

## *Simple Rules for Money* stewardship sermon series

### *“Save All You Can”*

#### [Proverbs 13:11](#)

We are on the second of our three-week sermon series, Simple Rules for Money, based on John Wesley’s sermon the “Use of Money.” Here is a brief review of last Sunday’s sermon. We examined the first rule: “Earn All You Can.” This may sound like secular wisdom. But, Wesley gave it to the Methodists with a twist. He said, “Earn all you can... without paying more for it than it is worth.” More specifically, earn all you can, but not at the expense of your life and health, not at the expense of your soul; not at the expense of your neighbor. For Wesley, work is God’s gift for God’s people, and we, the Methodists, are to earn money from our honest and diligent labor, not just to meet our own needs but to contribute to the work of God’s kingdom on earth.

Today, we turn to the second rule for money: “Save all you can.” Wesley said do not throw away or waste any of the gain you have diligently made, but live simply and carefully.

We all know we must save as much as we can. Putting aside money into a savings account helps us not to go into debt when we are suddenly faced with unexpected expenses through financial emergencies. Putting aside money for our children’s higher education enables us to make investments in their future. Putting aside money in retirement savings gives us financial freedom in our later years and allows us to continue to be generous with our money and time. Saving money is a great financial virtue parents must teach their children, just as our ancestors of faith did. Today’s scripture reading is one of many pieces of financial wisdom found in the Book of Proverbs.

However, living in a culture of instant gratification, many people find saving money to be rather difficult. According to recent survey results, Americans are not saving much. 57 percent of Americans have less than \$1000 in savings, while 20 percent of Americans do not save any of their income at all. In the meanwhile, Americans have an average of \$38,000 in personal debt, and this does not include home mortgages. But, saving money is possible for everyone. It can be done!

To manage and save money well, everybody needs a good plan. For children, having a piggy bank to put their coins and dollar bills can be a good start. And, for adults, here is a plan called 10-10-80. It goes like this: Give 10 percent; Save 10 percent; Live on the rest, which is 80 percent.

Probably, you have heard about this simple financial rule because it has been around for quite a while. Let me explain it a little bit. You give away the first 10 percent of your income. We, Christian believers, are called to give it to the church to support its ministries, to do the work of God in the world through our church. And, non-believers give it to charities and non-profit organizations to make a difference in the world.

In the Old Testament, God’s people were required by law to bring the first 10 percent of what they made to support the priests and Levites and to help the poor in the community. This was called the tithe. While

other offerings were something people voluntarily gave, the tithe was considered to be something they owed because it was believed to belong to God. So, prophets often delivered harsh words of God's judgment upon those who failed to bring their tithes.

Some of you might ask, "Why do we have to continue the giving practice of some ancient people?" Some of you might say, "It does not make sense to give away such a big portion of my income." In one of the churches I served, a prominent church leader was shocked when I told him that I would teach church members about spiritual discipline of tithing. He said, "Are you crazy? I've never heard of such a thing? Who can give that kind of money to the church?" Well, within a year, he ended up giving actually more than a tithe of his income through a new multimedia system his wife purchased for the church! Of course, it was not through coercion but through a change of heart. When I thanked them for their generosity, they said, "Actually, we received more than we gave!"

I strongly believe if you give, you will receive. That's the promise of God given to God's people through the prophet Malachi, who said,

Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in my house, and thus put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts; see if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing." (Malachi 3:10, NRSV)

In fact, according to the studies on the link between generosity and happiness, the people who are the most happy and satisfied with their lives are the ones who give the most.

Then, the second 10 percent of our income is to save for the future. As I said earlier, it is wise and necessary to put aside money for our and our loved ones' future. However, Wesley saved money for a different reason, and this was how it happened. As we learned not long ago, Wesley was a professor at Oxford University. One cold winter day, he noticed one of his chambermaids was wearing a thin linen gown. He felt sorry for her and wanted to give her some money to buy warm clothes to help her. So, he reached into his pocket only to realize that he had only a few coins - not enough to purchase the items she needed.

After that incident, he began to limit his expenses and save money to give to the poor. He recorded in his journal the progress he made with his effort to save money. In the first year, his income was 30 pounds, and his living expenses were 28 pounds, so he saved and gave away 2 pounds. In the following year, his income doubled, but he still managed to live on 28 pounds and gave away 32 pounds. In the 3rd year, his income jumped to 90 pounds, but he was able to keep his living cost at 28 pounds, and he gave away 62 pounds. In the 4th year, he earned 120 pounds, and with the same 28 pounds of his living cost, he gave away 92 pounds! Indeed, Wesley managed his money with eternal perspective!

After giving away the first 10 percent, and putting aside the second 10 percent, now, you can enjoy the rest of the fruits of your labor. The 80 percent of your income is for you to spend on whatever you want and need!

The 10-10-80 is a good financial plan, which is based on the perspective of abundance instead of scarcity, of generosity instead of selfishness. It is good stewardship of all our financial resources. And, of course, if you do not need the whole 80 percent of your income for your living cost, you can move some of it to your giving or saving column.

Perhaps, this wise financial plan of 10-10-80 is already a living reality for some of you. Perhaps, this is a huge challenge for some of you. But, trust me when I say this, we can do it with our willingness to take a leap of faith and with God's help. And, in the spirit of John Wesley, here are some ways you can begin your journey toward the 10-10-80 plan:

1. Make an honest assessment of your financial situation, a thorough inventory of your income and expenses.
2. Reduce your debt, especially, credit card debt. Develop a plan to pay off balances on your credit cards. If you can't do it alone, contact your credit card company and ask for help. Cut up all your credit cards until you pay off all the balances on them. Many years ago, I shocked my hubby by cutting all our credit cards. I had warned him I would do it if he continued to use them. Actually, it felt good not to have the plastic cards anymore in my wallet. And, more importantly, within a year, we were able to pay off all our credit card debt!
3. Reduce your possessions. I talked about this during the stewardship campaign last year. But, I am saying this again because we naturally accumulate things. Get rid of things you do not use or need, that take up space in your closets and cabinets, in your basement and garage. Donate those items to charities and live simply. One of our church members told me last week that a recent life event led him to be serious about getting rid of things he had accumulated over the years. It has not been long since he started his effort, but he is already feeling much better than ever before and wants to continue his effort of simplifying his life as much as possible.
4. Simplify your spending. Wesley warned the Methodists against costly extravagance, luxury, and self-gratification for housing, food, clothing, transportation, and advised them to be content with essentials.
5. Have a list of items you need when you go shopping. Do not go shopping mall just to look around or just to see what's on sale. If you do, highly likely, you will end up buying things you do not really need.

As I have already pointed out earlier, by his second rule for money, "save all you can," Wesley was not calling the Methodists to accumulate wealth, to build a large savings account, or to be able to enjoy a comfortable life in retirement. We, Christian believers, save all we can as a spiritual practice, to discover how our resources can be used for God's work of salvation in this world.

Next week, we will examine the third rule for money: "Give all you can."

Let us pray.