

Follow Your Map
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We are in a sermon series entitled The Journey to Financial Freedom. I want to remind you that our biblical definition of financial freedom comes from 2 Corinthians 9:8 which says:

God is able to make all grace (every favor and earthly blessing) come to you in abundance, so that you may always and under all circumstances and whatever the need be self-sufficient (possessing enough to require no aid or support and be furnished in abundance for every good work and charitable donation).

Financial freedom means all your needs are met – you require no financial aid or help from anyone else – and you have such abundance that you able to give to every good work.

We learned that there are many mile markers on the road to financial freedom, but the starting place is God’s Word.

The first mile marker is that we must take the slow road to financial freedom. That’s because financial freedom is a journey that takes work and self-discipline over time. But if you stay on the journey, you can be financially free!

Mile marker 2 is – Recognizing that God owns everything and we are stewards who manage God’s resources. God will hold us accountable for how we manage His resources.

The third mile marker on the road to financial freedom is: Give to God First. We do that by giving our tithes and offerings.

The fourth mile marker on the journey to financial freedom is: Work Like You Work For God. Before we can do anything with money we must first make it!

Then when we do make it: the fifth mile marker on the journey to financial freedom is this: Act Your Wage! That means to stop living beyond your means.

The sixth mile marker on the journey to financial freedom is to make your destination debt-free living.

Today is last sermon in this series and the title of my message is: Follow Your Map.

“What map?” you might ask. Well – there’s part of your problem. We’ve already talked about how the Bible is our starting point for this journey. So, God’s word is the map that gives us principles to live by that lead to financial freedom.

And remember – all these principles work together.
 If you follow none – you'll have no financial freedom.
 If you follow some – you'll have some financial freedom.
 If you follow them all – you will be financially free!

But the map I'm talking about today is the plan you follow to financial freedom. "What plan?" you might ask! Well – that's another part of the problem. So, we're going to talk about having a financial plan today.

In other words – have a destination and the directions to get there. Listen closely: you can aimlessly wander into debt and financial stress – but you cannot aimlessly wander out! It takes a GPS – a goal (financial freedom) a plan and sustained action!

We can't operate on the Willie Nelson financial plan. Willie Nelson made millions of dollars but ended up owing the IRS \$16.7 million - after negotiating his taxes and penalties down from \$32 million. Willie made a recording called The IRS Tapes which paid back about 3 million of what he owed – then he had to pay off the rest over time.

Author Robert Draper wrote, "Financial planning had no place in Willie's worldview. His belief that you should spend your way through life and die a pauper kept him forever at odds with his money men." Willie said to one financial adviser, "It's more fun if we don't plan."

Most of us think just \$1 million would set us for life, but without financial stewardship, we could just as easily go the way of Willie. To manage the resources God has entrusted to us requires planning.

Some Christians make the mistake of thinking that they should not make plans because that would show that they are not trusting God. They have a misunderstanding of Bible verses like Proverbs 16:9:

In his heart a man plans his course, but the Lord determines his steps.

They take this verse to mean that you can make plans, but God will just override them, so what's the point? That's not what this verse means. The Living Bible tells us what it means:

We should make plans - counting on God to direct us.

Making plans and trusting God are not mutually exclusive. We should make plans *and* trust God. After all, God is the original planner. He has everything planned out, beginning to end. Ephesians talks about the eternal purpose and plan of God and Ephesians 1:11 says –

In Him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of Him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of His will.

God is never caught off guard.
 God sees the end from the beginning.
 And He works everything out according to His purpose.
 And He works everything out for our good.

Listen to this promise from Proverbs 16:3

Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and your plans will succeed.

So commit yourself to God – press into prayer – hear from God – then make your plans. Get with God and get a plan. Get a plan to start tithing – to get out of debt – to save for retirement. If you fail to plan you plan to fail. That’s why the Bible says in Proverbs 21:5:

The plans of the diligent lead to profit as surely as haste leads to poverty.

The point I want you to see today is that in order for you to move forward on the road to financial freedom, you need a roadmap, goals, and a plan.

Planning is not one of my strengths. To me a long term plan is thinking about what I’m preaching next week. In the past, I even bragged about my lack of planning. That is – until I came across Proverbs 13:16, which says:

A wise man thinks ahead: a fool doesn’t and even brags about it.

Wow – that got my attention! I didn’t start planning, but I did stop bragging about my lack of planning! No – seriously – I did start planning. But I also had to surround myself with people who are more strategic thinkers than me.

Good leaders know their strengths and weaknesses and they hire people who are strong in their weak areas. I’m a visionary. I have big dreams. I always have ideas about what we should do. But many of those things would never get done without a team of leaders. Someone has to have vision, but you need others who can plan, recruit and get the job done.

So, when it comes to a financial plan – it’s not enough to have vision – you need to plan out the steps to get to that goal. Remember – our goal is financial freedom!

I did research this week on the steps different financial experts give to financial freedom. For instance, Dave Ramsey has what he calls baby steps and Crown Financial and Compass Financial have what they call money maps. I was encouraged to see that they all have basically the same steps to financial freedom.

Here’s a quick overview of Crown Financial’s steps to financial freedom, which they call “destinations”.

Destination 1 – Emergency Savings
 Destination 2 – Credit Cards Paid Off
 Destination 3 – Consumer Debt Paid Off
 Destination 4 – Save for Major Purchases
 Destination 5 – Buy Home and Begin Investing
 Destination 6 – Home Mortgage Paid Off
 Final Destination – True Financial Freedom

Let's look at this map a little closer.

Destination 1 –

This step includes starting to give, starting to live by a budget and saving \$1000 for emergency expenses.

76% of Americans live paycheck to paycheck. That means most people are working hard but never seem to get ahead. It also means they'd be in serious trouble if an emergency happened like an extended hospital stay, a plumbing issue, or a costly car repair. But you can plan for those emergencies and be ready for them.

The first step in taking control of your money is to create some cushion between you and life's emergencies. Your emergency fund is for those unexpected events in life. Start by getting \$1,000 in savings – and do not spend it on anything other than a real emergency.

The key to financial success isn't just shaving a few expenses here and there, but having an overall plan for how to spend what we earn. To do this requires having a budget.

A budget is simply a plan for spending money. Having a budget is telling your money where it should go rather than wondering where it went. Budgeting is usually not fun – but it's the only way to follow through and apply what we've learned about getting out of debt, saving and giving.

Destination 2 – Credit Cards Paid Off

Once you have \$1,000 savings in the bank, it's time to get into attack mode. Pay off your credit cards from the smallest to the largest. Get serious! Get intense! Get an extra job and sell stuff if you have to. Pay those debts off one by one.

Destination 3 – Consumer Debt Paid Off

This includes car payments and student loans. They all keep you from getting ahead and reaching your money goals. Think of what it would be like with no extra monthly payments and no fear of collection calls. You can get there!

Destination 4 – Save for Major Purchases

What would happen if you lost your job? And what if you couldn't find a new one for several months? It's not fun to think about, but you've got to be prepared. Once you've paid off all debt but the house, it's time to build up your savings. In this step, you'll save three to six month's income. You don't want any setbacks that will force you back into debt.

Destination 5 – Buy a Home and Begin Investing

Once your debt is paid off and you have some cushion in the bank for emergencies, you'll want to start planning your retirement.

The U.S. Census Bureau reports that one out of every six elderly Americans is already living below the federal poverty line. 29% of all American workers have less than \$1,000 saved for retirement. That's not okay!

Be careful to avoid risky investments. One of the easiest ways to invest is if your company offers a 401K – especially if they match your investment! Take advantage of that as soon as you can!

If a 30-year old contributes \$300/month to a 401k and a 50-year old contributes \$300/month to a 401k, the 30-year old will have \$1.1 million at retirement and the 50-year old will have \$140,000.

Many people wait too long to save and invest. They will do it someday, but someday never comes. But, the future is now because what you do now determines your future. Don't wait until it rains to realize you don't have an umbrella!

Destination 6 – Home Mortgage Paid Off

Final Destination – True Financial Freedom

You can get there if you follow your map!

By the way - not only do you need a plan for your future – you need a plan for what happens when you die. One of the most heartbreaking things we deal with as pastors is people who die without a plan. They have no insurance, no savings, no burial plot picked out – no nothing. And the family is left trying to figure out what to do and how to do it while dealing with the grief of losing their loved one. It's a sad – heart-rending situation.

Again – some people have the misconception that it is a lack of faith to talk about dying or to plan for your family after your death. This is not fear or lack of faith! This is wisdom!

Here's the facts – 100% of us will die - so all of us need to be prepared. 2 Kings 20:1 says:

Some time later Hezekiah became deathly sick. The prophet Isaiah paid him a visit and said, "Put your affairs in order; you're about to die — you haven't long to live."

Hezekiah had advance notice of his death and the word of the Lord to him was "Get your affairs together."

Now, none of us know when our death will occur! So, we need to follow the word of God and get our affairs in order now! We need to be spiritually prepared by being right with God through faith in Jesus Christ. We also need to be financially prepared. We need to make sure our family is taken care of! That includes having a will. Without a will the government steps in and determines what happens to your assets.

Having your affairs in order includes having insurance to pay for funeral costs and to provide for your family after you're gone.

Having your affairs in order includes leaving an inheritance for your children. Proverbs 13:22 says:

A good man leaves an inheritance to his children's children.

Now part of that is leaving a spiritual heritage, but it is also financial. However – we must use wisdom and make sure those we give an inheritance to are mature, trained and ready to spend it wisely. Otherwise Proverbs 20:21 comes true!

An inheritance obtained too early in life is not a blessing in the end.

I've told you before that the majority of people who receive an inheritance spend it all in less than a year! I hate that! People work hard their entire lives and save money in order to leave an inheritance – and then their heirs blow the money quickly.

That shows that one of the inheritances we can leave our children is map that leads to biblical financial freedom! We must teach our children how to work and save and give and invest.

Too many people grow up with no financial wisdom passed down to them. That's why so many people have financial difficulties. Obviously there are understandable financial hardships-- illness, loss of a job, business failure, a spouse leaving. But the vast majority of people in financial trouble are there because of a lack of knowledge and a lack of discipline, not because of hardship.

What we need to do is Plan now - Budget now - Save now - Give now! It's harder when you're older, but it's never too late.

Harland Sanders' father died when he was six years old. His mother had to go to work, so Harland learned to cook in order to feed himself and his siblings. When his mother remarried, his stepfather sent all the children away, forcing them to fend for themselves.

As Harland grew up, he supported himself with jobs ranging from insurance salesman to steamboat operator. Eventually, Harland ran a service station. He did well and bought the motel and restaurant across the street. Business was booming. Unfortunately, the new interstate highway bypassed Harland's Kentucky town and his business dried up.

Harland was now 65 years old, so he decided to auction off his property and live off Social Security, which at that time was \$105 a month.

When he had a restaurant, Harland had developed a recipe for fried chicken with a secret blend of 11 herbs and spices. Harland decided to go out and try his hand at franchising. He got in his car and went from town to town visiting restaurants and cooking his chicken for the owner and employees. If they liked his chicken and wanted the recipe, they agreed to pay Harland 5 cents for every chicken sold.

Twelve years later, Harland had 600 franchises and sold his interest to a group of investors for \$2 million. Most of us still eat chicken cooked with Colonel Sanders' secret recipe at Kentucky Fried Chicken. Although he suffered many setbacks in life – Col. Sanders did what it took to get out of debt and build wealth after reaching retirement age. My point is this - it's never too late – so start now!

Since I'm talking about planning, I want to close by saying that God has plans for you and those plans are good! Jeremiah 29:11 says:

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

Hallelujah! God has plans for you. And God's plans for you are good, not evil! God wants to prosper you, not harm you! God wants to bless you, not curse you!

God's plans should give you hope for your future! It's tough to live without hope because hope is faith for the future. If you have no hope for your future, you will have no power in the present. Instead, you will give up, you will quit trying and you'll stay stuck.

But there is power in hope. Hope is a great gift that causes us to endure and press on. So I want to speak the word of the Lord to you today. No matter what has happened to you in the past or even what is happening to you right now – God's plan for your future is good! So - if you've lost hope - you need to get into agreement with God about your future. God says that your future will be good! God says that your future will be prosperous! You have God's Word on it – so plan on it!