

**Series:** Financial University  
**Title:** Financial Priorities  
**Text:** 2 Corinthians 8:8-15  
**Key Word:** Priorities  
**Proposition:** Everyone will consider and act upon God's financial priorities as way to freedom.

Good Morning. My name is Chris Farmer and I serve as one of the pastors of this church. We are thrilled that you have chosen to worship God with us today. God is in this place. He offer His love, mercy, and guidance so that you and I can live the life we were created to live.

Many live with fear, anxiety, and stress in these challenging economic times. Our country and the Miami Valley area have seen dramatic job loses, severe market swings, the collapse of the housing and auto industry, and numerous foreclosures.

A recent survey of 7,000 Americans revealed that 80% of Americans feel stressed about our economy and their personal finances. Half are worried about the economic future of their kids and grandkids. Fifty-six percent are concerned about their job stability. The government, big business, and big banks have irritated 60% of those surveyed. The report summarized its findings by saying: "The declining state of the nation's economy is taking a physical and emotional tool on people nationwide."

Many blame the deregulation of the banking industry, subprime mortgages, the housing bubble, and even corporate fraud. However, my friends, these and others are simply symptoms of a deeper disease, which has infected both Wall Street and Main Street. Underneath the surface, we see greed, gluttony, envy, laziness, and pride. Times have not changed since ancient history. Everyone is infected. From the greedy CEOs

to all who borrow more than one could ever repay in order to buy homes, cars, the latest audio and video gadgets, and whatever else our hearts desire. Many went for instant gratification. Many spent tomorrow's paycheck to finance today's lifestyle. Many swapped saving money for buying on credit as if there was no tomorrow. Now many feel the pain.

We woke-up and smelled the coffee, knowing that we must change. We can no longer focus our energy and resources on acquiring more and more stuff that will eventually rust, break, rot, or decay. We realize that all the bigger, better, and newer stuff did not make us happier and content. In fact, we lost our joy to the gods of consumerism.

This series is not about raising dollars for our church budget. For the next few weeks, we are going back to school at Financial University to learn or relearn some ancient lessons that promises freedom and joy. We will not be inviting you to choose a lifestyle like our brothers and sisters of the Amish tradition. However, we will be inviting you to re-evaluate a sacred trust. Paul word's are timely, "*Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful.*" (I Corinthians 4:2)

This sacred trust permits the attainment of wealth. Money itself is neither good nor bad. It can be used for great good or great evil. (Brick Illustration: This brick is neither good nor bad. It depends upon what we do with this brick that can determine its value. With this brick, we can build a bridge or a secure wall. We can build houses and cathedrals. On the other hand, we can throw this brick at a window or car and cause

great damage. It simply depends what we do with it.) Money is like this brick. If we love money for money, sake then evil is at heart's door. The Bible is clear; it is the love of money that the Scripture says is a root of all kinds of evil. Jesus warned us that we could not serve God and wealth at the same time. Only one can be most important, only one can be our priority.

Before we examine our priorities, allow me to offer these words of counsel. It would be easy to be critical of others. We could be tempted to examine another's life and practices without even considering our own. Such a judgmental attitude grieves the Risen Christ and creates unwanted jealousy, envy, and hostility. Let us remember Jesus' words, *"Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. For with the judgment you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get."* (Matthew 7)

Today, it is good to look only onto ourselves with sober judgment. We know our income. We know our spending habits. We know our saving habits. We know our giving habits. We know what we need and what we simply want. We and only we can give ourselves permission to spend that something extra because we have the rest of our lives aligned with God's ways. Only we know these personal things.

A couple of weeks ago, a group of us went to a conference in Leawood, Kansas at one of the largest United Methodist Churches in the country. After the last worship service of the evening, we walked out of the church into the rain toward the parking lot. There in front of us, to our surprise, was a large hummer limousine. I overheard

someone say sarcastically, “Now there is someone living simply for Jesus,” while watching people step into this luxurious, glamorous, vehicle. I thought, “But we don’t know what this person makes and how much he/she gives. They may give millions to kingdom causes and yet have much left over.”

Friends, God is judge. We do not know what a person makes and how much they give. Only God know this. We stand before God alone. All we can and must do is simply say, “God, here I am. You know everything about me. I cannot hide from you. Show me where I am completely aligned with you and where I am not. I want to offer my full self to you. Change me, O living God.”

God has designed us for joy and freedom. We receive this freedom and joy as we align our priorities with His. Our friend Paul teaches us these financial priorities. **First, Live Simply.** Paul wrote, “*For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.*”<sup>v9</sup> Scholars teach us that Jesus’ lifestyle was consistent with the common people of ancient Palestine. He was not any richer or poorer than the common folk of his day. On the other hand, the Son of God chose to leave the grandeur and majesty of heaven and to adopt the life of simplicity. God became flesh and lived among us as the historic figure Jesus of Nazareth. He surrendered himself to the boundaries of time and space and other human limitations. He kept his power, but set aside his rights and glory. At times, he limited his power and knowledge. He became

“a simple, poor man.” However, He lived among us as if he belonged to another world. By such act of love, he made us rich.

We receive the richness of his love by adopting the lifestyle of simplicity. This lifestyle is freedom. Dishonesty is bondage. Simplicity brings joy and balance. Disloyalty brings anxiety and fear. The writer of Ecclesiastes wrote, “*God made man simple; man’s complex problems are of his own devising.*” (Eccl. 7:39) So what does simplicity look like? It seems to me we can demonstrate simplicity by living life as if we belong to another world. Like him, when we live below not above our means we are living simply. So buy things for their usefulness rather than status.

Those who practice simplicity resist purchasing anything that contributes to an addiction. Any form of addiction is slavery. Refuse to be a slave to anything but God.

One evening several weeks ago, I channel surfed to find something entertaining and engaging to watch on TV. Nothing seemed to grip me. I was not ready for bed. Therefore, I decided that I would get out our Playstation and play a video game. To my disappointment, it was not in the TV cabinet. I gave up and went to bed. While preparing for bed, I realized how attached I was to video games. I felt like something had been stolen from me. Later, I asked Ilea about it and she said she gave it to a friend to borrow for a while. The Holy Spirit then spoke to me and said, “Chris, you seem to have quite an attachment to stuff.” Ilea taught me that my attachment to stuff robs me of contentment. Such attachment could be God’s invitation to give it away so that I may know His peace. Simplicity liberates us from stuff.

**Next, Live Intentionally.** Paul teaches us, “*Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, according to your means. For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what he does not have.*” (v11, 12) The Corinthian Christians had a fine record of generosity. They had a desire to give freely, for freely they had received. They championed kingdom causes. They dare not give up on their desire to do their best. What a difference we would make if would all live at our best. How can we live at our financial best? Here are three simple steps. First, set financial goals. Begin by asking yourself: “What do I hope to achieve in the next year...the next five years...by the end of my life?” Then set financial goals that would resource those objectives.

For example, Melinda and I have three primary financial goals: First, we want to give away at least 10% of our income to the mission of Christ through this Church. Second, we want to be debt free with the exception of our mortgage within three years. Third, we want at least \$ 1,000 in a savings account for those rainy days within six weeks. Goal setting sets the stage for living life at ones best.

Next, develop a plan. Some once said that a failure to plan is a plan to fail. A written plan gives us concrete steps to achieve the goals we have set for ourselves. Without a plan, we tend to revert to the prodigal syndrome, who threw away all his resources in wild, fruitless, self-absorbed pleasure.

When I was fifteen years old, I wanted to go scuba diving in the Caribbean with the Boy Scouts. Mom and dad said I could go as long as I paid my own way. I cannot

remember how much it cost, but it was several hundred dollars. Therefore, I got a job delivering the Dayton Daily News. For about a year, I saved most of my income from this paper route and paid for my trip to the Caribbean. They taught me the importance of setting goals and developing a plan to accomplish them. **Fulfilling the plan** often takes hard work; persistence, problem solving, and most importantly faith that with God's help all things are possible.

**Finally, Live for Equality.** Paul says, "*Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality.*" (v13) Paul did not invite the Corinthians to give to relieve the suffering of others. He invited them to give so that God would even things out. Many times, we may experience that it is measured to us with the same measure as we measure to others. God has a way of repaying generosity with generosity. Those who give sparingly will reap sparingly.

The Scriptures contain commands against the exploitation of the poor and the accumulation of wealth for the sake of selfish gain. The Old Testament takes exception to the popular notion of an absolute right to private property. The earth belongs to God. People simply care for it for a time. On the year of Jubilee all the land reverted to its original owners. The year of Jubilee provided a redistribution of wealth, since wealth itself was viewed as belonging to God and not man. This economic view contests all modern beliefs and practice. If Israel faithfully observed the Jubilee, it would have dealt a blow to the problem of the rich becoming richer and the poor becoming poorer.

We must not forget though that God intends that we should have adequate material provision. There is misery today from a simple lack of provision, just as there is misery when people try to make life out of provision. Forced poverty is evil and should be renounced. Scripture also declares consistently and forcefully that the creation is good and to be enjoyed. The Lord calls for balanced contentment and equality through the free generosity of His people.

The Lord has revealed to us His way to freedom and peace: Live simply so others can simply live. Live intentionally so that we have a plan and purpose in mind. Live generously so that we might achieve a better sense of equality. When we align our priorities with His, then we will know His full pleasure.