

Stewardship Week 2
History and Longing for Financial Freedom
Oct 14, 2020

This post is in the realm of TMI for some of you, only because to talk about money is taboo for most of us in this world. When we have money, we pretend we don't. When we don't have money, we may feel ashamed, or worst case, its ALL we can think and talk about. We have already established that money has power, at least as much as we let it in our lives. But let me give you an example.

One day I sat with a parishioner in one of the churches I have served who recently lost her husband to a tragic event. The conversation quickly turned to her worry about how she would handle the finances, for a multitude of reasons. She confessed that she was proud of her son for they were debt free in their lifestyle and she and her late husband had taught them this skill. She also asked me, in the sweet normal way someone you care about is interested, where my family fell on this debt spectrum. I was ashamed to answer.

At this given time of our lives, freshly in seminary, just out of anesthesia school, new babies and an old house, we were largely upside down. School loans and credit to cover when we couldn't make ends meet on a very meager salary, car loans too and of course the trips that the young babies would never remember. I remember thinking right then and there, that there had to be a better way. This was my history and I longed for freedom to use this money the way it was intended. So much so, that I co-taught a Dave Ramsey Class (the only class of this kind available at the time) and made a decision that this would not be our life, one of fear and shame. It took us quite some time as a family, and many sacrifices but financial freedom was on the other side of this debt story. Freedom to do as we wish with the gift that was so generously given in the first place. Now, when I long to send money to Camp Fellowship to support the children staying there during the quarantine, I have no qualm or difficulty doing so. This is financial freedom and it tastes really good. It is what God intends. Where our money is, there our heart is after all.

The cost for financial freedom can be quite high, however. It costs responsibility and dedication in order to achieve this. Specifically, responsibility for our choices. It may mean that we choose not to take that trip to an expensive resort, opting

for an inexpensive trip to a friend's cabin instead, all the while paying extra to that student loan. It may mean we chose the "not new car" instead of the off the lot model. It may even mean we shop the clearance rack or sales instead of donning the newest fashions. When these choices are made, and our lives reflect this responsibility, financial freedom is within our grasp. We are investing in the possibility of our future. And remember, with power comes responsibility. The more we have, the more we are called to steward.

In the life of the church, the same responsibility applies. The church has an obligation to do God's work, because it is our calling. The church also has an obligation to be a good steward of what it is given in finances. This means that our budget process is getting wonderfully real. When we did the research of SOPC's budget process, for several years there has been a "negative" budget passed. We were living in debt, essentially, from before I came on board. But the two years since we have been together, plans have been put in place and are being followed to shift that tide to a budget that is real and sustainable. Administration is working to make sure this is our reality, with a 5-year goal in place to reach it.

Having a goal is important. I remember making a plan on paper of when I was going to pay off our final car. We scrimped and saved and ate ramen to make it happen. The joy I felt, the financial freedom when I wrote that check was astounding. The church is within reach of paying off the mortgage it owes, thanks to admin's work, can you imagine the joy when this weight is lifted? Owing money to others obligates you to their goals instead of God's goals. With financial freedom comes the ability to dream, to imagine, and to shift money instead to where God may be calling into the future.

So, for each of us as we approach the stewardship season, sometimes with trepidation, sometimes with joy, the question for us all will be, what are YOU ready to take responsibility for in order to be free to live for God? Together, all things are possible, sometimes we just need a little help from our friends. Financial Freedom is a gift from our God, indeed.