

A Childlike Financial Plan

Take a lesson from your seven-year-old

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He called a little child to his side and said to those that would listen, “Unless you change and become like little children you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” Matthew 18:3 is one of many verses that encourages us to take on childlike qualities. As we observe the little ones at play, it is easy to envy their non-complicated world. They live a simple, straightforward kind of existence without a lot of strings attached. By all accounts they seem to manage just fine. In fact, it would often appear they get along better when adults don’t get involved with their hidden agendas and the added pressure that success in the “rat race” brings.

A CHILDLIKE FAITH

I recall the time my son accepted Jesus Christ as his personal Lord and Savior. He was seven years old and we were attending the wonderful performance of A Toymaker’s Dream. As the performance was about to end, the actor playing the role of Jesus gave an invitation for all unbelievers. He simply asked the question, “Would you like Jesus to live in your heart forever?” No sooner than he finished the question, my son, sitting in the balcony isle, raised his second-grade hand as high as possible. What was about to happen wasn’t in any of the parenting manuals! Jesus directed those that responded to come down immediately. At a breakneck pace, my only son began his life-changing journey down the steep stairs! As he ran to Jesus, I tracked the top of his head bobbing and weaving in and out of the crowd. I finally caught up as he was being ushered to a large counseling room behind the stage. Quietly assuming a non-conspicuous position as observer, I witnessed a young man proceed to confirm my son’s spiritual decision. As he presented the simple plan of salvation, I remember how impressed I was with his unassuming approach. He did not mention doctrinal issues or offer an elaborate explanation of denomination platitudes. Instead, he simply presented the gospel in terms a seven-year-old could comprehend and accept. You see, salvation is quite a simple concept when seen through the eyes of a seven-year-old.

THE ENVELOPE, PLEASE

We take this same simple approach when we teach our children about finances. In this issue we will discuss how to teach children how to handle money and more importantly, teach them how to be good stewards with God’s resources.

For lack of a better name, we can call this the “envelope method.” It involves three envelopes, very little supervision, and is based on three principles. These are, give some, save some, and spend some. To demonstrate the process, let’s assume you give your six-year-old a dollar for picking up his or her toys.

The first envelope is for giving back to God. I believe you should emphasize the concept of giving back to God as opposed to simply calling it a tithe. That’s a complicated term and God doesn’t care what your child calls it. Initially they will need your assistance. Remember dimes and the one-tenth concept of tithe are new concepts, so be patient. Soon, they will be putting dimes into God’s envelope on their own. As they grow in their faith and stewardship, you will see their self-esteem and confidence grow. If we examine closely, it would seem that in their acts of obedience they are attempting to teach us a lesson. Not only is it more blessed to receive but it’s a lot of fun!

The second envelope allows you to teach your child about saving for a “rainy day,” or a large future purchase. This could amount to a coloring book or a new football, but teaching your child about saving supports the concept of delayed gratification and financial discipline, a concept, I might add, that many Americans need to be reminded of. How much a young person should be encouraged to save is a good question. I believe that saving at least twenty-five percent of their allowance or birthday money from “gramps” is a great start. For all those counting, that’s two dimes and a nickel. Can you imagine if we adults did this? Saving money for future purposes, paying cash and ultimately not being forced to use credit cards

at usury rates sounds pretty good, doesn’t it? I could dwell on that subject but I must go on to the third envelope.

The third envelope is the spending envelope or the “one for fun.” It receives sixty-five cents and for many young children, that is quite a bit of money. More times than not, they will want to save and give even more. In fact, they will often question the amount they are giving to God. Not that it’s too much, mind you, but that it’s not enough! What happens between the time we want to give God everything and the tie we allow our giving to be secondary to MasterCard™ and a new car? Maybe we don’t really become selfish and believe we can live without God until we become more “mature.” Many would argue and say it’s because our adult financial plans have become so complicated. This is certainly true. As our financial plans become more complex with asset modeling, betas, and multi-fund management, it seems our financial concerns are like so many spinning plates wobbling out of control. I wonder, when we ultimately stand in front of God to give a final account of our stewardship, if He will accept our excuses. We would be wise to observe the little children, learn their ways and strive for simplicity.

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