



CHAPTER THREE

DEALING WITH DEBT

Matthew 18:21-28: The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant

When you put your faith in God and decide that you want to live right and give your life to Christ, blessings do come. When God gives you wisdom, it will give you discernment over situations in your life, and from this discernment you become shrewd in your thinking. I have received some powerful testimonies from various members of my congregation; members have shared that their salaries have doubled. I have received e-mails, cards and letters sharing with me that they have seen dramatic reductions in the amount of debt they owe and have seen their finances turn around. I want you to grab hold of this and believe God with me that you can trust him for great things.

In this chapter, I simply want to “deal with debt.” It is time for you to handle the stronghold that holds so many people in bondage. One of the keys to getting out of debt is to make

sure that you deal with it. You cannot try to escape debt by ignoring it, because it will catch up with you. If you do not make some decisions regarding your debt, your debt is going to make some decisions for you. Proverbs 17:16 says: “Of what use is money in the hand of a fool, since he has no desire to get wisdom?” This is a powerful verse and it implies that you may not know what to do when you get money, because you lack wisdom in that area.

This leads to a working definition of wisdom: Wisdom is the ability to judge correctly and follow the best course of action based on knowledge and understanding. In other words, wisdom comes when you make decisions based on the information you gather before the decision. If you lack wisdom, the Bible says the source of that is God. When you seek God for wisdom, God will give you wisdom. James 1:5 states: “If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.” A “Coleism” by Dr. Ed Cole (known as the Father of the Christian Men’s Movement) defines it this way: “God’s pattern for victory is: wisdom, strategy, victory. Men want victory; God gives strategy. Wisdom gives a strategy for victory that results in glory.” He talks about the fact that a lot of believers never experience the glory of God because they lack wisdom, and if they lack wisdom they don’t have a strategy. If you don’t have a strategy, you cannot achieve victory.

We hear many messages within the church that help us better understand the meaning of scriptural references such

as: gifts of the spirit, casting out devils and the ability to speak in and interpret tongues. However, we do not hear as many messages educating us in the areas of the Bible that govern money. As a result, there are believers with a vision who lack the resources to finance that vision.

Break the Stronghold

What you have to do is make up your mind that you are going to break the stronghold. It does not matter if you came from a family that lived from paycheck to paycheck. You have to decide that it is over. That was how they were—your story is going to be different. When looking at financial stability, knowledge is power. If in fact knowledge is power, then ignorance makes us weak and susceptible to making bad decisions. One of the reasons that we are beginning to see change in the lives of some believers is that over the last ten to 15 years, ministers have begun to teach more in the area of finances. I believe that if we teach on it, then the spirit of God will release something into your situation that will change your life radically and permanently.

In addition to the topics covered in church, it is also wise to educate yourself in the areas of your life that need to be changed. Begin to read financial newspapers and magazines. Subscribe to magazines that will familiarize you with financial terms and money management. Once you are comfortable with those, move up to financial books. There are many financial books that make learning about money management

interesting. You have to commit to educating yourself on how to handle your money.

Have you asked yourself what caused you to be in debt? What caused you to struggle so long financially? I do not know you or your situation personally, but as a whole I think this is the problem: Christians pray the promises but violate the principles. In other words, you understand the promises of God and you stand on those promises because the promises are yes and amen. However, you lose sight of the fact that those promises are hanging upon principles. You can claim the promises but violate the principles and never get the blessing. There are a lot of Christians who have been praying for a long time for God to give them their harvest. It is not that he did not have a harvest available for them, but there is a principle that Christians are continuously violating in the area of money management—living paycheck to paycheck.

There is no question about it—if you plan on having a future you have to plan for it! If you are ever going to get to a place of financial stability, you have to get delivered from the mentality of living from one paycheck to the next. I do not claim to be an expert on money management. I do not claim to be an expert on scripture—but I do know that I have a passion to see God’s people set free from anything that holds them back from reaching their potential. I want to help you remove the spirit of debt, poverty, struggling and living paycheck to paycheck from your life.

A perfect example of people depending on their next

paycheck to make ends meet was seen during the time the state of New Jersey was hit with a budget crisis and the government shut down all government agencies and major businesses. The government agencies provided over half of the jobs in the state. The newscasters interviewed average workers who were jobless during those few days. One of the workers commented to a reporter, “What am I supposed to do? I live paycheck to paycheck.” (Source: UPN My News). The time to prepare for your future is not next week or next year, but right now. Preparing for your future should begin with your current situation.

Galatians 3:13 tells us: “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: ‘Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.’” It is important to understand that the curse of the law included poverty, sickness and death. From this you see that poverty is a spirit and you can be financially living in poverty if you have debt. You have to kill the spirit of ignorance or you will end up in the same situation all over again!

Money is not supposed to control you; you are supposed to be in control. In comparison to last year, if you are in the same financial hole then your situation has to change now. It is in essence choking you to the point where you feel there is no way out. Debt is a stronghold that can lead to physical ailments such as stress, which is known to cause hypertension. Why put yourself through these unnecessary changes? If you learn to take control of your money, you can reclaim your lifestyle

and take a different approach to handling your finances.

In order to bring about a change in your finances, you have to have delayed gratification. Some people try to accumulate in three years what it took their parents 30 years to build up. You have to learn to take each development as a step-by-step process, otherwise it will drive you into a place that you do not want to go. I also believe that there is a psychology to debt. There is something about a person who has had that paycheck to paycheck mentality for so long that they actually think it is normal. That is a stronghold on your life and it has caused you to develop an unscriptural mentality. It is unscriptural for you to live your life paycheck to paycheck. God does not only desire to get a blessing to you; he wants to get the blessing through you.

In 2005, there were 2,043,535 new bankruptcy filings, up 31.6 percent from 1,552,967 in 2004—meaning that one in every 53 households in America filed bankruptcy petitions (Associated Press, Lundquist Consulting, 1/11/2006). Debt has become more than a money problem. It is a character problem because when you go out and create a bill, you are giving your word that you are going to pay for what you have charged. Here are some reasons why we fall into these financial hardships.

1. We do not do our homework before we make the purchase. Consider this scenario: You go into a car dealership and want to buy a car. You are approached by a salesperson and asked, “How much can you afford to

pay?” I would advise you to never answer that question. You should negotiate the price of the car, not the price of the payment. They can end up stretching your car payments over a five- to six-year period. That is how car dealers get you caught up in overpaying for a vehicle. You could end up with a seven to nine percent interest rate on something for which you could have gotten a better price and interest rate had you done your homework. You should look for sources of information, like the Kelley Blue Book, to find the real value of the car and also explore other lending institutions. Go to that car dealer knowing what amount other banks will lend you if you finance the car through them. Then, if you are offered a higher interest rate, you can negotiate it down. It will show them that you are an educated consumer.

2. We make costly mistakes. We assume that we are doing okay because we can afford to make the minimum monthly payments. When you have the mentality of just being able to afford the minimum payment, you are not looking at the big picture. You are not looking at the amount of interest you will be paying over the course of the loan. Banks do not make money because they loan you money; they make money off the interest you are going to pay for the next six or seven years.
3. We wait too long before we start seeking help. Do not be embarrassed to ask for help or to downsize your lifestyle. People will let their mortgage get four months behind

before they acknowledge that they are beginning to slip into some sort of financial crisis. However, these same people will approach members of their church saying, “I need \$7,000 by tomorrow.” A lack of planning on your part cannot constitute an emergency for everybody else. Seek a professional budget counselor who can help you set up a monthly payment plan.

4. Misuse/overuse of credit cards. People get trapped in financial hardship because they start using credit cards as a survival tool instead of a convenience. If you cannot afford to pay off the entire amount at the end of every month, then you cannot afford to use your credit card. One of your goals should be to pay for everything with cash. If you cannot afford to pay for an item, save up until you have enough money to do so.

Proverbs 22:7 defines debt this way: “The rich rule over the poor, and the borrower is servant to the lender.” When you continue to borrow it enslaves you! You cannot enjoy many of the items you buy on credit because you are in bondage to a creditor. A credit card is not a debit card; it is a credit card!

Our children watch the way we use our money. You need to watch the way you pay for purchases, especially when your kids are with you. If you pull out this plastic card every time you go to the counter, your kids might begin to think that it’s a magic card. In college this will become a problem because during their first week, credit card companies in America will be passing out free t-shirts to unemployed or underemployed

college students if they fill out a form and get a credit card. How can we teach them self-control if we are not a living example?

If you are a college student reading this or if you are a parent, you should educate yourself about student loans. Do some research to find out what scholarship monies are available. Inquire within a school's financial aid department to see what they are offering. You can go on the Internet and do a search for scholarship money. Make it a rule not to fill out any credit card applications, which are so prevalent in the mail, stores and on college campuses. This is a trap! If you ruin your credit before you even get started, your chances of coming out of poverty can seem impossible. We know that with God all things are possible, but the key is with God. So if you are truly with God, do not allow yourself to fall prey to credit card traps and ruin your chance to experience financial freedom. Parents, please educate and warn your children about credit card traps. Take a stand and win the war against debt.

Ecclesiastes 5:10 says: "Whoever loves money never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income..." If you love wealth—it did not say desire—there is nothing wrong with desiring it; but if you are in love with wealth, you are in love with money. You will never be satisfied with your salary. This scripture is critical to your circumstances. It is critical because at some point in your life you will have to make a choice. You can live your entire life discontent with your salary, your job and your relationship, or

you can become satisfied and appreciative of where God has brought you financially until you can change your situation. If you do not, you will end up living life bitter and resentful thinking that everybody you work for underpays you.

The parable of the unjust steward offers powerful principles on debt management. Matthew 18:21-28 states:

Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?”

Jesus answered, “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.”

“Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.

“The servant fell on his knees before him. ‘Be patient with me,’ he begged, ‘and I will pay back everything.’ The servant’s master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go.

“But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii. He grabbed him and began to choke him. ‘Pay back what you owe me!’ he demanded.

Let me just give you the backdrop. Jesus has been teaching about forgiveness and the disciples were amazed by what he was saying. As a result, they began to ask questions. In verse 21 Peter asked, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?” In verse 22, Jesus said, “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.” He said, “seventy-seven times.” The point of the scripture is simply that forgiveness is limitless. There should never be a time in your life where you stop forgiving other people. Why is that so important? Sometimes when you struggle financially for many years, the enemy is able to cause you to become bitter with life and everything else. I refuse to allow my situation to get in my spirit and alter my attitude towards life. I choose to be positive, even in the midst of negative situations and negative job environments. You cannot let your environment dictate your attitude. You have to have an attitude that is so fortified you refuse to allow anything contrary to the Word to change it.

Verse 23 states: “Therefore, the kingdom of heaven....” Have you noticed that Jesus is always preaching the kingdom? Why do you think the message of the kingdom was weaved through every chapter in the Gospels? There is something Jesus is trying to tell us—when you get saved you enter the kingdom. When you pray and say, “Thy kingdom come,” you are saying that you want God to rule and reign in your life. The same way that God has total control in heaven, you want him to have total control in every area of your life. Now, if

God tells us that we are to pray this pattern: “Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come...” that means that you are expected to have an attitude that is kingdom-conscious. When you are kingdom-conscious, you recognize that if God has control, he also has control of your situation. For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. When he uses the words “settle accounts,” this tells me that in financial stewardship there has to be accountability.

You have to be financially accountable. If you are married, you have an obligation to be financially accountable to your spouse. Regardless of who handles the money, you have a responsibility. Any time you find a marriage where one partner begins to develop a secret account, that marriage is in trouble. Once you begin keeping secrets about your finances, it will not be long before you start developing secrets in other parts of your life.

You have to be accountable. The Bible said there came a day when the master wanted to settle accounts. There comes a time in our lives when God asks us, “What are you doing with the resources that I have given you?” You have to be accountable, and accountability touches every area in the life of a believer.

Verse 24 says that when the master began to settle with his slaves, the one who owed him 10,000 talents was brought to him. Ten thousand talents was the equivalent of 60 to 80 pounds of gold, which would equate to approximately \$2

million in U.S. currency. We are not talking about \$2 million in today's currency. We're talking about \$2 million back in a time where they were making between 17 and 23 cents a day.

Verse 25 says that since the slave did not have the means to repay what he owed, the master commanded him to be sold along with his wife, his children and all that he had so repayment could be made. You see what debt does to a family? Debt enslaves you. It can cost you your marriage and your family. It can also cause you to lose or have repossessed the stuff you have accumulated. The number one reason for divorce in America is not infidelity. It is financial issues that do not get settled. Even when divorce comes, you end up paying lawyers and attorneys thousands of dollars fighting over who gets the kids and who gets the money. Excessive debt creates stress and stress affects your health.

In Verse 26, the servant fell to his knees before his master and begged him, saying, "Be patient with me, and I will pay back everything." This is a powerful statement, not because he prostrated himself, but because his first reaction to his excessive debt was to deal with his creditor. He said, "Be patient with me, and I will pay back everything." Now here is a man making 17 cents a day who is \$2 million in debt and is asking for time to pay it off. Even if he had 17 lifetimes, he could not pay off that amount of debt. What we see here is a man of character because he desired to pay back the loan.

The Bible says the master felt compassion for him and released him of his debt. I can imagine the master saying,

“You know what? You’ve got character because, first of all, you dealt with the creditor. Second of all, you desired to pay it back. So, I am going to release you from this debt.” You know what that is? That is called supernatural debt cancellation.

At the end of this parable Jesus challenges his disciples that when God has released you from so much in life that had you bound, is it too much for you to be a blessing to somebody else? In this text, both men had excessive debt and God was able to turn some things around. If you deal honestly with your debt, just watch what God does. You may think it is going to take you a long time to get out of debt, but if you exercise good character and have a desire to pay back what you owe, God steps into the middle of your situation and accelerates your deliverance. The unjust servant got the blessing. He approached it right, he dealt with it right, but then he committed an unforgivable error in judgment. The Bible says he ran and grabbed a man by the throat that owed him just a few denarii. According to the scripture, the unjust servant became violent toward the man that owed him. The master found out about what the slave had done, called him back and enslaved him until he could pay all of his debt. Here was a man who had been forgiven and blessed and was unwilling to be a blessing to somebody else.

I do not understand how some of us who have been delivered from difficult situations in our lives find it too much to be a blessing to the kingdom of God. You are the same person that other people were thinking would never make it,

and look at you now. Look at all that God has done for you. After you have been released, is it too much for you to be a blessing to someone else? The Bible says this: “That in the measure that you give, it will be measured back to you.”

As you continue to journey through the chapters of this book, I pray that this information will help answer some questions that you dared not ask before. Maybe you felt embarrassed and did not want to seek help thinking you are the only one in your situation and that no one will understand your plight. God wants you to come out of this lifestyle of entrapment. He loves you and he knows that you love him. This is why he places angels in our lives. They are our beacon of light guiding us down dark streets that we sometimes do not see. It may take time, but you are going to do it, and do it with the help of God, who provides the wisdom and knowledge. This book will enable you to reclaim the life that God has planned for you while you were in your mother’s womb.

Dear heavenly Father, in the name of Jesus, we bow down before you with an open heart asking you to assist your beloved children with getting their finances in order. Show wisdom and knowledge in their lives so it can be used wisely in breaking the strongholds that have kept them in bondage for too long. Instill in their hearts the joy of your love. These blessings we ask, in Jesus’ name. Amen.