

Transformations

1st Quarter 2008

In this issue of Transformations:

- **The Financial Secret Weapon** (part six in a six-article series on the Bible and money)
- **Faith in Action: Abundant Living Testimonies**
- **Tips and Encouragement** (In this issue: Abundant Living Personal Finance Organizer)
- **Notes and Quotes**
- **Funny Money**
- **AL Tool Box**
- **Abundant Living Ministry News: Plans for Single Mom conference underway**

The Financial Secret Weapon: Discovering the tool that will lead you to financial peace

By Matt Schoenfeld

He was surrounded, and there was no way out. The enemies had closed in from every possible angle, and there was to be no escape. It looked as bleak as it could get. Imminent death was a heartbeat away.

Then, right as he was on the brink of disaster, he remembered his salvation. The Secret Weapon. He had a secret weapon!

Remember the old video game Defender? I know, I'm dating myself here! The best part of this game when you navigate your spaceship through hyperspace and try to blast the enemies out of the sky was the secret weapon. Just when all was lost and you were surrounded by the bad guys, you could hit the red button and implement your clandestine weapon ... the Smart Bomb. The Smart Bomb allowed you to blow up all the bad guys on the screen who had you surrounded. Just when all was lost, miraculously, there was a way to safety. You could live for another day, or at least the chance to get to the next level! You had an air of confidence about yourself, even when you knew things looked bad, because you knew you had the secret weapon!

Wouldn't it be great if there was a financial secret weapon? Just when you think there's no way out—no way to pay all those bills, no way to plan for the future, and no way to afford all the things you need—you could hit the red button and all the bills, all the creditors, all the enemies pressing in on you would simply disappear and you could rest easy and get a fresh start.

Guess what? I'm here today to tell you that there *really is* a secret financial weapon for you to use to fight back against the relentless and deceiving financial messages the world lobs at us—that consumer debt is OK, the get-rich-quick mentality, that you can give your time instead of money. And the remarkable thing about this secret weapon is that it is based on scripture and grounded in God's truth.

The final secret to finding financial peace in our series on God and money is, in fact, a secret weapon in and of itself. If you want to find financial peace in your life, use the secret weapon known as a spending plan.

Using a spending plan is the financial equivalent to having the secret weapon in a war. Not many people have one, but when you use it, it turns the tide of the battle. According to expert researcher George Barna, 25% of people say they follow a spending plan, but in reality, only 10% of people actually use the financial secret weapon. So what in the world is a spending plan? Isn't it just a budget in disguise?

A spending plan is a flexible money management tool that helps you allocate resources, live within your means, plan for the future, and meet your obligations. Now realize, I'm really not just trying to trick you into "following a budget." I promise. Something about the word budget just seems to carry a negative connotation with most people, doesn't it? If you follow a budget what that means to most is that you are not allowed to spend any money, and you certainly don't get to have any fun!

Let's be honest—we are going to spend our money aren't we? And you know what? There is nothing wrong with that. We all need money to live and to care for our families. I just want folks to have a plan for how and where they are going to spend it so they do so wisely. Because what we are really dealing with when it comes to managing our personal finances is this question: "How am I going to spend the money God has entrusted to me?"

I do think it's highly significant to note that the concept of using a spending plan is a biblical concept. When approached from that angle, my guess is that a lot of people who wrote off the idea of "budgeting" a long time ago may need to take a second look at this spending plan idea. Here's why.

In Proverbs 27: 23-24 the wisdom-literature writer instructs us, "Be sure to know the condition of your flocks, give careful attention to your herds; for riches do not endure forever, and a crown is not secure for all generations." When those words were penned thousands of years ago, livestock was the currency of the day, the common means of exchange, just like cash is for us today. If the shepherd did a poor job of keeping track of his sheep or camels, he was in for significant financial hardship. It is no different for us. Using a spending plan is really just modern-day sheep herding. If we do not follow a spending plan to help us keep track of where our money goes, it is highly likely that we will lack key financial information, end up wasting money, frequently get caught by surprise, and struggle to find financial freedom in Christ.

To contemporize the verse a bit, read it this way: "Be sure to know the condition of your *money*, pay careful attention to your *cash* ..." because the implication in Proverbs 27 is quite powerful. If you don't have some system that helps you pay careful attention to what's going on with your money, there is a high probability that it will disappear ... for riches do not endure forever. Not only that, but if we don't pay careful attention, it will also cause us to hurt our loved ones both now and in the future ... a crown is not secure for all generations. So if you want to do the loving thing with your money and bless your kids, your kids' kids, or even your kids' kids' kids, follow a spending plan so that you will be able to wisely manage the money God entrusts to you.

The year 2005 was an incredibly difficult for our family. Eight days into the New Year, my wife's mom suddenly passed away. Two daughters lost their best friend and confidant, and four grandkids lost their Nana. The grief came in waves like the turbulent ocean in the movie "The Perfect Storm." At times the sorrow was debilitating.

However, through the grief and pain, we quickly learned one thing about Carol Morrison. During her lifetime, she had taken to heart Proverbs 27:23-24. You see, Carol had been very good at paying careful attention to her flocks and herds. She did not have a lot of money. She had raised two girls on her own as a nurse, and then a small business owner. But because she managed wisely what she did have, she departed this world by leaving behind tremendous blessings in the wake of her passing. The blessings were things like

her funeral and grave plot had already been prepaid and prearranged. She had no debts that had to be paid off. All of her financial records were up-to-date and well organized. These may seem like little things, but when dealing with this kind of loss, you can only imagine how much easier it made it for her daughters.

I had heard horror stories from friends about the utter chaos and disarray of their parent's financial affairs and records. Not so here. All the records were stored neatly and were well marked in her file cabinet. Her will was in good order. There were no surprises. What a blessing. At this difficult time, my mother-in-law's wise planning created a wonderful testimony to how she had loved her family during her life. She left a legacy that will live on in her grandkids—part of their college education will be funded by their Nana's bequest. She did the loving thing with her money, she paid careful attention to her financial affairs, and as a result, she passed on blessings and a secure crown for the next generation.

No doubt, you have to learn how to handle a secret weapon properly. To learn the “nuts and bolts” of how to set up and follow spending, debt reduction, and investing plans, I encourage you to schedule an Abundant Living workshop in your church, business, or school. A certified facilitator from our nationwide network can help you learn these key aspects of Christian discipleship through our powerful seminars so that like my mother-in-law, you too can be a blessing to your family and others. Give us a call toll free at 1-877-434-9878. We would welcome the opportunity to help you and your organization's people.

For additional help in setting up your spending plan, you can also obtain a copy of my book, *Abundant Living: the five biblical principles for financial success*, by [clicking on this link](#) to our online store. It will help you dig deeper into the five principles we've been studying and take you step by step through the process of creating and implementing your spending plan. Plus the cost is affordable (only \$5 plus tax and shipping).

The financial secret weapon, the spending plan, is available to you. It will enable you to unlock all the keys to financial peace and lead you to a life of abundance and increased intimacy with the Lord. Follow the five principles for biblical financial success and you will walk in the joy of a life that blesses others as you handle money God's way.

Matt Schoenfeld is the Executive Director of the Abundant Living ministry, a stewardship training ministry based in Mission, Kansas. In his first book, *Abundant Living: The five biblical principles for financial success*, Matt reveals five key biblical truths that will help us manage our money wisely. Abundant Living teaches biblical principles for money management to people across the country through their partnership with Stewardship Ministries. Matt can be reached at: matt@abundantlivingministry.org or 877-434-8978.

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Faith In Action: Abundant Living Testimonies

How God is using Abundant Living around the globe to help His people:

Abundant Living put my husband and me on the same page to start this adventure [of managing finances] as a team.
—Deanece, Lakeview, Ohio

Abundant Living helped me see that even though I planned poorly as a young adult, all is not lost.
—participant in Oak Harbor, Washington

Abundant Living helped us get motivated to come up and stick with a spending plan.

—Dave and Jenny, Centerville, Ohio

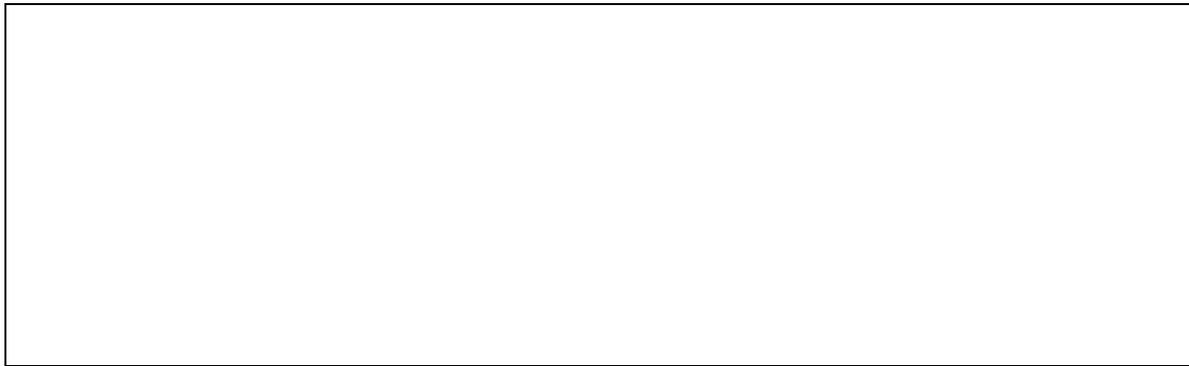
“I think it’s important to note that financial coaching is not just for people in crisis or with major debt problems. Three things stand out from when Abundant Living helped me with financial coaching. First is how our coach was able to simplify the several challenging and complex issues facing us. Second, there was solid scriptural backing for everything we discussed. Finally, he gave us a system to follow that worked. Abundant Living’s coaching ministry got me focused and motivated. This process was invaluable to me.”

—John, Kansas City, Missouri

Has the Abundant Living ministry helped you? Please [drop us an e-mail](#) and we’ll share your testimony in a future issue of Transformations.

Funny Money

CATHY



Tips and Encouragement

Tip: Need some help setting up your spending plan? Check out the Abundant Living Personal Finance Organizer

Ever wonder, “How in the world can I keep all my financial information organized and easy to manage?” Look no further than the Abundant Living Personal Finance Organizer (PFO)! The PFO is surely the most effective tool in the Abundant Living arsenal of secret financial weapons. It is simple-to-use, adaptable to your life, and affordable.

The PFO allows you to organize all of your monthly financial information and transactions into one three-ring notebook. Each PFO includes instructions and practical tools that enable you to organize your financial information, set up your spending plan, and track your financial progress.

If you don't have a system for handling your day-to-day financial affairs, I would highly recommend picking up a PFO today! I've personally used this money management system for over 10 years, and it has helped our family make it through both good times and bad. It has definitely given us the practical tools to allow us to follow the five principles for biblical financial success (give generously, flee the love of money, live within your means, plan for the future, and use a spending plan).

Abundant Living offers two versions of the PFO: [Go to the Abundant Living Toolbox article](#) for more information about this helpful financial organizer.

[Note: create link to Toolbox article]

Notes and Quotes

Plans are only good intentions unless they immediately degenerate into hard work. —Peter Drucker

When defeat comes, accept it as a signal that your plans are not sound, rebuild those plans, and set sail once more toward your coveted goal. —Napoleon Hill

It is against the grain of modern education to teach children to program. What fun is there in making plans, acquiring discipline in organizing thoughts, devoting attention to detail, and learning to be self-critical? —Alan Perlis

Planning is love in advance. —Matt Schoenfeld

Abundant Living Toolbox: Getting Organized

It seems like half the battle for many folks is just trying to organize all your bills and financial information. We offer two versions of a handy tool that is helping people all over the country get their personal finances in great shape so they can honor the Lord with their resources.

- **Abundant Living Personal Finance Organizer**

The PFO includes:

- One year's worth of Abundant Living expense tracking sheets
- Worksheets for tracking Net worth
- Three-ring binder for organizing all financial paperwork, bills, receipts, and statements
- "How to save \$10,000 in one year" brochure by Matt and Cynthia Schoenfeld
- [Click here](#) for more information or to purchase a PFO (\$15 ... a \$30 value)

- **Abundant Living Personal Finance Organizer Plus**

In addition to the contents of the PFO, the "Plus" version includes:

- The book *Abundant Living: the five biblical principles for financial success*

- A CD with three audio messages on biblical financial management by Matt Schoenfeld
- [Click here](#) for more information or to purchase a PFO Plus (\$ 25 ... a \$48 value)

All sales proceeds go to support the Abundant Living ministry.

Abundant Living Ministry News

- **Abundant Living Resources to be Translated into Spanish.** La vida abundante! That's the Spanish translation for Abundant Living. The Abundant Living workshops are already available in Spanish, and soon the Abundant Living book, Bible study, and Personal Finance Organizer will also be available in Spanish. If you are interested in our Spanish ministry version, please contact Matt Schoenfeld at matt@abundantlivingministry.org. *Muchas gracias!*
- **Abundant Living Small Group Bible Study.** *Koinonia* is the Greek word meaning "true fellowship." Small groups are often a key place where people can connect, share life, pray for each other, and grow in their relationship with God. In *Hidden Treasures: the secrets to abundant living*, cell groups, life groups, or even a couple of friends or a husband and wife can explore together what the Bible has to say about money. *Hidden Treasures* explores the central theme of how Christians should be focused on using their resources to show love to God, self, and others. For more information on *Hidden Treasures*, please contact Abundant Living at: 1-877-434-9878, 913-710-5012 or matt@abundantlivingministry.org.
- **Prayer requests.** We would love for you to join with us in prayer for the following issues and concerns:
 - The many families currently in one-on-one financial coaching.
 - For God to lead us to the churches where He wants us to serve.
 - Ministry founder, Matt Schoenfeld, would love your prayers as he tries to wrap up three new books.
 - Single Mom conference. Abundant Living is planning a conference in Kansas City for single moms in 2008. Please pray for event sponsors and volunteers to help us reach those moms who could use some help with financial training and other issues facing single moms.

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Editor: Terry D. Cooper

If your organization is seeking expert editing services, please contact Terry at tdc1821@sbcglobal.net or 816-220-9003.

Instructions

[If you would like to financially support this ministry, you may send your donation to:](#)

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