

Budgeting/ Biblical thinking about money

Carol: Hello Tammy... How is everything with the family?

Tammy: Ralf and I are doing well, thanks, Carol. But I am a little concerned about our children – especially the ones with children of their own. They always seem to be short of money for clothes, school, fuel... there are always bills!

Carol: I know exactly what you mean. I have a sister that struggles and I worry about my own children making ends meet. Maybe we ought to talk about how to manage your money better?

Tammy: Great idea! If they won't listen to me maybe they will listen to the program!

Carol: Hello my friend. How are you? I'm Carol, and, of course, Tammy and I are here with you on *Women of Hope*.

Tammy: Hi. Thanks for having us. Do *you* often worry about money? Would *you* like some help to manage your family's money better? I think most of us would! Today we're going to talk about making the most of your money!

Carol: You know, I've learned that when we have some money left over from buying the things we need like our food and clothes, or we have managed to save some money, we should try to make it work for us.

Tammy: You mean, like I did when I bought my chickens? They lay eggs that we eat, and we can sometimes sell the extra eggs and get more money. It's not always possible, but if you can, you should buy something that will *make* money for you

Carol: That's a great example of an *investment*. A person with more money might buy shares in a business as an investment. My son bought a bicycle and he earns money by delivering things for a shop. Or you may be able to buy a sewing machine, and make clothes you can sell.

Tammy: That would be wonderful! Many women have learned to sew at school or at home, and they are quite good at it. So it would be wise to put that skill to good use. But sometimes they don't have enough money to make that initial purchase. A sewing machine might cost more than they can afford.

Carol: That's true. In some places there are banks or special organisations that will give small loans to help people get started in a small business – like buying a sewing machine to make repairs or clothes, or buying bicycle to do deliveries. They only charge a low interest rate for them. When you pay the money back it's used to help someone else.

Tammy: That sounds like a good idea. But you would need to carefully think about it first, and plan it really well. A loan is a serious thing. You wouldn't be able to spend the loan on food or other things that get used up. That's not the purpose. The purpose is investment.

Carol: And it might be wise to discuss it all with your family if you can. They might be able to help you with ideas. Maybe there's someone who could even lend you the money. Or, instead of getting a loan, you might find that you could save a small amount each week, and after a few months you might have enough to buy your investment.

Tammy: That would be possible if you plan well. We all have to admit that sometimes we spend money on things that are not going to help our families cope better. It just happens! You see something and buy it.

Carol: And that's where it's helpful to have a budget. A budget is a money plan. You start off by working out what money you think you can earn each week. That's easy if you have a regular job, but it might be harder if your income is different each week; then you can try to find out your average earnings. To do this you need to look back over the last 10 weeks, and add up all that you earned. Then divide this total income by 10, the number of weeks that you were counting, and that will give you an idea of how much you usually have to spend each week.

Tammy: Then look back over those 10 weeks, and see what you spent on necessary things and on bills you had to pay. Again, you can average it - add up all that you spent on these things and divide the total by 10. That will give you an idea of your weekly costs. You can see how much you usually spend on food, or electricity, or clothes.

Carol: I do hope that your income is bigger than your costs! If your costs are more, you'll get into debt. So you might need to look at your costs and see if there is anything you don't really need. Maybe you're spending too much on clothes...or cigarettes.

Tammy: I think sometimes we all waste money. Sometimes people spend because they think that they are poor, and it is easy to get jealous of people who have lots of money. So when they have a bit of extra money they spend it so they can feel rich – even if it is just for a moment.

Carol: Yes, that's a common problem, I can understand that! And we all need a little treat at times. But we need to understand that people, some who have little money and some with a bit more, often spend unwisely. What matters is that you have some hope that you can get out of the cycle of poverty and earn a little more money! If you can see a way of saving to buy something that will earn money, you can begin to change your spending habits. Budgeting can help with this.

Tammy: OK, so we have worked out our income and costs - now comes the next big step:

planning which costs must be paid first. Set aside the money each week for the basic things you need, like food and housing, regular bills, and repaying debts. Try to pay off debts as quickly as you can, especially if you're paying interest on the loan.

Carol: My grandmother used to figure her budget with a row of bottles. In one she put a set amount of money for food, in another the amount for fuel, in another the money for our school expenses, and so on. Then she kept a tin with any money that was left over. I used to love that tin because it had kittens painted on the lid! If there was money in the 'kitten tin', some of it could be used for little treats, but most of it was saved up. At the end of each month she would put the money in her bank account.

Tammy: That's a good, simple way to plan what you can afford to spend. Your grandmother would be ready for unexpected expenses. You can use bottles or envelopes, whatever will help you to plan. Now, the next part of budgeting is to write down what actually happened, what money came in and what was spent. See how it compares with what you planned. This is where we can begin to see how we may be using our money unwisely.

Carol: You're right. Often when we can see where our money was spent, we are amazed at how much money we actually waste. Little things add up here and there. And keeping track of where and how you spend helps you to see the truth about where your money is going.

Now, you'll probably have to adjust your plan every few weeks to make it more useful. But you'll be surprised at how helpful it is. It can often help you with ideas about how to earn more, and it can help you to stop wasting your money. You'll get to appreciate your plan, or budget, especially as you see your savings growing.

Tammy: When we look around us, we often find that there are many people who are worse off than we are, no matter how poor we are. When we have an attitude of trying to improve things instead of just feeling that we have no hope, then we can help those who are worse off. And that makes us feel better about ourselves, so everyone is helped.

Carol: And, you know what? It works for gardens too. When we have lots of one kind of fruit or vegetable we love to give some away. And others do the same for us when they have lots. We all benefit together. And I find that friendship is actually more valuable than money. We can help each other like a family, even when our own family is not close by.

Carol: You're with your friends on *Women of Hope*; and Fran has just joined us. Welcome, Fran. We've been talking about how to budget.

Fran: That sounds good. Hello...I hope it was helpful to you...I know I need to budget carefully.

Tammy: Oh I think we all do!

Fran: People have very different attitudes to money, don't they? Some, misers, hate to spend any money, while some, spendthrifts, seem to throw it away. What are you naturally - a miser or a spendthrift? Did you know that God's word has a lot to say about our attitudes to money? To start with, we need to understand that everything we have comes from God, who made heaven and earth. So we should be thankful, and also responsible in how we use God's gifts.

Carol: There are some great proverbs in the Bible that talk about this. I like this one: 'Go and watch the ant, you sluggard; think about her ways and be wise. She stores her provisions in summer, and gathers her food at harvest.' (Prov 6:9) A sluggard is a person who is slow and lazy like a slug. But ants work really hard, don't they, bringing food to their nest and storing it for the winter.

Tammy: I guess we could say the ants budget well!

Carol: Here's another proverb. 'Lazy hands make a man poor, but hard-working hands bring wealth.' (Proverbs 10:4) So we get the idea: we need to work hard and not be lazy.

Fran: In the Bible there's a letter, written by a leader, Paul, to a young church worker called Timothy. Listen to the advice Paul gave:

You're truly rich if you follow God, and you're satisfied with what you have. What did we bring into this world? Nothing! What can we take out of the world? Nothing! So if we have food and clothes, we will be content with that. People who want to get rich fall into temptation; they get caught in the trap of many foolish and harmful desires that pull them down and destroy them. For the love of money leads to all kinds of evil. (1 Timothy 6: 6-10)

Carol: That's really good advice. Be content with what you have. Don't be greedy, that will lead you away from God's ways. Do you think that means we shouldn't try to improve our situation? No, we should work hard to provide what we need, but we must do it in ways that please God.

Tammy: It's hard to understand why we should be content, when we see other people with more money, more things? Do you ever feel jealous and bitter about that? Here are some more wise words from the Bible: 'Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have - *because* God has said, "I will never leave you; I will never forsake you." ' (Hebrews 13:5) When you know God is with you and cares about you, it really helps you to be content.

Fran: Yes, it helps you to be free in your heart, to focus on God more than money, and even to be generous. Let me tell you more about the first followers of Jesus, about 2000 years ago.

They were exciting times. Jesus Christ had lived a perfect life and taught about God. He had been killed on a cross, taking the sins of the world on himself, so that those who believed on him could be made right with God. But God raised him to life. Then he left this earth again, and returned to heaven. His followers were sure that he was the promised divine messenger from God; in fact, he was God, come in human form. Jesus' followers, the first Christians, were filled with God's Holy Spirit, and shared their message, so that many others believed in Jesus.

Listen to what God's word, the Bible, tells us about their life together.

'All the believers in Jerusalem continued together in close fellowship, and shared whatever they had with one another. They would sell some of their possessions, and share the money among them all, with whoever needed help. Day after day, they met as a group in the temple, and they had their meals together in their homes, eating together with happy and humble hearts, praising God, and respected by all the people.' (Acts 2:44-47)

Carol: Don't they all sound so happy, sharing their lives together? They were so sure God was with them. They really weren't interested in getting rich, they just wanted to tell everyone about Jesus.

Fran: That's right. But they weren't perfect, any more than we are, and after a while they started to quarrel about who was getting the most help. The leaders had to appoint some respected men to make sure the food was shared out fairly.

Now after a few years there was a famine, and the believers in Jerusalem were very short of food and money.

Paul was one of their leaders. Paul had travelled through several countries, as far as Greece, telling people the good news about Jesus. Many people had believed, and they were meeting together in homes to worship God. God gave them a prophecy, warning that this famine was coming. When they heard about the famine, these new Christians wanted to help those in Jerusalem. They were grateful to the believers in Jerusalem, who had sent the good news about Jesus to Greece. They really wanted to share with them. So they collected money, and gave it to Paul and his companion Barnabas, to take back to Jerusalem. (Acts 11:29-30) When Paul and Barnabas got back, they shared the money among those who needed help (Acts 24:17).

Tammy: That's great, that the believers who had money were willing to help those who didn't.

Fran: Yes. But even the people who were poor themselves were generous. Let me read what Paul wrote about some home churches in Greece.

'We want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. They have

been severely tested by the troubles they went through: but their joy in God was so great that they were extremely generous in their giving, even though they are very poor themselves. I saw that they gave as much as they could - no, even more than they could afford. Of their own free will they begged us for the privilege of helping God's people in Jerusalem.' (2 Corinth. 8:1-5)

Carol: That's very generous, isn't it...when you give away what you could really use yourself? That shows that they truly loved God and God's people. Too often we struggle to share even what we *can* afford. These people made a big sacrifice to help people they had never met, because they were united in their faith in Jesus.

Fran: You're right Carol, that *is* the reason. Paul went on to write, 'First they gave themselves to the Lord; and then to us, by God's will.' Can you see: the Macedonian Christians gave themselves to God with all their hearts, and God changed their hearts so they really *wanted* to be generous, like God is. Jesus was their example; listen to what Paul wrote next. 'You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ: rich as he was, he made himself poor for your sakes, in order to make you rich through his poverty.' (v9)

Let's think about those words. It says Jesus was rich; but on earth he had no home of his own, no money. How was he rich?...

Tammy: Well, I think it means that Jesus was rich in heaven, before he came to earth as a man. We can't imagine how glorious that must have been. But he gave all that up, to come to earth to bring us back to God.

Fran: And how did he make *us* rich? God doesn't usually give us lots of money! No, but we're truly rich in our hearts and minds if we know God loves us, if we've been put right with God, if we're hoping and trusting in him, and we know we have a home in heaven waiting for us. Remember what Paul wrote to Timothy: 'You're truly rich if you follow God, and you're satisfied with what you have.'

Carol: Here on *Women of Hope*, we've been talking about how to think about money. There were a few different things, weren't there? like *working hard* and consistently...

Tammy: ... like the ants!... and saving up for the future like the ants. Do you do that, or just spend anything that you get?

Carol: So budgeting and saving can help us provide the things our family needs.

Tammy: And then we thought about being *contented*, satisfied with simple things, not plotting to get rich any way we can. When we love money more than we love God, it can really lead us into trouble...maybe neglecting our families...taking foolish risks...or being dishonest, to get more and

more money? But when I'm trusting God, and remembering he's with me every day, that helps me to be contented.

Fran: And then we talked about the early believers in Jesus, who shared what they had.

Carol: It really challenges me, to think that they gave generously even when they had very little themselves. That's really copying the example of Jesus, isn't it?

Fran: So let's remember: when we're trusting in God we should work well...

Tammy: ...save what we can...

Carol: ...be thankful and contented...and be generous because God has been so generous to us!

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