

As I continue this series on Living Sanely In An Insane World, I've called today's talk Escaping From Economic Hell: Debt and Consumerism. Let's pray.

As a nation, we are drowning in debt. Our government cannot restrain itself from spending more than it takes in. Politicians have discovered that the easiest way to get elected or reelected is to simply make promises to the voting public that far outstrip our ability to pay. And anyone who tries to exercise any financial discipline so that we don't saddle our children and our children's children with these insane levels of debt is considered to be lacking in compassion.

Let me give you some statistics to show you how out of control our national debt has become. It took us as a nation nearly 200 years to run up a debt of \$1 trillion dollars.

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1981 National Debt: \$1 trillion dollars

We first hit a debt of \$1 trillion dollars in 1981. As of November 2005 the national debt has gone over \$8 trillion dollars.

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1981 National Debt: \$1 trillion dollars

2005 National Debt: \$8 trillion dollars

In the last 25 years, we've multiplied our national debt by 8x.

Now, I can tell you that our economy has not grown by 8x in the last 25 years. Let me give you another statistic to show you the magnitude of this problem. In the entire decade of the 1950's we added \$33 billion dollars to our national debt.

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The Decade of the 1950's \$33 billion in additional national debt

In the last four years, just since 2001, we've added more than \$2 trillion dollars to our national debt.

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The Decade of the 1950's \$33 billion in additional debt

2001-2005

+ \$2 trillion in additional debt

In other words, we are as a nation incurring national debt at 150x the rate we did in the 1950's.

There are only two conclusions one could draw when you look at the statistics regarding national debt. The first conclusion is that as a nation our appetites are wildly out of control and the second conclusion is that the majority of politicians are either unable or unwilling to tell the truth to the American public.

Do you know, Franklin Roosevelt, the author of The New Deal, during the depths of the depression made this statement:

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"Any government, like any family, can for a year spend a little more than it earns. But you and I know that a continuing of that habit means the poor house."

You say: What is the big deal about national debt? Why is it an issue?

Well, first of all, it is certainly an economic issue for America. A growing percentage of our national budget simply goes to pay the interest on this debt. The government is like everyone else. When the government lives beyond its means, it has to get the money from somewhere and where the government gets its money from is creditors, who charge interest. When you start paying interest, it means you have less money for everything else.

So one reason we should care about the growing problem of national debt is that it means that there is a shrinking amount of money for everything else that we look to government to provide – public schools, roads, national security, Medicaid payments, Medicare payments – all of these things are being squeezed simply because of the interest on the national debt.

But there is an even greater problem than the squeeze on our national budget. That is the power that foreign governments are now able to exercise over America's foreign policies. Proverbs 22:7 lays out the basic principle regarding the problem of debt.

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Pr 22:7 The rich rule over the poor,  
and the borrower is servant to the lender.

Literally, the word "servant" means slave. The borrower is the slave of the lender. In the decade of the 1970's America for the first time in its history moved from being a creditor nation to being a debtor nation. And as the debt increased, Proverbs 22:7 became true of us as a country. The borrower, that is America, becomes the slave of the lender.

Let me bring this down to earth. Many people in the U.S. are puzzled regarding America's relationship with Saudi Arabia. There are editorials written in the paper: Why aren't we tougher with the Saudis? After all, 15 out of the 19 terrorists who slaughtered thousands of Americans on 9/11 were citizens of Saudi Arabia. We know that the Saudi government funds all of the madrasas, the extreme Islamic fundamentalist schools around the world that train students to hate the West and to hate America. We know that Saudi Arabia leads the world in beheadings. We know that women in Saudi Arabia have absolutely no rights. We know that Saudi Arabia is either the first or second worst nation in the world in terms of religious liberty. It is either the worst, or the second worst country in the world, if you care about spreading the gospel.

So, the question is often asked: Why doesn't the American government take a tougher stand with the Saudis?

The answer is very simple. Because the borrower is always the slave of the lender. Saudi Arabia helps to finance our national debt. A huge amount of the Treasury Bills that fund our national debt are held by the Saudis. Likewise, a huge amount of the deposits in our banks, and a huge amount of stock in our stock market is purchased by the Saudis. If the Saudis ever cut the flow off, not just of oil, but also of money, they could wreck our way of life. So, at least publicly we have remained mute as a nation. As a nation, we have entered the Jaws of Hell.

And it is not just at the governmental level. We are also drowning in personal debt. Many of you know that Congress recently changed our bankruptcy laws because we have had record numbers of people going bankrupt. A million and a half folks this year will declare bankruptcy. Our youngest generation, Generation Y, those young adults born since 1981 has been labeled by *The Wall Street Journal* as "Generation Broke." More and more young people are financing their college educations through student loans. Again, because of our national debt, the government has been forced to cut back on grant money. So students are coming out of college into an uncertain economy often with tens of thousands of dollars of student loan debt.

On top of that, according to *The Wall Street Journal*, college students now owe an average of \$3000 in credit card debt. A significant number of college students have \$10,000+ in credit card debt. They are purchasing meals, books, and lifestyles they cannot afford on credit.

For those of you who are living with a load of debt, you know the toll that weight upon your shoulders. It is like a radio station that you hate which is always on in the background. You can't escape the pressures of debt and that is what we are marketing to our children.

Do you know that there are credit cards now that are being marketed to teenagers? You pay for them ahead of time. There is a card called “MyPlash,” which is a subsidiary of MasterCard. Teenagers can use this; there is fixed amount on it, to pay for whatever they purchase. And then, of course, it is advertised with different celebrities on the card so that you have Xzibit from MTV’s Pimp My Ride on the card.

How many of you think this is a good thing – the marketing of credit cards to 13-year olds?

The Jews had a word for a loan or for the collateral put up for a loan. The Hebrew word was *habal*. It was used to describe the binding obligation that a person has to repay a loan. When you signed your name, when you struck hands in a pledge, you were entering *habal*, a binding obligation to repay. The word *habal*, the same word used for an obligation to repay a loan, is used in other contexts to mean cords or fetters, chains that bind, to be tied up in a rope. In one case *habal* is translated snare or trap. You see, the Holy Spirit inspired the Jewish writers of the Old Testament to use the same word for loans and debt that they used for being tied up with a rope, being put in chains, being ensnared, or trapped.

Do you understand the basic orientation of the Bible to debt? The basic orientation is that this is not a great thing. Even today, if you just looked in a thesaurus for synonyms for the word “debt” you will find words like liable, minus, owing, in hock, encumbered, insolvent, in the hole, broke.

Let me ask you a question. Are these the kinds of words that you read in the credit card offers that fill your mailbox when Chase Bank, Huntington, or your college markets you a new credit card? Does the envelope say anything like, “Wanna go broke? Interested in being in the hole? Let us put you in chains. Wanna enter the Jaws of Hell? Sign up with us today. Our interest rates are adjustable.” You could end up never being able to pay off your debt.

Do you know that our rising national debt and our rising personal debt is an objective barometer concerning the spiritual condition of 21<sup>st</sup> century America? I want you to see this. Flip open to Deuteronomy 28. Deuteronomy 28 contains God’s promises to the nation of Israel. God promises to bless his people Israel if they would obey God. God says that if you do what I’m telling you to do; if you keep my commandments, here is what will happen. Then the Lord lays out a series of blessings that will come to the nation. There is one that I want to call you attention to, Deuteronomy 28:12,

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Dt 28:12 The LORD will open the heavens, the storehouse of his bounty, to send rain on your land in season and to bless all the work of your hands. You will lend to many nations but will borrow from none.

As I said before, until the 1970's, the U.S. was a creditor nation. It always lent to nations and borrowed from none. But in the last 30 years, we have become the world's greatest debtor nation. Deuteronomy goes on and tells us what would happen if the nation is disobedient to the Lord. Now, I realize that these words apply specifically to the nation of Israel. I am not trying to suggest that America is as a whole God's people, or that we are in a covenant relationship with God. But there is a spiritual principle here regarding what happens as people depart from the wisdom that is contained in scripture more and more. I find it interesting that one of the consequences of departing from God's wisdom in the scripture is found in Deuteronomy 28:43-44.

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Dt 28:43 The alien who lives among you will rise above you higher and higher, but you will sink lower and lower.

Dt 28:44 He will lend to you, but you will not lend to him. He will be the head, but you will be the tail.

Disobedience to God, failing to listen to God's wisdom as a nation and personally, will mean that you will always be a borrower and you will never have money to lend. Debt in the Bible is a spiritual matter, not just a financial matter. When our orientation to God is not right, we can find ourselves struggling economically.

Now, I immediately need to say this. I do not want any one of you to misapply what God's Word is saying. There are many instances in God's Word where an individual is living in an obedient and responsive way before God and yet finds themselves drowning in debt. The Bible calls such people the humble poor, or the oppressed of the land. An extended illness, being laid off, going through a divorce that is not of your making, and raising three kids on your own, being cheated in business, being robbed or assaulted – all of these circumstances that are outside of your control can plunge you into debt even if you are living in a humble, obedient relationship with God.

Nevertheless, our nation as a whole and many individuals are struggling with debt not because of circumstances outside of our control like prolonged illness, lay-offs, robberies, or assaults, but simply because of out-of-control appetites. Our wants and demands are outstripping our resources. Many of us have a spiritual problem.

Do you know that our world is at war and the warfare is not just physical. It is not just the localized wars in Columbia, the Congo, or in Iraq. There is a spiritual war going on. There is a great clash of kingdoms – the kingdom of God is continually confronting the kingdom ruled over by Satan and his many demons. There is an approach to life, a set of principles, that govern subjects of the kingdom of God,

and there is an approach to life, a set of principles, that govern the subjects of the kingdom of Satan.

You can very quickly distinguish between the kingdom of God and the kingdom ruled over by Satan by paying attention to the basic operating systems. Here is the operating system, the principle that governs the kingdom of Satan: Gratify yourself immediately with no thought of the consequences. You have no up front costs, no money down. The kingdom of Satan offers its subjects immediately, instant, sometimes mind-blowing gratification at the front end. In the kingdom of Satan you get to use drugs and right off the bat, you are going to experience a great rush. WOW, that was amazing. In the kingdom of Satan you can have premarital sex and you will go WOW. Except the truth is, most people don't say WOW, the truth is that for most people, premarital sex is extraordinarily disappointing. But the promise is there. The way it is portrayed in the movies and on TV is that there is a WOW attached to premarital or extramarital sex.

The kingdom of Satan continually offers instant relief, instant exhilaration, and instant freedom. The kingdom of Satan says: Look over there; the grass is greener. But with the kingdom of Satan there is always the fine print. Most people fail to read the whole contract. And the fine print is this: For this mind-blowing experience, for this release, for this nibbling on the other side of the fence, you are going to pay hugely with slavery, addiction, long-term pain, enormous debt. You will pay relationally, emotionally and financially.

- Sure! Sign up for that credit card. Call Chase Bank today. There are operators waiting.
- Buy that car today – no money down.
- Buy that leather sofa. No interest until April 2006!
- You have a \$10,000 credit limit.
- It is easy; it is fun.
- Just pick up the phone.
- Just a few clicks with your mouse.

Have you ever seen the pop-up ads on your computer in spiritual terms? Brothers and sisters, the kingdom of God has exactly the opposite operating principles. The kingdom of God is always very frank regarding the upfront costs that will be incurred. Jesus never said to anyone: Follow me; it is going to be easy. It's fun, just pick up the phone. Become one of my disciples, it will cost you nothing. Jesus never lures people in with no cost promises and then at the end says: Gotcha! Jesus looked people in the eye and said: You want to be a follower of mine? It is going to cost you.

SLIDE Mark 8:34-38

Mk 8:34 Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

Mk 8:35 For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it.

Mk 8:36 What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?

Mk 8:37 Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?

Mk 8:38 If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels."

Jesus always says: there is a high front end commitment to getting it on with God. God requires total surrender. You have to turn your life totally over to him. You can't give God a piece of your life. He is not interested in *part* of your heart. He wants *all* of your heart. He demands all of you. You've got to wave the white flag. You've got to give up control. You've got to say: Enough! I surrender. It's a high commitment; a radical commitment. There are no easy returns. Then and only after much effort will there be a pay off.

You say: I want to get up in the a.m. and begin to have a devotional life with God. I'm going to commit a half hour a day. I'm going to commit 15 minutes to pray and 15 minutes to read the Bible. I'm going to set aside 6:30-7:00 a.m., or 7:00-7:30 to be alone with God. You do it. You say: OK, I'm going to do it. You might initially enjoy it a great deal, but lots of times we find very little happening with us spiritually.

You say: I'm going to come out to Morning Chapel. I'm going to gather with others. It becomes more difficult. It becomes inconvenient. I'm not having this great breakthrough. I'm not getting a great immediate WOW in my life – likewise involvement in a small group, involvement in a women's group. It is inconvenient. Dinner gets rushed, you have to get a sitter, you're tired. Commitment to anything goes is hard and you rarely see an immediate payoff.

That is the nature of the kingdom of God.

The same thing is true when you say: I am going to choose to be a better husband. I am going to choose to follow Christ and be a better wife. I'm going to be a better friend. I'm going to be a better parent. For the first few weeks, maybe even for the first few months, the going is really hard.

This is true with dieting. This is true with praying for the sick. This is true with sharing your faith. This is true with trying to reconcile a broken relationship. There are huge front-end costs and often very little by way of initial returns. This is the nature of the kingdom of God.

But you know, with the kingdom of God, Jesus always brings the returns in later. You find yourself after a period of weeks and months experiencing greater freedom. You find yourself after a period of weeks and months feeling perhaps for the first time in your life a sense of self-esteem. You find yourself after a



period of weeks and months enjoying life more, feeling more liberation, feeling more of God's presence, having better and more satisfying relationships, a happier marriage, freedom from life-controlling habits. The more you are obedient, the happier you are. You start off in the funnel narrowly, and your life gets bigger and bigger, and bigger.

So, let me tie off this first portion regarding debt. What is the biblical message regarding debt? It is not forbidden, but it is dangerous. Often debt operates by an entirely different set of principles than the principles of the kingdom. Debt often brings bondage. Debt often brings heartbreak. Debt often is a sign of out of control appetites.

There are times when debt is not only unwise, when it is wrong – when you are disobeying God. I've been talking about warnings and cautions. But there are some clear lines in the Bible, there are some times when we are actually violating a scriptural principle. When is debt wrong?

Debt is wrong when you do not repay your debt. Psalm 37:21 says:

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Ps 37:21 The wicked borrow and do not repay,

but the righteous give generously;

Ro 13:7 Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.

Ro 13:8 Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law.

Now in both Psalm 37 and in Romans 13 there isn't a condemnation of debt *per se*, but rather, what is condemned is owing money and failing to repay it. If you have a debt, pay it. When a bill comes due, pay it and be done with it.

What does that say about bankruptcy? Having been a lawyer, I realize that if you go and speak with an attorney about your debt problems, one of the first things they may talk with you about is bankruptcy. If you say: I want to work out a plan to pay off all my bills, I want to restructure my debt, I can't pay what I agreed to, but I believe I owe the money and I want to restructure the debt, many attorneys will try to steer you away from that. Many attorneys will tell you why it is unwise to do anything other than to liquidate your assets and give your creditors ten cents on the dollar.

But brothers and sisters, I will tell you that many attorneys don't share your value system. The Bible says that:

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Ps 37:21 The wicked borrow and do not repay,  
but the righteous give generously;

A Christian is someone whose yes is yes, and whose no is no. A Christian is a person of integrity and not only because of your word, but also because of your witness, brothers and sisters, pay what you owe, even if it takes you a long time to pay it off, even if it means a diminished lifestyle, even if it means that you lose face and have to go to your creditors and embarrass yourself. Do what it takes to pay your debts for the sake of your witness.

How open will someone be to our Savior, if they get stiffed by a Christian? A person who called themselves a Christian stiffed me and left me holding the bag for their \$500 debt, their \$1000 debt, and their \$10,000 debt.

Now do I believe that bankruptcy is always wrong in every instance? No. Sometimes a creditor will force you into bankruptcy. You can't do anything about it. Sometimes an individual's emotional and physical health is being so compromised by the debt load they are bearing that bankruptcy is the merciful and gracious accommodation of our legal system to our unfortunate circumstances. There are circumstances that push us into bankruptcy that are beyond our control – an illness, a layoff, a divorce. But while there are these exceptions, the general principle is this: debt is wrong when you do not repay.

Some years ago, a principal of an elementary school told me a story about receiving a note from a former student, who had been there years before. Attached to the note was a check for a certain amount of money. The student wrote with their name attached. They said that some years before they stole something from the cafeteria. They also wrote in the note that they had subsequently come to know Jesus and they wanted to repay what they stole with interest.

How many of us would do what that student did? What kind of person goes to that length to repay what they owe? The kind of person who does that is called a Christian. It is someone who does not simply live at the level of the rest of the world, but takes the high road in life. She is a person who does what is hard. He is a person who operates according to the principles of the kingdom of God. Who goes after excellence in financial dealing? Someone who is called a Christian.

When is debt wrong? When you cannot give to God. Proverse 3.9 says:

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Pr 3:9 Honor the LORD with your wealth,

with the first fruits of all your crops;

Years later, the apostle Paul told the Corinthian church in 1 Cor. 16.2,

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<sup>1</sup>Co 16:2 On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made.

In both the Old and New Testaments, it is clear that when you cannot set aside money on a regular and systematic and proportional basis to do God's work because you are in debt, you have stopped putting God first in your life. Again, I need to underline that this isn't the case if you have gone into debt because of circumstances beyond your control. But if, as in the case of most Americans, you are in debt because you have over-consumed, because you've made irresponsible decisions, then our debt is wrong. Never borrow money if it makes it impossible even temporarily to give to God's work.

If we are making a dollar, we should not spend 100 pennies on ourselves. Even worse, we should not spend 110-120 pennies on ourselves. If we are making a dollar, we need to learn how to live on 90 pennies, or 80 pennies, and give the rest to God.

Debt is wrong when you cannot respond to God. I've watched this with so many young adults. There are so many young adults who have gotten themselves into the position as a result of student loans and credit card debt that even if God called them to the mission field, they could not respond for a period of years, indeed, decades because they have to pay off all of this debt. Brothers and sisters, as a follower of Jesus Christ, if it is within your power, you always want to put yourself in a position of maximum flexibility before God. That if God says: I want you to do such-and-such, you are able to offer immediate and unconditional obedience to his call. Far better is it for you to take six or seven years to go through college and graduate without much debt so that you can be free before God to respond to his call at age 24 than to graduate at age 21-22 loaded down with tens of thousands of dollars of debt.

It is far better to go to a community college and live at home, even though it denies your independence for a little while, than to go to an expensive school and be denied the liberty of being able to radically obey God in whatever God is calling you to.

Of course this is true of folks in their 30's, 40's, and 50's. It is far better to live in a low priced house or to buy cars that you can pay off in 2-3 years. Our possessions ought to be things that we can easily let go of in order to respond to the call of God. We should not be possessed by our possessions. Debt is wrong when you cannot respond to God.

Debt is wrong when you presume upon the future. James 4.13-17,

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Jas 4:13 Now listen, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.”

Jas 4:14 Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.

Jas 4:15 Instead, you ought to say, “If it is the Lord’s will, we will live and do this or that.”

Jas 4:16 As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil.

Jas 4:17 Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn’t do it, sins.

Most borrowers get into trouble because they fail to listen to God’s Word. We get into trouble because we base our borrowing decision on the presumption that everything is going to work out in the future according to our present plans and predictions. In other words, we believe that we know how everything is going to work out.

- If I take out this loan, then I will be able to pay it back because I will keep my job and not be laid off.
- I’m going to make raises at such-and-such a rate.
- There won’t be any economic down-turn.
- Interest rates won’t go up, so I don’t have to worry about adjustable rate mortgages.
- My house is going to appreciate as it has always appreciated.
- My health will be great in the future.
- No one in my family will have emergency medical needs.
- My car won’t break down or be stolen.

Well, what if things don’t work out the way you plan?

- What if you get laid off?
- What if your car does get stolen?
- What if you incur unexpected medical bills?

What will you do with your debts? James says that you don’t know what is happening tomorrow. Why do you pretend to know what will happen in 5-10 years? James also says you are unwise when you have not taken account of your frailty, verse 14.

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Jas 4:14 Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.

Anyone who has ever been rushed to a hospital or who has stood at the side of a loved one knows that profound sense of how fragile life is. Do you understand that your health is a frail thing, that your spouse’s health is a frail thing, that your children’s health is very frail, that we are mist – we are here today and gone tomorrow? We are not going to be permanently well.

Some of you with children have enjoyed *Veggie Tales*, the kid movie with Bob the Tomato and Larry the Cucumber. This Christian video company sold tens of millions of videos and a little over a year ago they went bankrupt. According to the company President, in an article in *Christianity Today*, he said that *Veggie Tales* went bankrupt because they violated this principle from James 4. They presumed upon the future. They projected that their sales would go from \$40 million in 1999 to \$125 million in 2002. So they expanded hugely. They spent money like crazy. They hired lots of new staff and signed a multi-million dollar loan agreement, entering contracts based on these projections. The projections didn't work out the way they planned and like a house of cards, this wonderful Christian company collapsed.

How do we avoid presumption? In applying James 4 to our lives, it appears that if you are taking out a loan and you don't have the current means to repay that debt, if the money is not in the bank, or if the collateral in the item isn't sufficient to back up the loan, for example, the car is repossessed if you got sick and that would pay off the loan, if your house is foreclosed on and that would pay off the loan – if you don't have the means to pay off the loan either with existing assets or the collateral in the property that is backing up that loan, then you are presuming on the future.

You say: But Rich, if the only loans I take out for a house or a car are loans that I currently have the means to repay or backed up by collateral in the item, then I probably wouldn't be borrowing that much.

Now you are getting the idea!

Finally, debt is wrong when you are simply over-consuming. Back in the 1950's, before JC Penny, the founder of JC Penny's died, the Penny's corporate board met to discuss whether or not JC Penny's would sell on credit. Up until 1958 JC Penny's had always been a cash-only business. The only board member to oppose the credit policy was JC Penny himself. He predicted that if the charge policy was implemented, people would not be able to keep from over-buying. In other words, people would buy what they couldn't afford to buy and they would end up injuring themselves.

So as a matter of principle, JC Penny voted to keep the department store chain on a cash-only basis. He was outvoted by every other board member. And within a year they issued 12 million credit cards. Every other department store in America followed suit.

You say: Rich, I've violated one or more of the principles you've laid out. I have presumed on the future. I'm drowning in debt. There are bills I haven't been able to repay or I'm paying just the minimum payment on a high-interest loan. I'm living with so much emotional stress because of debt in my life. What should I do?

Let me suggest a few things in closing. We've got a financial stewardship ministry here called Crown Financial. It is a 10-week program. If you go through this 10-week program, you will be able to gain real order and real clarity regarding God's will for your finances. If you really want to reorder your financial house, not just gain a little bit of temporary relief to get the creditors off your back, but you want to make long-term change and begin to move into the liberty and freedom that God has for you, we are starting some new groups beginning in December. There is information out in the lobby at some tables about Crown Financial. I want to encourage many of you to check that out.

We also need more personal financial counselors. We have a personal financial counseling ministry in the church, but because of the demand for their services and the limited number of counselors that we have, people are having to wait months to get into to see one of our private financial counselors. If you have any financial counseling ability, if you think you have some talent in this area, if you have some ability here, if God has been nudging you that this may be an area where you could serve for a couple of hours a month, we have a training program for you. You can find out more about that at the tables in the lobby from the leader of our Crown Financial group.

In addition, our Marriage and Family Life ministry is offering a marriage seminar on Monday, November 21<sup>st</sup> from 7:30-9:00 p.m. The topic will be Finances.

Here is another thing you can do: Stop tempting yourself. If you are in debt, cut up your credit cards today. Take them out of your wallet, out of your purse, and cut them up in little pieces and throw them away. Immediately move to a cash only basis. Make a determination to accumulate no more new debt. Instead, begin to pay off your old debt starting with the smallest bill so that you gain some traction and then move up to the bigger and bigger bills.

Stop tempting yourself. Throw away your catalogues before you look at them. Stop shopping as entertainment. If you need something to fill your time, volunteer.

You don't have to live in bondage to debt your whole life. That is not God's will for you. I want to close with Leviticus 25:8-12,

#### SLIDE

Lev 25:8 “ ‘Count off seven sabbaths of years—seven times seven years—so that the seven sabbaths of years amount to a period of forty-nine years.

Lev 25:9 Then have the trumpet sounded everywhere on the tenth day of the seventh month; on the Day of Atonement sound the trumpet throughout your land.

Lev 25:10 Consecrate the fiftieth year and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you; each one of you is to return to his family property and each to his own clan.

Lev 25:11 The fiftieth year shall be a jubilee for you; do not sow and do not reap what grows of itself or harvest the untended vines.

Lev 25:12 For it is a jubilee and is to be holy for you; eat only what is taken directly from the fields.

If we went on to read through the rest of the chapter, we would find that every 50 years in Israel God proclaimed liberty throughout the land of Israel and said that anyone who was in debt is now freed from their debt. Anyone who lost property through illness, through poverty, through foolishness, through presumption, through laziness – anyone who sold their property away got it back. You couldn't be permanently enslaved. Every 50 years everyone was set free.

Here is where I want to close. You and I and our country will never become debt free without laying a spiritual relationship with God. You see, debt problems, as I said earlier, are often symptoms of a deeper spiritual problem. If we are not rightly related to God, we will try to satisfy our deep spiritual needs through acquiring more possessions than we can pay for. Until we are rightly related to God, we will continue to suffer debt problems.

You see, the year of Jubilee began on the 10<sup>th</sup> day of the 7<sup>th</sup> month on the Day of Atonement. The economic freedom that Israel enjoyed began with spiritual freedom, the Day of Atonement, when people's sins were forgiven.

It is not enough for us to acquire new economic skills. Financial training is good but the deeper spiritual issue, the issue of the restlessness that is in our hearts, can never be satisfied except by us knowing that our sins have been forgiven and that we have been adopted into God's family as his sons and daughters. Only when our restless hearts are at peace with God can we break the power of over-consumption and get released from the jaws of hell. God's intention for you and for me is liberty in every area of life including financial liberty. That liberty comes through the cross of Jesus Christ. Let's pray.

## Rich Nathan

## Sane Money: Sane Living in an Insane World Series

## Luke 12.13-21

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