

CHRISTIAN MONEY \$ENSE

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Progressive Steps in Saving Money

Mark Robbins, CPA

What is the best way to get a large amount of money?

- Win the lottery.
- Inherit a fortune.
- Save a little at a time.
- Compete on *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?*

Is that your final answer?

Is having a substantial amount of money sin in itself? Certainly not! The Bible says *loving* money is sin, not *having* money (1 Tim 6:10).

Should amassing lots of money be the highest priority goal of the believer? Jesus taught, "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matt. 6:19-21 NIV). Take it from someone who learned this lesson the hard way: Chasing money won't make you happy. It will make you look like a fool.

So is it wrong to save money? Jesus again has an answer. Christ taught His disciples that God expects us to be wise stewards and intentionally multiply the resources He gives us (Matt. 25:14-30). We like to imagine that the secret to multiplying financial resources relates to luck (the lottery), others (inheritance), or intellectual smarts (game shows). But nothing could be further from the truth. Wise business managers intentionally structure their efforts around good stewardship so the business can survive tough times. Did you know that research shows 80% of American millionaires are first-generation millionaires? The majority of millionaires don't inherit their wealth. It is built over time by hard work, determination, and wise decisions.

Believers have the most important reason of anyone to deliberately become good financial stewards. Ultimately, it is God's money, and it can be used to advance the kingdom of Jesus Christ. But how do we become good at saving money? Consider this truth from the book of Proverbs, "Dishonest money dwindles away, but he who gathers money little by little makes it grow" (13:11 NIV). Consider some general characteristics of activities involved in gaining dishonest money and gathering money:

- Dishonest money - focused on exploiting frailty in others & reacting to possibilities
- Gathering money - focused on utilizing my strengths & planning around probabilities

Many sports coaches will tell you that good offense attracts crowds, but good defense wins games. Financial offense equates to having a large salary. You may not be able to control that. Instead, focus on your financial defense (controlling your spending). Let's look at some practical steps that you can take today to become a better saver:

- Focus on cash flow* - You can only become a good saver if you spend less of your paycheck than you earn. For most people, housing, cars, dining, and entertainment consume a larger part of monthly income than they should. Evaluate these areas and make difficult decisions like reducing spending to have extra monthly cash.
- Reduce high-interest debt* - Don't take on unnecessary debt. Also, use extra cash flow to pay off existing debt more quickly. This will free up more monthly cash.
- Create short-term savings* - If you lost your job, how long would it take to get another one of equivalent pay and opportunity? Work towards having three months of living expenses saved. This will take time, but you can do it. I'm sure you know someone who ran into hard times that could have benefited from this advice.
- Save for major purchases* - Do you want new furniture? Where are you vacationing this year? Work towards paying cash for major expenses. You won't be able to do this all of the time, but why pay someone else interest if you don't need to?
- Build long-term savings* - Take advantage of retirement saving options (401k, 403b, IRAs, etc.) when you are financially able to do so. Remember, put a priority on monthly cash flow and non-retirement savings. You can't touch retirement money for years. Your cash flow and savings are what can help you during difficulties before retirement.

Having extra money is a product of discipline, not luck. Read the gospel of Matthew to see how often Christ spoke about money. God expects us to be good stewards of His money (Matt 25:14-30). There are only three ways to use money: spend it, give it, or save it. Determine to reduce your spending so you can develop generous giving and wise saving habits. You can improve your situation over the next year. Start this month!

BBC Foundation has been ministering to churches and individuals regarding biblical stewardship since 1992. Send your questions on finances and stewardship to: BBC Foundation, 538 Venard Rd., Clarks Summit, PA 18411. Phone: (800) 451-8668, website:bbcfoundation.org; e-mail: info@bbcfoundation.org