

Taming the Money Monster

Discussion Guide

Chapter 1: Taming the Money Monster

Exactly what is the “money monster”? How does it affect you and your family? Do you feed it? Are you cornered by it? How would taming it make your life different?

How do you feel about the stories of Tom and Sue, Betty, and Phil and Jenny? Which aspects of their situations are like yours? What advice would you give them?

Which of the following do you most need to do in order to tame the money monster? What questions about the next step do you hope this book answers?

- Get a complete, realistic picture of your current financial situation.
- Begin to reduce and even eliminate your debt.
- Set aside money in a savings account for emergencies and major purchases.
- Live within your income.
- Develop the correct perspective, remembering that God is the source of everything.

Read Hebrews 11. What does faith have to do with finances? How could strengthening your faith help guard against unwise decisions?

Chapter 2: The Road to Debt

Which of these causes of problem debt are you most vulnerable to? How do you know?

- a lack of discipline
- a lack of contentment
- a search for security
- a search for significance

What does each of the following Bible passages have to say about attitudes that can help you avoid debt?

- Galatians 5:22-23
- Hebrews 13:5
- Philippians 4:11-13
- Deuteronomy 31:8
- Matthew 6:25-33

Why do many people throw in the towel and say, “It’s not worth the cost to get out of debt”? Based on this chapter, how would you reply to them?

Chapter 3: Advertising Illusions

What’s the most outrageous advertising claim you’ve seen or heard? Do you think it has been successful? Why or why not?

Which of the following illusions do you tend to find attractive? How could you counter them next time they confront you?

- “You can’t live without it.”
- “Why should you deny yourself?”
- “Enjoy now, pay later.”
- “There’s little or no cost involved.”
- “This product or service will meet your real needs.”

“No one but you is responsible for your debt situation.” How do you feel about that statement? Have you been using debt as an attempt to meet your need for security or significance? If so, what’s been the result?

Chapter 4: Financial Deceptions

How did Tom and Sue get into financial trouble? What were their false assumptions?

What is the grain of truth in each of the following statements? In what way are they deceptions?

- “Borrowed money is always paid back with cheaper dollars in the future.”
- “The tax deductibility of interest makes using debt a wise thing to do.”
- “Inflation is inevitable; therefore, it is always wise to buy now at a lower cost than in the future at a higher price.”
- “Leverage (debt) is magic.”

How have your experiences proven (or disproven) the following statements?

- “If a deal sounds too good to be true, it probably is.”
- “Be very careful when accepting [financial] counsel from anyone.”
- “Truly successful people . . . become successful the old-fashioned way: They earn it.”
- “The key to financial success is to spend less than you earn and do it for a long time.”
- “There are no shortcuts to taming the money monster.”

Chapter 5: A Biblical Perspective

When you face a financial decision, do you usually consult the Bible? Why or why not?

How does each of the following statements differ from what the Bible actually says about money?

- “It’s a sin to borrow.”
- “It’s wise to borrow.”

- “God will bail you out of debt.”
- “Debt is an exercise in faith.”

What does each of the following Bible passages have to say about money?

- Romans 13:8
- Philippians 4:19
- 1 Timothy 5:8
- Psalm 37:21
- Proverbs 6:1-5; 11:15
- James 4:13-15
- Isaiah 55:8-9

Chapter 6: The Road Ahead

What can you conclude from the story about the retired pastor? What can't you conclude?

How could compounding help you reach your financial goals? What would you need to do first in order to benefit?

How do current interest rates compare with those mentioned in this chapter? Do the members of your group have any advice on how to make the most of compounding? How can you verify the validity of that advice?

Chapter 7: How to Get Out of Debt

Which do you think is more painful: being in debt or getting out of debt? Why?

If you're in debt, which of the following have you done? How long would each of the other steps take? What sacrifices might they require?

- Determine where you are.
- Stop going into debt.
- Develop a repayment plan.
- Establish accountability.
- Reward yourself.

Which of these strategies for getting out of debt would work best for you? Why?

- Sell assets.
- Use savings accounts.
- Make double payments.
- Keep payments constant.
- Reduce living expenses.
- Reduce tax withholdings.

Chapter 8: When Should You Use Credit?

How does the author suggest you determine whether going into debt meets the following four criteria?

- common sense
- a guaranteed way to repay
- peace of heart and mind
- unity

Where would you go for advice if you were urged to borrow \$5,000 to spend on each of the following?

- shares in a new dot-com company
- a used hybrid automobile
- adding a sunroom to your house
- getting your child through the first year of college

When might borrowing money violate a scriptural principle? How could you guard against that happening?

Chapter 9: Understanding Credit

Which of the following do you need to know more about in order to use credit safely?

- identity theft
- credit ratings
- APR
- credit card terms and policies
- what the Bible says

What does the phrase “We can afford it” mean to you? How does your definition affect your family’s financial health?

Why don’t Christians all agree on whether and when it’s appropriate to use credit? What should they do when they disagree?

Chapter 10: Credit Card Debt

After taking the true-false test in this chapter, what do you conclude about your use of credit cards?

Why is each of the following a misconception?

- You can’t live without credit.
- Having a credit card means you’re creditworthy.
- You have to have a credit rating.
- All interest is equal.

If you had a 22-year-old son, how would you convince him to follow each of these guidelines?

- Begin with a spending plan.
- Use a debit card instead of a normal credit card.
- Always pay the full balance.
- If you can't follow these guidelines, destroy your credit cards.

Chapter 11: Installment Debt

Do you agree with the following statements? Why or why not?

- If you can't afford to pay cash for a car, you can't afford it.
- There's no such thing as easy payments; if you can't afford to save, you can't afford to make payments.

How might advertising for cars be different if most people expected only transportation from them? What kinds of automobile ads appeal to you most? Why? Do they affect your buying decisions?

If you were to follow the author's advice, when and how would you buy your next car?

Chapter 12: Mortgage Debt

Do you agree that many young couples feel entitled to more than they can afford? Why or why not? How might this attitude affect home-buying decisions?

"A house may be an investment, but a home is not." What does the author mean by this?

What cautions does the author issue in each of the following areas? Why?

- adjustable and fixed-rate mortgages
- home equity loans
- early mortgage payoff
- refinancing
- equity sharing
- credit life insurance

Chapter 13: Other Debt

What is the “binary trap”? Why is it better to ask, “What’s the best use for the money I have”?

Are any members of your group saving or borrowing for a child’s college education? If so, how does their advice on college financing compare to the author’s?

How could your own borrowing practices affect the following people? What can you do to make those effects as positive as possible?

- your children
- your grandchildren
- your spouse
- members of your church
- non-Christians in your community
- needy people