



FINANCIAL LITERACY SUNDAY

CUTLURAL RESOURCES

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I. Introduction

Good financial stewardship requires knowledge of sound financial practices, sources of reliable information, and accountability to God and others for the faithful use of all resources. Churches should embody a supportive, Spirit-led environment for members and communities to improve and apply their financial literacy skills. God expects both the church leadership and the congregation to generously present and effectively use tithes and offerings to fulfill God's work. This heavenly mandate calls us to be fiscally wise.

Unfortunately, personal financial management is often not integrated into middle and high school curricula, and many parents are not equipped to teach these skills to their children because they never learned them. Churches should fill this gap by using biblical principles on financial matters and other quality resources. There are financial professionals in many churches who would eagerly use their expertise and experiences to enable individual congregants, as well as the congregation as a whole, to achieve greater financial literacy and economic security.

The journey to financial freedom calls for a renewed sensitivity to the Holy Spirit. As the ultimate source of wisdom, the Spirit reveals to us appropriate places to plant financial seeds for an abundant harvest to benefit not just us but as many of God's children as possible. Exercising faith, diligence, and patience nurtures financial progress by invoking God's power to multiply our efforts. The journey also involves a surrendering of unproductive habits, false perceptions, and "idol gods" that distract us from God's best intentions for our lives and our world. When individuals, families, and communities make informed, Spirit-led financial decisions, their needs are met, and there is typically an overflow of resources which can empower disadvantaged people. More often than not, the problem is not so much a lack of resources as it is a lack of imagination. We must use more creatively the many resources that God has already placed at our disposal.

II. Historical Lesson



Harriet Tubman

The life and experiences of Harriet Tubman are instructive for the journey to financial literacy and freedom. As a fugitive slave, fearless leader, and war heroine, Harriet Tubman denounced the institution of slavery and led others to bring about its demise in the United States. Her acceptance of God's call to liberate African Americans from an unjust social system should be imitated in the quest to liberate African Americans and other marginalized people from financial oppression, which is a contemporary form of slavery holding so many people in bondage.

Effectively Resisted Injustice

Born into slavery as Araminta Ross, Harriet Tubman witnessed at a young age her slave owner's unsuccessful attempt to sell her brother away. Her mother prevented the transaction by hiding him and sternly confronting the slave owner—warning him that it would be in his best interest to cancel the deal. Her mother's courage inspired Harriet to believe that effective resistance to social unjust was possible, *and necessary!*

Faithfully Labored Despite Harsh Conditions

Although subject to inhuman labor conditions, Harriet Tubman took pride in her work. She did not curse God for her plight; rather she trusted God to honor her commitment and faithfulness. In an attempt to protect a fellow slave, Tubman blocked the path of an angry overseer and was herself wounded by a blow to her head. The injury caused her to have blackouts throughout her life; yet, it did not deter her from being a productive worker and faithful servant of God. She continued to use her wit, skills, and dependence on God to overcome her disability. Even as a fugitive slave, Tubman landed jobs that enabled her to use her skills and save money to support her efforts on the Underground Railroad (URR). Her strong work ethic, perseverance, and obedience to God equipped her to fearlessly lead other slaves to freedom as a stalwart conductor of the URR and enlistee in the Union Army.

Persistently Kept the Faith

Realizing that she could no longer wait for the repentance of slave owners, Harriet Tubman “actively [sought] a role in God's plan, rather than letting others dictate her path.”¹ She demonstrated great reverence for God and trusted the Holy Spirit to guide her every move. The North Star, her visible, heavenly guide, marked the path for her escape and for the direction of the URR, where she led countless other slaves safely to freedom without any losses. Her 100% success rate earned her the title of “The Moses of Her People.” Her keen intuition for tactical approaches enabled the Union Army to defeat the Confederate Army in key battles. Her demonstration of faith, courage, and action withstood the threatening, generous ransom for her capture and death.

Gained Valuable Allies

Tubman collaborated with free African Americans, recently freed slaves, and slave abolitionists to provide safe havens and financial resources for URR passengers. She mobilized the passion of others for this great mission, and she steadfastly kept people focused on the goal. Allies took care of her family to ensure that Tubman could continue the fight for freedom. Tubman also received great support from friends after she completed her mission on the URR and her tours of duty with the Union Army.

Tested Those Who Desired to Take the Underground Railroad

Tubman knew that everyone who expressed a desire to take the URR was not committed to the cause. She had to protect the inner workings of the URR so that her enemies would not destroy this powerful system for liberating slaves.

Left Behind Those Who Didn't Seek Freedom

Not all of her fellow slaves sought freedom. They could not envision their lives being any better than their current circumstances. Even her husband rejected Tubman's offer for freedom. He

decided to marry someone else during her time on the URR. After completing her work, Tubman proclaimed: “I freed a thousand slaves. If I could have convinced more slaves that they were slaves, I could have freed thousands more.”

Created Opportunities for Equal Treatment

Harriet Tubman was an integral force in the Union Army despite the Army’s fear of enlisting former slaves. She paved the way for acceptance of African Americans in a social system that refused to honor the humanity of African Americans, not to mention their talents. African American participation in the Union Army was critical for defeating the Confederate Army and its plan to uphold slavery in the United States.

III. Cultural Response to Significant Aspects of the Text

Our community needs Harriet Tubmans to aid us in our fight for financial literacy and freedom. We witness daily the harsh economic realities that affect marginalized people—a lack of basic necessities such as food, clothing, and shelter; repossessed cars and homes; and unequal access to job opportunities. Like Tubman, we must nurture our talents and channel our resources to lift ourselves and others from financial oppression. Slave abolitionists and civil right leaders fought so that we might have the right to equal access, including the right to be educated. Financial literacy is a crucial part of freedom’s curriculum.

Harriet Tubman could not liberate others if she first had not liberated herself. We must free ourselves from financial oppression before we invite others on the journey. The fight for financial freedom begins with a personal accounting of and appreciation for the resources that God has made available. In light of difficult economic conditions, are there ways that each of us can “tighten our belts” and forego purchasing things that we comfortably can live without? Are your gifts being used effectively, and are your spending priorities faithfully aligned with God’s call for your life?

Answers to these questions require a closer look at money sources and how and where your money is being spent. A prayerful analysis causes us to take the “M” and “Y,” or “MY,” out of **money**—allowing us to acknowledge God as the ONE who owns and controls all of our financial resources. In Deuteronomy 6:4-5, Moses reminds the people that God is the ONE who will lead them from bondage: “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength” (New International Version). In a similar way, Harriet Tubman, the “Moses of Her People,” knew that God was the ONE who would liberate the people; so she loved God with all her heart, soul, and strength, and her steadfast focus resulted in the liberation of many lives. The lesson for us should be clear: If we remove the focus from “MY” and stay centered on the “ONE” God who is able to do anything but fail, we can reach freedom and financial success.

The next step toward financial freedom is to determine what you own versus what you owe to others. Are you managing your assets well enough to answer and support God’s call on your life? Does debt have you in bondage? The Holy Spirit often provides revelation on these matters, but we must pay attention to the Spirit’s signs and messages. We must surrender to God and earnestly pray for God to remove the distractions that keep us from focusing on God’s intentions

for our lives and our resources. Once you identify more clearly God's intentions for your life, you can begin to change those circumstances and actions that hinder you from achieving your divine purpose. The peace that comes from knowing your purpose will enable you to share your resources more generously with others. When you are a blessing to others, you put yourself in line to receive more blessings from God.

If you have difficulty finding your purpose, seek help from trusted, knowledgeable sources that can guide you and hold you accountable. You will learn techniques that will strengthen your spiritual and financial situations and allow you to share your newfound insights with others who encounter the same stumbling blocks. This is where the church can play a vital role in creating a community that fosters financial literacy and well-being.

Churches should offer sermons, seminars, and classes that focus on financial stewardship and literacy. Often there are members in the congregation who can aid in this initiative. Also, pastoral care is often needed to help members address habits or addictions that drain their financial resources and hamper their productivity.

In her book examining the role of faith in the practical lives of black women, Marla Frederick underscores the “. . .tension [that] exists between those [churches] who believe that their central mission is to preach the gospel of eternal salvation and those who believe that part of the gospel of eternal salvation mandates a discussion of present-day social and economic justice.”²

Financial stewardship has personal and collective implications that move Christians toward practical liberation in this world, even as we await eternal salvation in the world to come. God expects us to use God's wealth for the common good. By equipping members with the tools to evaluate their financial practices and decision-making skills, churches benefit from the increased capacity of members to give to the church's ministry efforts. These churches also create a cadre of activists who can leverage their knowledge and demand fair access to financial services and opportunities in the public sphere.

Churches also must recognize the value of collaboration in achieving collective financial freedom. Spiritual allies who can educate, train, and provide opportunities offer a valuable network for sustainable economic advancement. Churches should seek partnerships with members who are skilled in financial planning and with institutions that render services that elevate an individual's ability to secure, protect, and leverage resources. It is critical that skilled individuals also understand and can address the policies and social systems that deter financial freedom and limit access to resources.

In this “get-rich-quick” society, it is easy to fall prey to scams and fraud. When seeking counsel and collaboration on financial stewardship matters, individuals and communities should be leery of those who have “arrived” at a comfortable financial status through greed and schemes and who falsely believe that they have reached “success” own their own. If it seems too good to be true, it is! Churches should not endorse these negative activities. The Bible warns us about aiding-and-abetting activities that financially harm others, especially the poor.

Moreover, persons who are ungrateful or irresponsible with their financial resources can distract individuals, households, and communities from effectively responding to God's ministry efforts.

Often these individuals drain precious resources from their parents, families, friends, and communities. We must be willing to set appropriate boundaries even with our loved ones to prevent, or at least lessen, for us the consequences of their negative financial behaviors. These individuals must decide if they want freedom and if they are willing to constructively participate in God's plan for financial restoration and freedom. Even Harriet Tubman had to leave behind loved ones who wanted to remain in bondage.

IV. Autobiographical Story/Personal Testimony

As the oldest child of teenage parents, I witnessed at an early age my parents' struggle in managing their finances. Their jobs as a construction worker and factory seamstress offered minimal wages that resulted in paycheck-to-paycheck living and swelling credit balances at interest rates well above 20%. To relieve some of their financial burdens, I worked two jobs in high school while pursuing academic and extracurricular achievement in the hope of attending a four-year college or university.

During my teenage years, my parents did not share the details of their personal finances. However, they were very clear on what they could or could not afford. The things I desired were mostly in the "could not afford" category. While I appreciated their struggle, I always wondered if their situation was a result of personal choices and/or a lack of financial knowledge to counteract the external factors that threatened their financial well-being. The minimal discussions on personal finances and the community's silence on the black economic plight fueled my interest in these matters and my desire to become the change I sought for my parents and others within my community.

A catalytic event occurred when I was applying to college and needed details of my parents' financial portfolio. Their level of debt relative to their negligible savings astounded me. From that point, I developed a passion for helping people escape the threatening, transgenerational financial bondage that besieged my family and many other African Americans in my community.

As a result of my call to financial literacy and freedom, I have obtained undergraduate and graduate degrees in finance; worked at prominent financial institutions that served high-net-worth individuals and non-profits with large endowments; and founded a financial planning and investment management firm. The most significant lesson that I learned on my journey is that the best stewardship practices are readily available to those who are willing to follow God and receive instruction from sources that God has assigned to impart financial wisdom and knowledge.

A Spirit-led mindset gives direction on these fundamental stewardship questions: Do you acknowledge that all you have belongs to God? Can God trust you to faithfully work on God's behalf, to live within your means, and to use some of the resources entrusted to you to help the poor and disadvantaged? Are you gaining wisdom that will help you manage your earthly inheritance? Will you courageously challenge those who seek to disrupt the financial well-being of others?

“Yes” to these questions provides a roadmap to our destiny as heirs of God’s abundance. We can stay on the right path by daily adhering to godly guidelines for good financial stewardship. In Building Wealth through Spiritual Health, Danny Freeman aptly defines “The ‘WOW’ Factor!”—**W**ork + **O**bedience + **W**isdom—as the formula for gaining access to heavenly riches.³ The freedom comes from knowing that we are aligned with God’s will and are protected by God’s grace.

V. Making It a Memorable Learning Moment

Churches are well aware of the necessity for good fiscal management and stewardship. Clergy and lay leaders collaboratively implement the church’s vision by employing tithes and offerings. They guide the annual budget process and present the church’s progress and financial condition to the congregation. Congregants should incorporate similar fiscal procedures in their households and provide God an account of their stewardship practices. Knowing your money stewardship profile will shed light on your commitments and the sacrifices necessary to live and share God’s abundant life.

Determine your financial worth.

How much money would you have left if you sold all your assets for cash and paid off all your debts? This amount represents your net worth. Obtain current values of your assets (e.g., savings accounts, retirement accounts, and property) and liabilities (e.g., credit card balances, mortgage, and school loans) from your most recent statements and websites that provide property valuations such as Kelley Blue Book (www.kbb.com) and Trulia (www.trulia.com). Personal finance software such as Mint (www.mint.com; free) and Quicken (www.quicken.com) provide a net worth tool that retrieves your financial data from participating institutions. Are your assets greater than your debts? Do you have enough “cushion” to carry out your assignment from God? Are your assets working for your benefit and the benefit of God’s people?

Review your free credit report and confirm what you owe to others.

Evaluate your credit standing and request your free credit report through <http://www.annualcreditreport.com>. By law, each of the top three credit reporting agencies—Equifax, Experian, and TransUnion—must provide a free credit report to each consumer once every twelve months. Never pay for a credit report unless you choose to. Compare your credit balances to the balances you reported on your net worth statement to ensure accuracy.

Track your cash flow—know what’s really coming in and what’s going out.

Do you know how you are spending your income? Personal financial software simplifies this task and allows you to create schedules and graphs to determine how you are progressing with saving, spending, and charitable giving to God’s mission. Plus, keep a pad or use your phone to record everything you spend, including ATM purchases and withdrawals.

Protect and build your resources.

Do you have adequate insurance to cover your needs (e.g., health, disability, and long-term care); to protect the loss of your assets (e.g., homeowners’, car, and liability); and to leave a legacy (e.g., life). Work with a trusted attorney to draft your estate planning documents (e.g., will, living trust, living will, and powers of attorney) that reflect your desires. Also, review your investments

for consistency with your goals, time horizon, and tolerance for risk. Counsel related to estate planning and investment management also should incorporate the effect of taxes when implementing the recommendations.

Pay Caesar only what Caesar is due.

If you prepare your own taxes, make sure you are knowledgeable about current tax laws in order to benefit from favorable laws and to avoid penalties and interest for non-compliance. If you hire a qualified tax preparer, be sure to review your returns carefully and ask questions if you do not understand their assessment.

Have at least one financial goal that can be reached in one year.

A detailed review of your financial information will give you a good snapshot of your financial condition. The next step is to determine how you can strengthen your situation each year. Would you like to pay off one of your credit cards? Increase your tithes, offerings, and other charitable contributions? Double your savings?

Find someone who can keep you accountable.

It is easy to make resolutions, show some progress, and then revert to unproductive habits. Share your goals with a trustworthy person who can keep you focused. Discuss your progress regularly and vow to strengthen your financial position together.

VI. Songs That Speak to the Moment

When we take the “MY” out of money, we recognize God’s ownership over all things and have faith that God’s vision for us is far greater than anything we can imagine for ourselves. We are willing to submit to God’s instruction on all matters and to faithfully follow God wherever God leads us. When we surrender to God, we are granted the freedom to live a life full of God’s love, promises, and protection.

I Surrender All

All to Jesus I surrender;
All to Him I freely give;
I will ever love and trust Him,
In His presence daily live.

Refrain:

I surrender all,
I surrender all;
All to Thee, my blessed Savior,
I surrender all.

All to Jesus I surrender;
Humbly at His feet I bow,
Worldly pleasures all forsaken;
Take me, Jesus, take me now.

Refrain

All to Jesus I surrender;
Make me, Savior, wholly Thine;
Fill me with Thy Holy Spirit,
Truly know that Thou art mine.

Refrain

All to Jesus I surrender;
Lord, I give myself to Thee;
Fill me with Thy love and power;
Let Thy blessing fall on me.

Refrain⁴

Fred Hammond's "Thank You (I Won't Complain)" reminds us that God's love and protection guide and sustain us throughout our lives. Our gratitude replaces our misplaced focus and tight grip on our earthly circumstances with an unwavering faith and trust in God's sovereignty. Our praise and thanksgiving enter the heavenly realm and unleash a peace that passes all understanding and guards our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:7).

Thank You (I Won't Complain)

There's a praise
That lives deep in my heart
And it says
Oh Lord I love You
I am blessed
When I think of Your goodness to me
It comforts me daily

But there are times in my life
When things don't work out right
And my burdens are heavy
And there's no joy in sight
Put my eyes back on You
For You've always come through
And with this simple refrain
I will bless You, bless You

Refrain #1:
Lord You've been
Good to me

You made the way
I could not see
Your love came in
And lifted me
And now, I won't complain
Through the years
You've been there
To dry my tears
There is not
A closer friend
Than You

Oh Lord You have been
So good to me
More than this world could ever be
I really want to thank You
Lord I won't complain

Lift my hands
Give You praise in the midst of each storm
'Cause You are worthy
When life's sorrows and heartaches rush in
I will remember (You are still worthy)

Refrain #2:
Let the words of my mouth
Leave no room for doubt
Because down through the years
You've been faithful
And when I think it all through
Oh Lord it's been You
Who's been there all the time
And I'm grateful, grateful

Refrain #1

Lord I know that You know what's best for me
Even when my weary eyes can't see
I really want to thank You (really want to thank You yeah)
Lord I won't complain (Lord I won't complain)

Refrain #2

Through it all
Through it all You've been there for me

Through it all
Through every trial, every heartache You've been there

Through it all
Every tear that I've cried Lord You've been there

I lift my hands and I give You the praise

Through it all
Down through the years every step that I had to take

Through it all
You've been there any time I'm falling

Through it all
You've been there to hold me tight through the crazy times

I lift my hands and I'll give You the praise

You've been good
You've been good when I think of all You've done

You've been so good
It makes me want to shout for joy and give You glory

You've been good
There is no one like You, You've been so good yeah

I lift my hands and I give You the praise

Let's say thank You
Thank You
I won't complain
Instead I'm gonna say

Thank You
Thank You

I'll lift my hands and I'll give You the praise

Through it all
Through it all You've been there every day of my life

You've been so good
You've been so good and I lift my hands to give You praise

Let me say
Thank You (6 times)
I won't complain

Instead I'm gonna say
Thank You (6 times)
I won't complain

Instead I'm gonna say
Thank You (4 times)

Somebody say it⁵

Jill Scott's "Golden" reflects a remix of the theologian Irenaeus's proclamation that "the glory of God is man [and woman] fully alive." When we are spiritually attuned to God and live within God's will for our lives, we gain access to the rights and privileges associated with being a faithful child of God. We are empowered to meet each day boldly—believing that we are not bound by earthly conditions. We see God's glory manifest in our spiritual, financial, and physical health.

Golden

I'm taking my freedom,
Pulling it off the shelf,
Putting it on my chain,
Wear it around my neck,
I'm taking my freedom,
Putting it in my car,
Wherever I choose to go,
It will take me far,

[Chorus]

I'm livin' my life like it's golden
Livin' my life like it's golden, [X3]
Livin' my life like it's golden, golden,
Livin' my life like it's golden, [X4]
Livin' my life like it's golden, golden,

I'm taking my own freedom
Putting it in my song,
Singing loud and strong,
Grooving all day long,
I'm taking my freedom,
Putting it in my stroll,
I'll be high-steppin' y'all,

Letting the joy unfold,

[Chorus]

I'm holding on to my freedom,
Can't take it from me,
I was born into it,
It comes naturally,
I'm strumming my own freedom,
Playing the God in me,
Representing His glory,
Hope He's proud of me,

[Chorus]

[Bridge]

I'm living my life like its golden, golden, golden, golden, golden, golden, [X2]

[Chorus]

Livin' my life like it's golden,
It really matters to me, Ohhh

[Bridge X5]⁶

Notes

1. Clinton, Catherine. Harriet Tubman: The Road to Freedom. New York, NY: Time Warner Book Group, 2004, p. 31.
2. Frederick, Marla. Between Sundays: Black Women and Everyday Struggles of Faith. Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: Regents of the University of California, 2003, p. 89.
3. Freeman, Danny. Building Wealth through Spiritual Health. Winston-Salem, NC: Darda Press, 2003, pp. 209–235.
4. Van De Venter, Judson W. (lyrics) and Winfield S. Weeden (music). "I Surrender All." African American Heritage Hymnal. Chicago, IL: GIA Publications, 2001. #396.
5. Hammond, Fred. "Thank You (I Won't Complain)." Free to Worship. Zomba Recording LLC, 2006.
6. Scott, Jill. "Golden." Beautifully Human: Words And Sounds Vol. 2. Santa Monica, CA: Hidden Beach Records, 2009.