

SERMON: From John Wesley to Modern Day Methodists by Howard Pribble
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Good Morning. I want to talk to you today about money and specifically about saving. We'll start with John Wesley's approach and try to carry that into modern times. When I took speech class back in college, I was told, "Tell them what you are going to tell them, then tell them, then tell what you told them". So here we go.

We are going to start off with a little history on John Wesley and lead briefly into some up-to-date concepts such as financial planning, budgeting, risk management, due diligence, giving and finally – pledging. So what can John Wesley teach us about money? He was actually noted for his simple but profound financial principles. He is well known for the following famous quote "Having, first, gained all you can, and, secondly saved all you can, then give all you can". You heard about earning last week and we will discuss more on giving next week. Today we will focus on saving. His life was guided by the belief that God will do nothing but in answer to prayer. Whether we think of, or speak to, God, whether we act or suffer for him, all is in prayer. Proceed with much prayer, and your way will be made plain. So came his dictum to save all you can, cutting off every needless expense. Give all you can. Be glad to give, and ready to distribute, laying up in store for yourselves a good foundation against the time to come, that you may attain eternal life. He spoke, "Do you not know that God entrusted you with that money (all above what buys necessities for your families) to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to help the stranger, the widow, the fatherless; and, indeed, as far as it will go, to relieve the wants of all mankind?"

We know that John Wesley brought revival to 18th-century England and started the Methodist Movement. We know him as a great preacher and a greater organizer. But few of us realize that Wesley made enormous sums from preaching--the sale of his writings made him one of England's wealthiest men. If you google John Wesley's net worth, the calculation over his lifetime is the equivalent of \$50M in dollars. In an age when a single man could live comfortably on 30 pounds a year, his annual income reached 1,400. With such an income he had the opportunities to put his ideas on money into practice. What did he say about money? And what did he do with his own?

John Wesley knew grinding poverty as a child. His father, Samuel Wesley, was the Anglican priest in one of England's lowest-paying parishes. He had nine children to support and was rarely out of debt. Once, John saw his father being marched off to debtor's prison. So when John followed his father into the ministry, he had no illusions about financial rewards. It probably came as a surprise to John Wesley that while God

had called him to follow his father's vocation, he had not also called him to be poor like his father. Instead of becoming a parish priest, John felt God's direction to teach at Oxford University. There he was elected a fellow of Lincoln College, and his financial status changed dramatically. His position usually paid him at least thirty pounds a year, more than enough money for a single man to live on. John seems to have enjoyed his relative prosperity. He spent his money on playing cards, and on tobacco and brandy.

While at Oxford, an incident changed his perspective on money. He had just finished paying for some pictures for his room when one of the chambermaids came to his door. It was a cold winter day, and he noticed that she had nothing to protect her except a thin linen gown. He reached into his pocket to give her some money to buy a coat but found he had too little left. Immediately the thought struck him that the Lord was not pleased with the way he had spent his money. He thought of those pictures he had just paid for and asked himself, "Will thy Master say, 'Well done, good and faithful steward'? Thou hast adorned thy walls with the money which might have screened this poor creature from the cold! O justice! O mercy! --Are not these pictures the blood of this poor maid?"

Perhaps as a result of this incident, in 1731 Wesley began to limit his expenses so that he would have more money saved to give to the poor. He records that one year his income was 30 pounds and his living expenses 28 pounds, so he had 2 pounds to give away. The next year his income doubled, but he still managed to live on 28 pounds, so he had 32 pounds to give to the poor. In the third year, his income jumped to 90 pounds. Instead of letting his expenses rise with his income, he kept them to 28 pounds and gave away 62 pounds. In the fourth year, he received 120 pounds. As before, his expenses were 28 pounds, so his giving rose to 92 pounds. Wesley felt that a Christian should not merely tithe - but give away all extra income once the family and creditors were taken care of. He believed that with increasing income, what should rise is not the Christian's standard of living but the standard of giving. His saving allowed him to do more giving.

This practice, begun at Oxford, continued throughout his life. Even when his income rose into the thousands of pounds sterling, he lived simply, and he quickly gave away his surplus money. One year his income was a little over 1,400 pounds. He lived on 30 pounds and gave away nearly all of the 1,400 pounds. Because he had no family to care for, he had no need for savings. He was afraid of laying up treasures on earth, so the money went out to charity as quickly as it came in. He reports that he never had more than 100 pounds at any one time. Wesley limited his expenditures by not purchasing

the kinds of things thought essential for a man in his station of life. In 1776 the English tax commissioners inspected his return and wrote him the following: "We cannot doubt but you have silver for which you have hitherto neglected to make an entry." They were saying that a man of his prominence certainly must have some silver plate in his house and were accusing him of failing to pay excise tax on it. Wesley wrote back: "I have two silver spoons at London and two at Bristol. This is all the plate I have at present, and I shall not buy any more while so many around me want for bread."

John Wesley's teaching on money offered simple, practical guidelines for every believer. His first rule about money was Gain all you can. We heard about this last week. Despite its potential for misuse, money in itself is something good. There is no end to the good it can do: "In the hands of God's children, it is food for the hungry, drink for the thirsty, raiment for the naked. Wesley added that in gaining all they can, Christians must be careful not to damage their own souls, minds, or bodies, or the souls, minds or bodies of anyone else. He thus prohibited gaining money through industries that pollute the environment or endanger workers.

Wesley's second rule for the right use of money was "Save all you can". He urged his hearers not to spend money merely to gratify the desires of the flesh, the desires of the eye, or the pride of life. He cried out against expensive food, fancy clothes, and elegant furniture: saying "Despise delicacy and variety and be content with what plain nature requires." Wesley had two reasons for telling Christians to buy only necessities. The obvious one was so they would not waste money. The second was so they would not increase their desires. The old preacher wisely pointed out that when people spend money on things they do not really need, they begin to want more things they do not need. Instead of satisfying their desires, they only increase them. Wesley's third rule was "Give all you can". One's giving should begin with the tithe. He told the one who does not tithe, "Thou dost undoubtedly set thy heart upon thy gold" and warned, "It will 'eat thy flesh as fire!'" But one's giving should not end at the tithe. His view was that all of the Christian's money belongs to God, not just the first tenth. Believers must use 100 percent of their income as God directs. We will hear more about giving next week.

And how has God directed faithful people to use their incomes? Wesley listed four scriptural principles: First, provide things needful for yourself and your family (I Tim. 5:8). The believer should make sure the family has "a sufficiency of plain, wholesome food to eat, and clean raiment to put on" as well as a place to live and enough to live on if something were to happen to the breadwinner. Next - "Having food and raiment,

let us be therewith content" (1 Tim. 6:8). "Whoever has sufficient food to eat, and raiment to put on, with a place to lay their head, and something overhead, is rich," he said. Third - "Provide things honest in the sight of all people" (Rom. 12:17) and "Owe no man anything" (Rom. 13:8). Wesley said the next claim on a Christian's money belongs to the creditor. He adds that those who are in business for themselves need to have adequate tools, stock, or capital for the carrying on of that business. Finally - "As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto those who are of the household of faith" (Gal. 6:10). After the Christian has provided for the family, the creditors, and the business, the next obligation is to use any money that is left to meet the needs of others.

In giving these four biblical principles, Wesley did recognize that some situations were not clear-cut. He accordingly offered four questions to help his hearers decide how to spend money: In spending this money, am I acting like I own it, or am I acting like the Lord's trustee? What Scripture requires me to spend this money this way? Can I offer up this purchase as a sacrifice to the Lord? Will God reward me for this expenditure at the resurrection of the just? In 1744 Wesley wrote, "When I die if I leave behind me ten pounds...you and all mankind can bear witness against me, that I have lived and died a thief and a robber." When he died in 1791, the only money mentioned in his will was the miscellaneous coins to be found in his pockets and dresser drawers. Most of the 30,000 pounds he had earned in his lifetime he had given away. As Wesley said, "I cannot help leaving my books behind me whenever God calls me hence; but in every other respect, my own hands will be my executors."

But, what does all of this mean for us in how to save money in today's world? Wesley had no family to care for and no thought to medical care or retirement planning, etc. Indeed, the modern world is much more complex than the eighteenth century. Technology makes things more difficult but also makes some things easier. One of those things is budgeting. John Wesley had his list of expenses and creditors to take care of and what was left he gave away. If we tried that today, we get to the end of our list and find that we have very little left to give. So we don't. Today, it takes a concerted plan – a budget. There are a number of technology tools (Excel, Quicken, etc.) to help you track your budget and spending. But how do you establish a budget in the first place? Most of us need help. Unless you are trained and make your living in the financial industry, you are an amateur playing with dice. (I know. I've been there.) Financial planning is a must. Just as you would not try to build a house without hiring an experienced contractor, in coming up with a viable financial plan, you need a good certified financial planner (one who has CFP after their name). This means that they

are committed to working for you – not the brokerage or financial institution they belong to. (Indeed, many CFPs are independents.)

Most of us, in order to make it through our financial lives, are going to need more than just our jobs to fund us. We will need investments. (Make your money work as hard as you do.) Whereas John Wesley put all his beyond day-to-day money into giving – we invest it. This allows us to keep some oversight and control while avoiding the temptation to spend it. But it takes faith and courage. You need a plan – a budget. Income versus outgo – housing, food, medical care, clothing, education, not to mention taxes, retirement funding and money for various contingencies. Increasing your income can come with promotions or changing jobs (with the associated strain and stress) and from successful investments. Here's where the aforementioned budget and planning comes in. Before sinking money into investments, you need to assess the risk involved so that you have a reasonable chance of coming out ahead. Otherwise, why bother? This risk assessment is where due diligence comes in. For each opportunity, you need to look at who is the money going to, how successful have they been, do they have a viable plan, and what result would you expect to see. And how do you find these promising investments in the first place.

As I mentioned before, you need a professional financial planner who can assist you in collecting promising investments together into a solid portfolio – a Certified Financial Planner. A good CFP will insist that you include one additional factor – giving. Giving gives you the confidence that you are a contributor to society and a necessary sense of wellbeing that your life is making a difference. These are shades of John Wesley's guiding principles. The beginnings of a financial plan will necessarily be deficient in many areas. But a good plan will grow year over year and allow funding, including giving, to get more comfortable. That brings us back to John Wesley and his saving. Remember how he started small and increased each year. Nowadays saving requires a balanced plan where all factions of the plan start out modest and grow over time.

But the key thing is that the plan needs to be there. Here is where a pledge to the church can come into play. A pledge to Geneva United Methodist Church means people and mission. Not just the pastors and staff and the materials they need for Christian education and music, but through them and our apportionment to the district, to the dozens of people serving northern Illinois, the country, and the world. Perhaps you are beginning to see the importance of your pledging effort no matter what the size. Pledging is important not just to you but to the church in general. The church has a budget too. Having a collection of personal pledges allows the church to

plan what it can accomplish throughout the year. During the fall, you will see thermometer charts showing our progress toward covering our church budget. Once you have determined through prayer and consultation what your pledge will be, there are two basic ways to automate the process. You can setup an automatic funds transfer from your bank to occur each month. Or, you can setup a directive in Elexio to charge your bank account each month. These automatic transfers are really helpful because it is much easier to give money that you never see.

So, we have seen John Wesley's approach to saving and giving, how the modern financial world's complexity makes this type of saving impossible for most of us, how saving leads to giving, and how your pledge can adapt to the current situation. Those of us on the Stewardship and the Finance committees are behind you in our prayers, wishes for your future prosperity, and our service to you and this church in any way we can. Thank you and may God's peace be with you. Amen.

Scriptures:

I Tim. 5:8 8 If any one does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his own family, he has disowned the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

I Tim. 6:8-9 8 but if we have food and clothing, with these we shall be content. 9 But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and hurtful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction.

Rom. 12:17-18 17 Repay no one evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. 18 If possible, so far as it depends upon you, live peaceably with all.

Rom. 13:8 8 Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law.

Gal. 6:8-10 8 For he who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption; but he who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. 9 And let us not grow weary in well-doing, for in due season we shall reap, if we do not lose heart. 10 So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.