

# CHRISTIAN MONEY \$ENSE

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## Starting Strong in 2004

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How many have already made New Year's resolutions for 2004? Some people have resolved not to make any more New Year's resolutions. No matter which group you are in, everyone has some goals he or she would like to achieve in 2004. Many times we fail in our goal setting because of two issues: our goals are not specific enough and we are not resolute in achieving the outcome.

"The plans of the diligent lead surely to abundance, but everyone who is hasty comes only to poverty" (Proverbs 21:5, ESV). That verse contains two key words: abundance and poverty. Make your mental choice on which you want (I already know the answer). The way to that end is through diligence, which starts with planning.

Here are some steps to help you start financially strong in 2004.

- Construct & prioritize a financial goal list – What financial goals do you want to achieve? Now, arrange those into three categories: short term (this year), medium term (five years) and long term (twenty years). Finally, put dollar amounts and dates by each goal. "Increase my savings account" is not specific. Be specific so you can be successful.
- Make a specific list of your debts and assets – Again, be specific. List the dollar amounts, interest rates, and minimum payments due. A further explanation of how to use this follows.
- Create a draft budget that increases monthly cash flow – Your monthly cash flow is the difference between your income and your expenses. Create a plan to maximize the difference between those two. That surplus will help you pay off debt or save more quickly. Hint – some

likely culprits that are robbing your monthly dollars include dining out, entertainment, communications (cell, internet, cable, etc.), and groceries. Car payments are another big item to evaluate.

- Increase your giving in 2004 – If you improve your finances only so you have more money, you have truly missed the point of stewardship. Biblical stewardship is not about saving more so you can have more. Biblical stewardship is about saving more so you can give more to God's work in this world. Consider the truths in 1 Timothy 6:17-19.

Now more on what to do with your monthly cash flow. Most people have multiple existing debts. Don't try to make extra payments on all of them at the same time. That is the "shotgun" approach, and it does not work. Make minimum payments on all of your debts except one (highest rate or lowest balance). Focus all the extra dollars you can spare on that one. Once it is paid off, roll that payment onto the next debt to focus on that one. This is the "rifle" approach, and it works. You might also consider accelerating your debt reduction by using some of your assets to pay off debt.

"The plans of the diligent lead to abundance" (Proverbs 21:5). Make specific goals for 2004 and change your spending habits. Track your progress monthly to keep yourself motivated. If you would like a copy of a one-page budget to help you get started, please contact our office.

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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](http://bbcfoundation.org); e-mail: [info@bbcfoundation.org](mailto:info@bbcfoundation.org)