



Leader's Guide

By William C. Wood

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Introduction

Getting a Grip on Your Money originated as a series of 13 group study lessons. Every chapter was piloted with an adult Sunday School class, while parts of the book were used with a variety of audiences, including schoolteachers and Bible study groups. This guide is intended to help you serve as a group leader in using the book.

Your Responsibilities

Here's what you need to do if you're the group leader:

1. Arrange for the meeting place and make sure it is comfortable before participants arrive. You will need a flip chart, blackboard, or overhead projector for some chapters' questions.
2. Look over the chapter you will be leading, paying particular attention to any preparation of cards or pieces of paper that will be necessary. Much of your work as a leader will involve collecting responses from group members, sharing them with the group and leading the discussion that results. Experience indicates that people are quite willing to discuss the subject matter, if only they can get a little encouragement.
3. Look over the suggested answers to the study questions in this guide – but understand that any given group may respond very differently from the answer suggested here.
4. At the beginning of the session, welcome participants and give a brief summary of what the chapter is about. Then work through the end-of-chapter questions. With a typical response from participants, you can spend 45-60 minutes answering the questions and discussing the answers.
5. Five minutes from the end of the session, try to conclude the discussion and find out if there are unanswered questions that will require someone to do homework and report back to the group.

6. Give some thought to the role of group prayer in your sessions. Some groups will want to open and close with prayer; some will want to share with each other about financial struggles they are facing; others will want to keep any financial struggles entirely to themselves. Make sure everyone understands that if someone talks about a financial struggle in the group, that the group will maintain the confidence and not discuss it anywhere else.

In one Sunday School quarter, you can cover this book at a rate of one chapter per week. Experience indicates that the pace is quite feasible. A four-session study on investment would include only Chapters 1, 6, 7, 8, and 9, with Chapters 1 and 6 covered in a (busy) first session, and the remaining chapters each covered in a single session.

1. Declare Victory and Admit Defeat

This chapter outlines the central strategy of the book: to “declare victory,” by developing the will to improve your finances, and to “admit defeat,” by recognizing that you won’t develop the perfect financial plan.

Materials to prepare:

Small slips of paper or cards, one for each participant
Flip chart or blackboard

Featured Scripture:

Matthew 16:24-27

Study Questions and Answers

1. Along with the other participants in your study group, write down your top three financial goals – not sensitive ones, so that they’re OK to share. Then pass your sheet of paper to the group leader. After the group leader has chosen one person’s set of financial goals and written them on a chalkboard or flip chart, try to guess whose goals they are. (Of course, the author of the goals should not give it away at first.) Repeat with each person’s goals.

a. Why did you guess that a certain person had a certain set of goals?

b. Are your goals very different from those of others in the group?

c. Do any of the goals being discussed conflict with the goal of following Christ? Could they, if pushed too far? Why or why not?

In many groups, the goals will be very similar, so that you can begin using tally marks next to already-mentioned goals such as “save for future education.” Almost any goal that people are likely to mention can conflict with the goal of following Christ, if pushed too far. For example, the

admirable goal of saving for retirement can come into conflict with helping others in need, if it becomes an all-consuming focus.

2. Make two lists. In the first of them, list the top five sources of joy or satisfaction you've had in the last five years. In the second, list the top five sources of stress or worry in the last five years. Compare your lists with those of others in the group.

a. Did money show up on either list? On both lists?

Why?

b. Would it be a good objective to have money show up on neither list?

Usually money shows up as a source of stress and worry – but rarely as a source of joy or satisfaction. I believe that it would be a good objective to have money show up on neither list. If we get our joy and satisfaction from the right things, and control our finances so that we don't worry, then money won't show up on those lists.

3. In the chapter's example of Chris and Dusty, were you surprised that Dusty never overcame that late start to catch up with Chris? (It's surprising to most people, unless they have seen the example before.)

Why don't people save more money when they're young, if it makes such a big difference to their later wealth?

Youth makes people very “now”-oriented, and this problem may be increasing over time. Wealth later in life seems very remote to a young person. (This is part of the same attitude that makes some young people take risks as if they were immortal.) It's a rare young person who can consciously make the tradeoff to spend less now and receive more – even much more – in the future.

4. Read Proverbs 30:7-9. Which is a more difficult spiritual problem, too much money or too little? Why? Which have you experienced more of?

Most people will say that too much money is a bigger spiritual problem, because it makes it easy to forget our dependence on God. Believers who have too little money at

a given time are not likely to overlook that! Most people will say they have experienced “too little money” more than “too much,” and this usually holds true across a wide variety of income levels. Many people believe that “10 percent more” would be enough, whether they’re starting from a position of relative poverty or relative abundance.

5. If you played the lottery and won a \$10 payout, how much of the money would you give to the church? Why?

Some people respond with a standard 10 percent answer, because they are familiar with the custom of the tithe (giving a tenth of all income to the church). Others believe that they would give a much larger fraction, perhaps half. Still others believe that it would be immoral to play the lottery in the first place and that money won would be tainted.

6. If you’re going on a diet, is it smart to throw out all of the high-calorie treats that are currently in the house? Why or why not?

It’s a smart idea to remove the temptation if you want your diet to succeed. A cynic would say that it would be smarter not to throw the treats away, because your diet will fail anyway and then you’ll have to spend money to restock. But approaching the diet with that attitude in the first place will likely doom the dieter to failure.

7. Read Matthew 16:24-27. Would we approach our jobs and careers any differently if we promised ourselves to faithfully follow this teaching?

This is mostly a rhetorical question with the obvious answer being “yes,” we approach everything differently when we devote ourselves first to taking up the cross and following Jesus. Remember that the cross was seen in biblical times entirely as an instrument of execution – its religious symbolism was yet to come – so this was no light commitment that Jesus was calling for.

2. Get Control of Your Budget

This chapter is vital. The most important financial technique taught in the chapter is also the most simple: *Spend less than you make*. If you can't do this, then you can't accomplish any goal other than spending. The spiritual goal of all this is important, too: to get control of your budget so that money reflects your life priorities.

Materials to prepare:

Blank copies of Matt and Jan's checkbook with blank columns out to the right, two for each participant or couple (copy from book or download into Microsoft Excel from <http://www.plainmoney.com/studyaims.htm>; then print).

Featured Scripture:

Matthew 23:23

Study Questions and Answers

1. At the end of this chapter there is a copy of Matt and Jan's checkbook register and, to the right, some empty boxes. Using the empty spaces, divide up the budget into (1) marriage, (2) children, (3) giving, (4) personal growth, and (5) everything else. (This has already been done for you in figure 2.3, but don't look there. It's good for you to go through the exercise of apportioning expenses among different value categories.)

a. Matt and Jan say that marriage, children and giving are their top personal values. Does their budget agree?

Their budget doesn't agree, especially when it comes to giving. Although there may actually be some giving going on (out of "cash" into the offering plate on Sunday), they're certainly not giving much. Also, although Matt and Jan do

play golf together sometimes, it's a stretch to call all those golf expenditures "marriage."

b. If you don't spend much on something, does that mean you don't value it? Why or why not?

No, you can still value something highly without spending a lot of money. The "children" category may provide the best illustration of this. Spending time with children may reflect a very high priority for children, yet it might not cost very much.

c. If you did this exercise with your own checkbook, what would it say about your spending and your values?

This question is not intended entirely as a guilt-producer, though it may have that effect on some participants. A gentle reminder here could be useful: "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." (Matthew 6:21). Still, remember that the purpose of these sessions is not to condemn anybody, but to help all those present get a grip on their money.

2. Which is easier for you as you think about spending less than you make, (1) spending less or (2) making more? Do you think it's the same way for most people? Why?

For most people, "spending less" is easier than "making more." That's because they've already thought of the best ways of making more, and are currently doing the best that they can. Also, frequently "making more" means changing jobs – and with it, making an important life change – while "spending less" can be done without major life changes.

3. Read Matthew 23:23. What does this verse say to Christians today as they think about whether to give away a tenth, more than a tenth, or less than a tenth of their income?

To many Christians, this passage implies an obligation to give away a tenth of their income. Even the Pharisees did that, and Jesus commended the practice even as he

criticized the Pharisees for neglecting justice, mercy and faithfulness. (However, some authors believe that the Old Testament tithe, as a rigid and mandatory percentage, no longer applies to New Testament Christians. These authors call for giving that “flows from the heart and is personally determined” but could apparently be less than 10 percent. See John MacArthur, *Whose Money is It Anyway? A Biblical Guide to Using God’s Wealth*. Nashville: Word Publishing, 2000.) My concern is that without even a rough guideline, New Testament Christians will give away, say, 0.5 percent and miss out on the victory that we win over money when we give away a substantial amount. The very act of giving helps us demonstrate to ourselves that money doesn’t have a hold on us. And remember, in Matthew 23:23, the observance of the tithe was the only thing commended about the Pharisees.

4. Many people feel that they spend as much money as they get, no matter what that amount is. As a result, while they may receive pay raises that add up to a lot over the years, they don’t end up saving any more money. Why is that? Why do most people save money more easily if they never see it (for example, if it’s taken out of their paycheck before they’re paid)?

The most common answer to this question is “human nature,” and that’s not a bad answer at all. Whatever the reason, people do seem to do better with saving money if they’ve never seen it but instead have had it deducted from the paycheck. Apparently the inconvenience of getting at the money that’s been deducted provides just the little boost that many people need to follow up on their good intentions to save more.

5. Does most of your debt finance long-term assets, like a car or a house? Or is it just the product of spending on things like vacations that are here today and gone tomorrow? What’s the problem with financing things for longer than their useful life?

When you finance things for longer than their useful life, you set up the situation, out into the future, when you’ll simply be paying fixed costs for debt each month without getting a corresponding benefit. If you finance things only

for as long as their useful life, you're at least getting the benefit and paying the costs at the same time. Notice also: If you finance something for less than its useful life, there will be a time when it's paid off and you're getting the benefit without facing a monthly fixed cost.

6. Read 1 Timothy 5:8, then 5:3-10 (the surrounding verses) for context. Do these verses obligate you to support your brother if he is in need? What if he is in need because he's lazy and never wanted to work?

Clearly there is a strong Scriptural obligation to support one's family. Also, in a situation of true need we would want to meet the need first and ask questions later. However, it is not in the long-term best interests of a family member to support that person in idleness. Paul even wrote to the Thessalonians, "If a man will not work, he shall not eat" (2 Thessalonians 3:10). It's important to understand the context of 2 Thessalonians, but there is no Scriptural obligation for the industrious to support and encourage laziness.

3. Insurance and Banking

This is the first of three chapters on specific financial areas, before the text gets into investing. In this chapter it's insurance and banking, followed in succeeding chapters by housing and cars. Although we're moving on to new material, it's sometimes worthwhile to remind participants that they can't have healthy finances if they can't *spend less than they make*. Also, it's good to remind people why they're trying to spend less than they make: not to accumulate more money and things, but to worry less about money and keep it in its proper place.

Materials to prepare:

Barn raising cards, copied and cut apart, one for each participant.

Featured Scripture:

Matthew 25:14-30

Study Questions and Answers

1. At the end of this chapter you'll find a set of cards that represent the different jobs that might be done at a barn raising. Copy them and cut them apart. They'll help your study group realize how great it is that God has given us different abilities, so that we can work as teams more effectively than we could as individuals.

a. Along with everyone else in the group, draw a card at random. Would you be good at doing what your card says?

This activity can be fun, and can help members of a group get to know each other better. Don't just rush through it. People will have definite opinions about what jobs they'd do well at the barn raising.

b. Now trade your card for someone else's – but only if the other party will consent. Answer again: Would you be good at doing what your card says now?

More people will now say they're good at doing what their card says. Otherwise, they ordinarily wouldn't trade. This is a small illustration of the idea of specialization – doing what you're good at, whether in your job or your family or your church.

c. Who won and who lost when people traded cards?

Ordinarily, both parties would have gained, if they traded voluntarily.

d. What would you do at a barn raising if you didn't think you were good at anything on any of the cards?

Most participants will understand that everyone can make a contribution in a group project like a barn raising, even if it's only running errands so that one of the top-notch carpenters can keep hammering.

e. Could house raisings today take the place of home insurance? Why or why not?

House raisings today would be difficult to substitute for insurance, because of specialization. Most of us, unlike the farmers of the past, have specialized in diverse fields that make us poor builders as a result. Also, the voluntary nature of the old barn raisings would be hard to translate into today's terms.

2. Do you believe that buying insurance shows a lack of trust in God? Why or why not?

People may have different views on this, but most will be comfortable with insurance as a modern practice – even while they may feel that voluntary aid to those in need would be better.

3. If insurance customers choose the lowest deductible possible, they have the smallest out-of-pocket expense when an accident occurs. So, isn't it a good idea to

get the lowest deductible? Why or why not?

The main problem here is that low-deductible policies cost a lot. It's expensive for the insurance company to handle and pay small claims, and that expense gets built into the cost of low-deductible policies. They're so expensive that a larger deductible is often a better buy.

4. Read the parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30). Is this parable actually about money? If not, what is it about?

Although the parable directly concerns money, the larger point seems to be the use of abilities and resources. Note that in Matthew 25:21, "His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'" The promise was that the servant would share in the master's happiness because he was good and faithful, not just that he would have a lot of money because he had invested astutely.

5. Is it possible to have "too much money in your checking account"? To have "too much money for your own good?" Explain.

The woes of lottery winners tell us it is possible for some people to have "too much money for their own good." It's also quite possible to have "too much money in your checking account," in that it could be earning more interest – and be less subject to overspending – if it were not in checking.

6. Why would freezing a credit card in a block of ice help some people control their overspending? Couldn't they just thaw it out and go shopping anyway? What else might work for people with a credit problem?

The freezing trick works because some people are capable of restraining their spending if they stop and think about it – and the ice block makes them stop and think. Something else that works is simply cutting down on the number of credit cards; many other strategies are possible.

4. A Roof Over Your Head

This chapter concerns housing, usually an individual or household's biggest monthly expense. Because housing is usually a fixed cost each month, when it's too big it's hard to make the rest of the budget work. On the positive side, if housing costs are well within reach, the rest of the budget is much easier.

Materials to prepare:

Question 1 will work best if you prepare little slips of paper so that the group will be able to turn in answers to you, which you then will write on a blackboard or flip chart for everyone to see.

Featured Scripture:

Proverbs 21:5

Study Questions and Answers

- 1. Consider the immediate family or household of which you are currently a part.***
 - a. What is the minimum number of bedrooms you need?***
 - b. What is the minimum number of bathrooms you need?***
 - c. Do you know of a family or household living in your area that is made up of the same number of people as yours but that occupies a smaller number of bedrooms and bathrooms than you specified? If so, how can they get by with less than they "need"? What does it mean to "need" something if you can get by without it?***

People often respond, depending on household size, that they "need" one bedroom for each person and almost as many bathrooms. And, frequently there will be a household in the area with as many people but a smaller number of

bedrooms and bathrooms. This all refers to the point that people use the word “need” not to indicate a necessity, but rather to describe a highly desirable goal – even if, properly speaking, it’s a “want” or a “luxury” instead of a “need.”

2. In your opinion, are people generally happier today than they were in the time of your grandparents? If not, why not? Is it that their housing or food or clothing is worse than in the time of your grandparents?

Relative happiness across generations is impossible to measure authoritatively, but many participants believe that people were happier in the time of their grandparents. If so, that indicates that happiness doesn’t depend much on material goods. Few, especially in the United States or Western Europe, will believe that housing, food or clothing is worse today than then.

3. Would Jesus have us (1) live in mansions, or (2) live in something less than mansions so that we could identify with others and have more money to give away? Why not small houses instead of large houses, for the same reason? Why not mobile homes or tents instead of small houses? Does Jesus want us to be homeless?

This is a difficult and challenging question. It’s easy enough to see that we shouldn’t live in extravagant mansions, but the same logic could easily take us far down the housing scale. As the chapter points out, Jesus did not own a home (Matthew 8:20); but, he did not appear to be advising others not to own homes. Simon Peter apparently owned a home that he and others used (Matthew 8:14), and Mary and Martha in Bethany owned a home where Jesus was a welcome guest (Luke 10:38). As the chapter also points out, Christians are sometimes called on to leave homes or lands for the sake of their faith (Mark 10:29-30, Luke 18:29-30).

4. What does Proverbs 21:5 say to someone who wants to buy or sell a house in a hurry? Is it possible to take the advice of Proverbs 21:5 too far or too literally?

The implication of the passage is clear; haste leads to poverty. As with most sound advice, however, it can be taken too far or too literally. There are times when people do need to move forward on a housing transaction, prayerfully but quickly. Still, experience suggests that far more people regret moving too quickly than moving too slowly on housing.

5. Deuteronomy 15:1 says, “At the end of every seven years you must cancel debts.” This was part of the Old Testament law that had the effect of keeping people out of debt trouble. Some Christians believe that Deuteronomy 15:1 means they should not take out a home loan with a term longer than seven years. Do you agree?

Most people consider this suggestion impractical in today’s society. It is possible for young people just starting out to observe the seven-year limit if they wish, but typically by renting and saving money for a long time, or by settling for a used mobile home or other lower quality housing for their first owned residence. With that home paid off, they could “trade up” to something nicer, perhaps several times, without violating the seven-year limit. However, Old Testament customs on debt are not observed by today’s Christians; this is just another example of the ever-present question: How much of the Old Testament is to be observed by New Testament Christians?

6. At times there are many people who could save \$200 per month by refinancing their mortgages at an expense of \$2000. That is, they’d recoup their refinancing expense in about ten months, then be \$200 per month better off for years. Yet they don’t refinance. Why don’t they?

“Human nature,” “laziness,” and “lack of information” are all possible answers. It has often been observed that people are slow to take advantage of deals that are very much in their favor, *if those deals involve up-front expenditure of money*. Similar results have been observed in appliance purchases, when people will save a few dollars on an energy-inefficient appliance, only to pay higher utility bills

for the life of the appliance.

5. Wheels

This chapter is the last in a series of practical chapters on spending decisions before the investment chapters start. Financial advisers are familiar with the fact that people lose thousands of dollars by buying and selling cars too frequently. This chapter is aimed at helping people make better decisions and worry less about transportation.

Materials to prepare:

Slips of paper for question 1.

Featured Scripture:

Matthew 13:3-23

Study Questions and Answers

1. Mark a piece of paper with a response to the following question: Relative to the group of people in this room, are you (a) a better-than-average negotiator, (b) a worse-than-average negotiator, or (c) an average negotiator?

a. Tally the responses for your group. Did more than half of the people say they're better than average? If so, they can't be right.

Typically, more than half of the people think they are above average. They can't all be right.

b. Discuss: How do people become good negotiators? Is it a skill that improves with practice? Is it a skill that some people are just born with?

Some people seem to have a native ability to negotiate well. However, negotiation skills improve with practice. If you have someone in the group who has worked in sales, that person can tell the group about the benefits of experience.

c. Discuss: How do you know if you got a good deal

when you negotiated the price of a new car? If the sales manager of the dealership says you did, is that good evidence that you got a good deal?

No, they'll always tell you that you got a good deal. It's part of the job. You can tell if you got a good deal only by comparing your price with actual prices paid on similar models by others, and typically that information is unavailable.

d. Can a Christian be a good negotiator in a car showroom?

Yes, a Christian can be a good negotiator, but techniques such as lying – often effective in a negotiating situation – can't be used by the conscientious Christian. Still, most of us have met Christians that had such force of personality that they could negotiate a good deal ethically. We also know people who couldn't use lying effectively, because they're not very good liars – and that's not an insult!

2. Social observers have said that the United States has “a love affair with the automobile.” Do you have a love affair with your automobile? Do you have a love affair with an auto-supported lifestyle?

People sometimes recoil at the idea of having a love affair with a mere machine like the automobile. However, many will admit, if they're honest, that they miss the auto-supported lifestyle when they don't have it (for example, when they go to work in Manhattan, or when they give up driving for a few days because the car is being fixed, or perhaps even when they go off to a retreat where they're on foot several days.)

3. Read the parable of the sower (Matthew 13:3-23). What are the “thorns” that choke out God's Word today? That is, what did Jesus mean when he referred to “the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth?”

One good answer to what the “thorns” are is to simply turn on the television and look carefully at the advertisements. The material goods, the luxuries and the lifestyles that are

being portrayed rarely lead to simplicity and appreciation of God's creation.

4. Many people work hard to save a few cents by buying generic food items, or drive a few miles to save a dollar on gasoline, but then easily agree to automotive options that cost hundreds or thousands of dollars. Why?

One answer to this question is “car fever,” but another answer would be that people spend a lot of time in their cars and they want to be comfortable there. Still another answer is that people look at the monthly payment rather than the costs of options, and rationalize spending thousands because it will only add a few dollars to the payment.

5. Do you always have all the recommended maintenance done on your car, and on time? Or do you just drive it until it breaks? Or something in between? Is it poor stewardship of a resource to do less than all the recommended maintenance? What spiritual attitude is reflected by driving a car with defective safety equipment (bald tires, for example)?

Few people do all the recommended maintenance on time. Given the cost and inconvenience of car maintenance, something less than perfect maintenance is probably consistent with good stewardship of time and resources. However, driving a car with defective safety equipment like bald tires reflects a lack of care for the lives and health of the driver and others.

6. Many of us think of our cars as necessary to live our busy lifestyles, and we often think our time is over-committed. Who made us too busy, and who overcommitted us? Is this even a fair question to ask?

The short answer is that *we* chose our busy lifestyles. A longer answer would note that it's difficult to live a simple and quiet lifestyle in a busy and noisy society; however, the intent of this question is to get participants to look at their lifestyles and realize that they can take more control if they really want to.

6. The Simple Approach to Investing

This chapter starts a series of investment chapters by laying out the simple approach to investing: *buying and holding* assets (rather than *buying and selling*), and not striving to play or time the asset markets. This approach is strikingly successful over time, and far better for most investors than anything more complicated. Among financial insiders, this simple approach is obviously the best for new investors. Even seasoned investors will find it hard to beat the results of the approach outlined in this chapter.

Materials to prepare:

Slips of paper for question 1.

Featured Scripture:

Luke 12:16-21

Study Questions and Answers

1. On a piece of paper, writes down (anonymously) something nice that a neighbor of yours has, such as a new boat or a big-screen television. Then hand in your piece of paper to the group leader, who will record all of the responses on a chalkboard or flip chart. As you consider the list, answer these questions:

a. Is it coveting to admire the nice thing that your neighbor has?

No, if you admire it and you're happy for your neighbor, it's not coveting. It becomes coveting when you envy it and wish you had it.

b. Are there any items on the list that would cause more of a problem for you than others would? Are there any items that aren't any problem at all –

because you're glad your neighbor has it but you don't want it?

This question simply points out that coveting problems aren't uniform. Some material goods present substantial temptations to some of us, while others are harmless.

c. Is it coveting to wish that you had made the same lucrative investment your neighbor made?

Yes, it's easy for admiration of your neighbor's skill or luck in this case to turn into coveting.

d. Are there times in your life when you're more susceptible to wanting something that your neighbor has?

Yes, there are such times, including, for example, the time when people are first moving out on their own. They often keenly notice who has a nice apartment or home and how nicely furnished it is. At other times in life, it seems not to matter much (such as among young parents who are totally consumed with taking care of the kids, or among senior citizens in some senior communities).

2. What do you usually do with your income tax refund? Would it be difficult to allow yourself a small amount from it to spend on anything you wanted, then save the rest? Why or why not?

Most people go out and spend it, and most people find it difficult to do otherwise. People think of the money as very much deserved, since they earned it in the first place; some even think of it as a gift from the government, forgetting that the government withheld the taxes from their paychecks all year long.

3. Do you pay any attention to the day-by-day reports on how the Dow Jones Industrial Average is doing? If that average is much higher or lower in a given day, will that be a topic of conversation in among your friends and associates? Will you be emotionally affected by it?

This differs across homes and workplaces. At the height of stock market mania, the Dow Jones Industrial Average does become a topic of everyday conversation in many quarters, and people who are tracking their stock balances get emotionally involved with the ups and downs. In more normal times, only a huge move (up or down) in the stock market will be noticed.

4. Suppose a mysterious stranger walked up and gave you \$1,000. It's yours to keep, but the stranger offers you a deal. (You trust her to deal honestly.) She'll flip a coin and if it comes up heads, you double your money to \$2,000. If it comes up tails, you have to give back the \$1,000. Would you accept this deal? Would your answer change if the stranger offered you \$10,000 for heads and the same deal on tails? What do your answers say about your willingness to take risk?

People who are highly “risk averse” keep the \$1000, period. People who are more tolerant of risk, or even are risk seekers, would be intrigued by the gamble. There are some investments that offer a history of modest fluctuations, and some that offer high volatility. The highly risk averse will avoid the more volatile investments.

5. Suppose you learned that your closest friend had turned a \$1,000 investment into \$20,000 by purchasing the stock of a new bank in town. At the time the friend bought the stock, you didn't hear anything about it. Would you be angry at your friend for not letting you in on the deal? Why or why not? If your friend had risked \$1,000 on a speculative investment and lost it all, do you think you'd hear about it?

Most people answer that they wouldn't be angry about not being let in on the deal, especially if it was speculative. The friend might simply have been saving the friendship from the strain that would occur if he had recommended the deal and it went sour. Also, most people don't say much about their investment losses – while they're quick to talk about investment gains. This can cause people to overestimate the gains that others are making.

6. Read the parable of the rich fool (Luke 12:16-21). What kinds of “crops” do we harvest today that would raise the possibility that we would fall into the same mistake as the rich fool? Does this parable argue against Christians having savings accounts?

The “crops” today are more likely to be dividends and investment gains than agricultural crops. The parable does argue against an attitude that denies dependence on God but, properly interpreted, does not argue against prudent savings by someone. The specific warning is directed to “anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God” (Luke 12:21).

7. Taxes and Other Leakages

This chapter continues the investment section by discussing two very different kinds of “leakages” from investment accounts. The first kind, taxes and fees, is the kind that reduces investment return, perhaps substantially, over time. The second kind is more subtle. In this case, the investor doesn’t actually lose any money, but does end up supporting causes that he or she doesn’t believe in.

Materials to prepare:

Slips of paper for question 1.

Featured Scripture:

Mark 12:13-17

Study Questions and Answers

1. On a piece of paper, complete this sentence, “What I dislike the most about taxes is _____.”

Pass in your paper to the group leader, who will read aloud all responses from the study group members.

a. Do all the reasons for disliking taxes really come down to having to give up money?

For many people, the objection is what the government does with the money. That is, they say they don’t especially mind giving up the money, but they feel it’s wasted or spent on improper things.

b. Do you dislike the sales tax, which is automatically tacked on to purchases at the cash register in most jurisdictions?

Many people think of the sales tax as the fairest, because everybody pays it at the cash register and there appear to be no loopholes.

c. Do you believe that the income tax, as currently administered, is fair?

People don't think of the current income tax as fair, because it's complex and they know that people – especially those who can afford tax lawyers and accountants – can arrange tax matters to their favor.

d. Do you believe that injustices in the current tax system justify under-reporting of income, to avoid giving money to a corrupt system?

Most people don't think they're morally justified in cheating the income tax system, even if they think the system is corrupt.

2. Is it possible to save large amounts of money for retirement but still “live for today”? Or does saving for retirement necessarily make you more forward-looking and more worried?

It is possible to save large amounts for retirement and then essentially to forget about those amounts, perhaps occasionally reading the statements that come in the mail. Still, saving for retirement does tend to make people more forward-looking. This may or may not result in more worry.

3. Suppose a worker buys some shares of her company's stock through an employee stock purchase plan, and suppose that after a time the worker is free to do whatever she wants with the stock. Is it disloyal for her to sell it and put the proceeds into a mutual fund?

Some people would regard this as disloyal, but with the experience of employees losing life savings in company stock (Enron in 2001 is just one example), many people would consider this to be only sensible. Note also that the worker in this question is complying with the plan's requirement to hold company stock for a time before converting it to another asset.

4. Would you invest in a pornography company's stock

to get high returns? How about a tobacco company or a company that sells alcoholic beverages? How about a mortgage bank that lends money to people whose lifestyles you don't approve of? Or to put it another way, how can you invest money and be sure that you won't be supporting something you disapprove of?

The short answer is that you can never be totally sure your money won't be supporting something you disapprove of. That's partly because of the nature of money. It transfers purchasing power, and then you don't have much control over what the recipient does with it. However, all of us can direct money in ways that make it less likely that the money will go directly to something we don't support; we can use methods such as investing in socially responsible mutual funds that meet our definition of social responsibility.

5. Many investors prefer not to invest, directly or indirectly, in the stocks of companies that produce tobacco, because of tobacco's role in causing illness. Should they also withhold their investment funds from restaurant chains that serve large amounts of high-fat foods, also implicated in causing illness? Why or why not?

This is a difficult question. Some will say there's no difference, so that if you withhold your investment from tobacco stocks you should also withhold your investment from high-fat restaurant chains. Those who distinguish the cases will say that people can get a healthy meal by carefully choosing at a high-fat restaurant chain, while no one can get a healthy cigarette from a tobacco company.

6. Read Mark 12:13-17.

a. Why were the Pharisees and Herodians asking Jesus about taxes? Was it that they wanted to be sure to live a faithful life?

No, it was a trap. They were trying "to catch him in his words" (Mark 12:13).

b. In verse 17, what is Caesar's? Today, what do we owe to the government?

This question could have a long answer. A short answer is that Caesar had the right to taxes and compliance with laws that did not violate God's law. Today, Christians owe their governments taxes and, again, compliance with laws that do not violate God's law.

c. In verse 17, what is God's? What do we owe to God?

Verse 17 says, "Then Jesus said to them, 'Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's.' And they were amazed at him." Notice that Jesus did not lay down a long set of rules, but instead described an attitude or a way of living. In short, we owe everything to God, but our response is to be a victorious way of living rather than an endless desire to derive rules and follow them (the Pharisees' approach).

8. Bonds and Bond Funds

This chapter continues the investment material with a second major kind of investment, bonds. Bonds have more safety but less return than stocks. They're useful for most investors to hold, and should form the majority of the holdings for those who need to assume less risk.

Materials to prepare:

Two slips of paper for each participant for question 1.

Featured Scripture:

Luke 6:30-38

Study Questions and Answers

1. On a piece of paper, complete the sentence, "If I thought that Jesus Christ would surely be returning to earth tomorrow, then tonight I would _____." Pass in the results to the group leader, who will record the responses on a flip chart or chalkboard.

a. What is the most prevalent answer among the members of your group?

Most answers center on repentance and prayer. Some will also mention singing and worship.

b. Can you do enough good works in a day to assure your salvation? In a week? In a year? In a lifetime?

No. This question is just a reminder that we are saved by grace. "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast." (Ephesians 2:8-9).

c. How much of your preparation for Christ's coming would be financial?

Again, the answer is obvious: None of it would be financial. This question is only a reminder that money just won't matter.

2. Complete the sentence, "If I thought the world and national economies were going to collapse in six months, before that happened I would _____." Again, pass in the results to the group leader for recording with the others.

a. How much effort would you devote toward getting food -- and the guns to defend it with?

There are some in the survivalist movement who recommend no investment at all until you have "a year's food and the guns to defend it with." That's the source of the wording in the question. Some would follow this advice, while others wouldn't like the role of armed defender of a food cache.

b. Do you think you would be prepared at the end of the six months?

Many people believe they wouldn't be prepared, because of the uncertainty of knowing that a collapse really would come.

c. Would you take money, with penalties, out of your retirement fund to prepare for the collapse?

Only a few would, again because of the uncertainty of a collapse.

d. Would you be more confident in making radical financial changes if Christian leaders and authors began warning that an "economic earthquake" was coming?

The wording here is again deliberate. Some people actually took money out of retirement accounts, with substantial penalties, after reading *The Coming Economic Earthquake* by Christian author Larry Burkett (Moody 1991). They are now far worse off than if they had neglected his advice. The predicted economic earthquake may yet come but Burkett's

more recent writings have moderated the tone of the warning.

3. Suppose a stranger came to your town claiming that he had invented “the next Frisbee,” a plastic toy that would become as successful as the original Frisbee. He wants you to lend him \$1,000 for a year while he begins manufacturing and selling this toy. What rate of interest would he have to promise to get you to lend him your money? What does your answer say about risk and return?

Most will say they wouldn't lend at any rate of interest, while others may say it would take a truly high rate, maybe 20, 50 or 100 percent. This illustrates that there is a tradeoff between risk and return. You'll only assume more risk if you expect a higher return. The other side of this: When an investment has a high return, you can count on it having a high risk.

4. What if a financial planner told you, “Everyone needs to have some underperforming assets, whether it's bonds, stocks or whatever. If all of your assets have done well, that's a sign you haven't diversified enough – and you won't have any money in ‘losers’ that are about to become winners.” Would you agree? Would you want to have some underperforming assets among your investments? Would you trust this financial planner more or less than a planner who said you should never keep underperforming assets?

This question checks to see whether participants really have understood the principle of diversification. If they have, then they'll want to have some underperforming assets at all times – since some of them (we don't know which) are about to become the next star performers.

5. Why do investment professionals say that you have to make two correct decisions in order to “time the market?” How much effort should you spend monitoring the stock market and shifting between stocks and bonds?

The two correct decisions are (1) when to sell (when the

market's about to crash) and (2) when to buy in again (when the crash is over and stocks are about to begin going up again). That's hard to do. Average investors should spend almost no time monitoring the market or shifting assets, instead just checking yearly to see that their preferred mix of stocks and bonds isn't too far out of line.

6. Read Luke 6:30-38. Is Jesus giving financial advice in these verses? Do you believe that this passage forbids Christians from investing in bond funds that seek to pay back investors' principal plus interest?

These passages are about having a giving attitude, *even toward our enemies*, and having a giving lifestyle. They do not appear to prohibit lending as an investment, but equally they do not support a lifestyle that never gives to others. It is difficult to love our enemies, but that is what Jesus calls us to do, even to the point of giving to them and not expecting repayment.

9. Avoiding Investment Mistakes

This chapter is the last of the four on investment proper. Although the chapter mentions many specific mistakes you can make, they come down to (1) getting greedy and (2) overestimating your own financial knowledge. The entire chapter is designed as an antidote to the get-rich-quick mentality featured in some personal finance magazines, and in water-cooler conversations during bull-market times.

Materials to prepare:

Copied scripts for readers in question 1 (if they don't have their own copies of the book)

Featured Scripture:

Ecclesiastes 9:11

Study Questions and Answers

1. Listen as two members of your study group read the following dialogue aloud. (Or you could be one of those two members!)

[Phone rings]

Terry: Hello.

Telemarketer: Hello, Terry Reynolds?

Terry: Yes, this is Terry.

Telemarketer: Terry, my name is Chris DeShazo and I'm with United Equity Investments. We're calling financially aware people like yourself to let them in on an outstanding new investment opportunity. Would you like to earn more on your investment dollars?

Terry: Well, yes, but I'm not interested.

Telemarketer: Your name was recommended to us by your former pastor, Robert Underwood. He and other Christians are especially interested in our investment

products because they know our firm was founded by a strong Christian . . .

Then discuss:

a. How far do telemarketers usually get with you when you get a call like this?

Most people will answer, “not as far as this dialogue went.” They would have hung up sooner.

b. Would it make a difference to you if an investment were recommended by a “Christian” investment company?

To many people the answer is “yes,” but they’re skeptical, as experience suggests they should be. There are those who exploit Christians’ trust.

c. Would you think less of your former pastor if you believed that he had given your name to a company like United Equity Investments”?

Most people would say yes.

d. Could you be certain that your former pastor gave your name out just because the salesperson says that the pastor did?

This is just a reminder that if an investment company is unethical in one area, that company probably won’t be shy about lying in another area. You can’t be certain that your former pastor gave them your name.

2. Most people naturally suspect that an investment isn’t a good deal if it’s pushed on them with a very short time to decide. Why, then, does pushing investments with time pressure work so well?

“Lack of information” and “greed” are two possible answers, but it’s still surprising how well high-pressure sales pitches work, even on people who sense something is wrong.

3. It is well known that buying and selling stocks in a

short time is quite risky. It is also well known that holding stocks over a long time period (“buy and hold”) is a profitable strategy. Why, then, is the idea of buying and selling stocks frequently in a short period of time so attractive to people? Is buying and selling stocks in a short period just a form of gambling? Is it more respectable than gambling? More fun?

Short-run buying and selling appeals to the idea that a smart person can make money just by using that intelligence – without having to do any physical work. For most people, the outcome of short-run buying and selling is so unpredictable that it is a form of gambling. However, it is more respectable than gambling because of the thought that smart research can make it profitable. Some short-term stock traders find it more fun than gambling, or at least more accessible.

4. Suppose 100,000 people gather in a stadium for a big experiment. Each takes out a regular coin (not a rigged coin) and flips it. Everyone who flips “tails” has to leave, but everyone who flips “heads” gets to flip again. After the first round, about half the people are left (50,000). Then 25,000 people are left, and after that, 12,500. After some more rounds, only a handful remain. Are the remaining coin flippers good at coin flipping or just lucky?

They’re just lucky, period.

Thousands of stock analysts try to pick good stocks. Are the ones who pick high-returning stocks good at it or just lucky? How can you tell?

And here’s the point. You can’t tell which ones are good and which ones are just lucky. Most people aren’t in a position to evaluate the investment “theories” that are being proposed, so they judge by looks or feelings.

5. Why do people want to apply the word “investment” to an expenditure that’s clearly not an investment, like a new sports car?

For some people, this is surely to make themselves feel better about something that's an indulgence. The word "investment" has a solid feel to it.

6. Have someone read Ecclesiastes 9:11. What does this passage say to us today? What does it say about our investments? After its survey of the seeming emptiness of life, what conclusion does Ecclesiastes reach (see 12:13-14)?

This passage means that life isn't fair; that "time and chance happen to them all." The essence of the conclusion is an admonition to "Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole [duty] of man" (from verse 13). At times, the bitterness of Ecclesiastes seems headed toward the opposite conclusion: life is meaningless, so don't bother to keep God's commandments. In the end, though, the Teacher (the author of Ecclesiastes) reminds us that "God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil." (from verse 14)

10. Saving for Big-Ticket Items

The investment chapters (6-9) have almost exclusively a long-term focus. In this chapter we look at shorter-term goals such as saving for education or housing. Although the best long-term strategy is “buy and hold index funds,” modifications are necessary for the shorter term, for money that will be spent in a relatively shorter length of time.

Materials to prepare:

Slips of paper for question 1.

Featured Scripture:

Matthew 6:31-34

Study Questions and Answers

1. Fill in the blanks of the following sentence: If I had it to do over again, the three things I would change about my education would be (1) _____, (2) _____, and (3) _____.

Share your responses with the rest of the group, as they share theirs with you.

a. Do most members of the group with they had more education or less education?

Usually the answer is “more.”

b. Is there anyone in the group who answered, “I would have studied less and partied more”?

Usually there isn’t anyone, unless that person is joking. Partying usually seems more attractive at the time than in retrospect.

c. Is there anyone in the group who answered, “I would have saved less money to pay for education”?

Usually not. The point of these questions is that people rarely regret getting more education or saving more to pay for it.

2. If you were going to make a down payment on a house four years from now, how comfortable would you be about leaving that money in the stock market until then? Why?

The answer to this question depends on the times. In stock market booms, some people will think the market can only go up and will think it's OK to leave the money in the market as long as possible. When the market is unsteady, the folly of leaving the money in the market will be apparent.

3. Does the year that occurs between each birthday you celebrate seem to be shorter now than when you were younger? Why do you think this is? Is it related to Psalm 39: 4-5?

Most people think this happens because a year is a shorter proportion of one's life as time goes by. One year is 20 percent of a lifetime to a 5-year-old, but only 3 percent of a lifetime to a 33-year-old. Psalm 39 speaks of how life is "fleeting" and "but a breath"; only with age do people fully appreciate this fact.

4. Does Matthew 6:31-34 teach us not to seek food or clothing at all? Should we just sit back waiting for it to fall out of the sky? If not, what does Matthew 6:31-34 teach about providing for ourselves?

The teaching is "seek first his kingdom and his righteousness" (from verse 33). That means giving primacy to God's kingdom, and then understanding that "all these things will be given to you as well" (from verse 33).

5. If you had been given several thousand dollars to spend any way you wanted when you were eighteen, do you think you would have made wise decisions? Why or why not? What does this say about the advisability of saving for young people and

presenting them with cash?

Most people will say they might not have spent it well – blowing the money on a fast car, for example, instead of saving it for tuition or long-term goals. This illustrates that, in most cases, it's not advisable to present young people with cash unless it's specifically and legally tied to some long-term goal such as education. (The donor's intention that it be used for education, by itself, won't do.)

6. During the process of saving up to buy a home, is money spent on rent “thrown away?” Why or why not? Does this argue for trying to buy a home before you're ready?

No, it's not thrown away, because you get housing in return, often for less than the cost of buying an equivalent property. As mentioned in an earlier chapter, buying a house in a hurry can be a major mistake. Realizing that rent money isn't really thrown away can help put off a premature home purchase.

11. Personal Finance for Youth

People at different stages of life will approach this chapter differently. For those still in high school or living at home, it will help them understand what a spiritually based financial education can accomplish. For those who have left home, it can help them come to terms with their financial education – to help them understand where their parents were coming from. For those who are raising children, the advice directly applies. Finally, for those who have children in their lives but are not parents (uncles, aunts, or grandparents, for example), it can help them support the parents in teaching financial and spiritual responsibility.

Materials to prepare:

No materials required.

Featured Scripture:

Luke 15:11-32

Study Questions and Answers

1. Describe your favorite Christmas – that is, the Christmas observance you cherish the most in memory. Listen as the other members of your group describe their favorite Christmases.

a. Was your favorite Christmas from your childhood, or sometime later?

Often the favorite memories will be from childhood.

b. What part did the observance of Christ's birth play in that holiday?

Answers vary widely here, depending on the traditions of the household and individual.

c. Of what importance was the amount of money

spent on that holiday?

Often here the answer will be that the amount of money spent wasn't important at all. Other answers are, of course, possible, such as from the household that answers, "Our best Christmas was the one that we spent in Hawaii." Frequently, however, such a trip will have been the most memorable materially but not spiritually.

2. What is, or was, your "release curve" like? Did you smoothly go from 100 percent to 0 percent reliance on your parents? Have you been released yet? Was the curve bumpy rather than smooth, with big changes in your responsibility and freedom in a short time?

People may be uncomfortable talking about their own release curves, so you as group leader may want to be prepared to go first if necessary.

3. Some writers believe that children understand less about scarcity now than their parents did when they were growing up. Is it true? If so, what's the reason – kids' attitudes, their knowledge, or just a general increase in wealth?

The attitudes and the general increase in wealth seem to have gone hand in hand. It's hard to imagine, but such commonplace items as microwave ovens and televisions were once considered high-end luxury items (and it took a considerable fraction of income to buy them).

4. Read the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32). Would it have been OK for the father to have told the son, "No, I'm not giving you your inheritance. Now be quiet and get back to work"? What might have happened then? More generally, under what conditions should a parent intervene to save a child from the consequences of a poor choice?

The father would have been within his rights to deny the son's request, but the son would no doubt have been dissatisfied with the decision. Most parents feel justified in intervening to save a child from permanent consequences of a poor choice (with drugs or relationships, for example),

while not intervening if the consequences will be temporary (getting cold from not taking a jacket in the winter).

5. Why is it a mistake to pay too much for household work done by a child? Why is it a mistake to pay too little?

Paying too much promotes unrealistic expectations about how easy it is to earn money. These expectations will be dashed when a child begins working for an employer outside the home. Paying too little may make a child think that work is unrewarding, and discourage the development of a work ethic.

6. Deuteronomy 6:7 calls on parents to teach their children God's commandments throughout daily life: "when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up." What would be the corresponding description of the times that parents interact with their children today? Is the job of teaching children the faith easier or more difficult than it was in Old Testament times?

Time spent with children today is likely to be in the car, on the way to soccer practice, on the way back from the mall, and in similar settings. The job is probably more difficult today than in Old Testament times because technology has made sin and distraction more accessible.

12. Retirement

Although many participants will not be even close to retirement, this chapter is important to them, because small decisions made early in life have such a large impact on later possibilities. This chapter will also help younger participants deal with retired relatives and give them advice.

Materials to prepare:

Slips of paper for question 1.

Featured Scripture:

Matthew 20:1-16

Study Questions and Answers

1. Complete the following sentence: On an ideal day after I retire, I would _____. Share your sentence with the rest of the group.

a. Do any of the answers include doing “work”?

Some people would like to do volunteer work after retirement, or perhaps to work part-time.

b. Do the answers assume that you’ll be in perfect health after retirement?

Many people make that assumption, such as those who imagine playing a lot of golf.

c. Do the answers assume that you’ll have plenty of money after retirement?

Many people make this assumption as well, such as those who have in mind world travel.

2. Do you think you will ever receive Social Security? If you do, are you worried about the financial problems of Social Security? If you don’t, do you

believe that the older generation will silently stand by and let Social Security be abolished?

Typically, young people believe they will never receive Social Security, but often they have not thought about the set of political circumstances required. Senior citizens vote in large numbers, and this has long made Social Security difficult to cut.

3. Do you currently have any hobbies or favorite activities that can be enjoyed by retirees? Do you currently have any hobbies or favorite activities that require you to be youthful to participate? Explain.

This question is designed to get people to think about whether they would have to make large changes to enjoy life in retirement. However, it's difficult to think of hobbies or recreation that couldn't be enjoyed by healthy retirees (witness the senior rock climbers and extreme mountain bikers).

4. Have someone read the parable of the workers in the vineyard (Matthew 20:1-16). Why were the all-day workers upset with the master of the vineyard? Would you have been upset if you had been one of the all-day workers? How do you feel when you learn that a death-row inmate has accepted Christ?

The all-day workers were upset, perhaps because they thought they would get more, or perhaps because of the injustice they saw from working more but getting the same reward. Most of us empathize with the all-day workers' feelings of injustice. Many also find it hard to accept that a death-row inmate can receive Christ's forgiveness, implicitly comparing themselves with the inmate and finding themselves better. However, these thoughts do not take sufficient account of God's grace.

5. Sometimes people get offered buyouts that enable them to retire with full benefits at age fifty-five. Would such a buyout be attractive to you, or would you turn down such an offer? Why?

Many people will say "yes," and in any community there

will be examples of those who retire early and adjust well. There are also people who feel that they would get bored if they retired so early.

6. If you lived in your current residence until retirement, could it easily be adapted to the needs of an older resident? Did you think about any of this when buying it? If you did think about it, would that amount to worrying about tomorrow, as was advised against in Matthew 6:34?

Answers will differ, but few homebuyers think consciously about the adaptability of a home to retirement needs, even some who are close to retirement age. Clearly, giving some thought to adaptability is prudent, but also it is clear that it could extend to worrying about tomorrow, as was advised against in Matthew 6:34.

13. For Those You Love

End-of-life decision-making is nobody's favorite topic, but this is one place where a little effort can save others a lot of pain. This chapter takes participants through the decisions involved with end-of-life medical care, wills and funerals.

Materials to prepare:

Slips of paper for question 1.

Featured Scripture:

Philippians 1:21-26

Study Questions and Answers

1. Complete the following sentence: One thing I would want to happen at the time of my own funeral would be _____. Share your answers with the others in the group

a. Based on funerals you know about, is your wish realistic, or is it unlikely to be fulfilled?

Wishes based on mourners' behavior, such as, "I want people not to be sad," are unlikely to be fulfilled. Wishes about the nature of the service are quite feasible if specified in advance.

b. Is your wish more likely to be fulfilled if you communicate it in advance to relatives, or is it just one of those things that happens?

Answers will vary here. Wishes based on mourner's behavior will just happen; wishes about the service need to be communicated in advance.

c. Does it spook you even to think about your own funeral? Do you think most people are that way?

Most people are not comfortable with their own mortality.

2. Why do you think the general tendency of doctors is “When in doubt, do more?” Is that necessarily a bad thing when a doctor is dealing with the victim of a serious accident or illness?

Doctors’ inclination, training and ethics are all geared toward preserving life, not shortening it. That’s not necessarily a bad thing, especially in emergency medicine, when aggressive treatment can give family members options. (In the absence of aggressive treatment, there might be no options.)

3. Have someone read Philippians 1:21-26. (This was written by Paul from a jail cell in Philippi.) If you had been a personal friend of Paul and had read this in his letter, would you have been more worried or more encouraged about your friend’s condition?

Most people would be worried if they got a letter like this. It is unsettling to have a friend talk about death, even if the friend goes on to conclude that continuing to live is more important.

4. Would you consider filing a will that had been made up with a computer package? Would you consider letting a truck driver take out your appendix? What’s the difference?

The major difference in these two examples is that the damage of having a truck driver perform surgery would be immediate and obvious, while the damage of an improper will would only show up after death. Also, computer packages can do a competent job on very standard wills, but even small complications can lead to unexpected results.

5. Why do you think funeral directors sometimes engage in the practice, “When in doubt, do more”? Is it necessarily bad?

They may engage in it to assure that family members will not have regrets, since they will have no further opportunity to right any shortcomings. Of course, they may

also engage in the practice out of financial self-interest. If family members are prone to regret, it may be in their interests to be led toward a more elaborate funeral; however, many families seek only to forget funerals after they are over and are therefore not prone to regret.

6. Why would it be a special matter of concern to an older person to determine what will happen to the wealth he or she has accumulated in a lifetime? Why would it be distressing “not knowing who will get it” (Psalm 39: 6)

Some people view their accumulated wealth as the only tangible thing they leave behind, and feel that their life is less meaningful if something unintended happens to that wealth. In the Psalms, there is a profound reflection on the futility of material gain: “Man is a mere phantom as he goes to and fro: He bustles about, but only in vain; he heaps up wealth, not knowing who will get it” (Psalm 39:6).

Victorious Living in a Complex World

Although the chapter on death and end-of-life decisions logically comes last, that's a difficult and perhaps discouraging way to end a book or a group study. Therefore, the epilogue, "Victorious Living in a Complex World," is intended to end things on a more cheerful note. It's just a few pages of text, but it can help remind people of the major themes of the study: that the perfect is the enemy of the good, and that they can do something positive about their finances. Simplifying our finances and putting money in its place can show that we honor God with all that is ours.

"Victorious Living in a Complex World" can be covered in about ten minutes at the end of a session on Chapter 13, or in a separate, summary session. This would be a good time to plan a class reunion of sorts, in six months or a year. At that time, the members of the study could check in on how they're doing financially. The website associated with this book (www.plainmoney.com) will continue to update resources associated with each chapter.

If you have questions or suggestions, please e-mail me at bill@plainmoney.com. I would be glad to hear from you.