

Seven Spiritual Secrets to Successful Money Management

by Tom Lipp



- 1 Ask God for Help**
- 2 Serve Others**
- 3 Get Organized**
- 4 Underspend**
- 5 Honour Your Parents**
- 6 Give to the Poor**
- 7 Diversify Your Investments**
- 8 Expect Miracles**

Ask God for Help

Most people in the Western World ignore God when it comes to money matters. Really? God? We mean the sovereign Creator who understands everything divine and human—including all money matters. The Lord Jesus Christ, who physically rose from the dead (a historic fact), is God Almighty, being co-equal with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Here is the first of seven, spiritual secrets to successful money management.

Ask God for help. It's amazing how reluctant we are to pray for assistance. God opposes the proud, but gives grace (help/favour) to the humble. The first statement that Jesus made in his longest message, the Sermon on the Mount, is "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." The word for poor is better translated as beggar. All that a beggar can do is beg—not trade, bargain, or sell—beg. Thus the first secret is to recognize our limitations, and be humble enough to ask God for both spiritual and material help. Sometimes, people think it's selfish to pray and ask God for stuff. Others feel God is not interested in details and that they are being presumptuous in asking God Almighty for ordinary things. Jesus told us to ask God our Father in Heaven for "daily bread." This means praying daily. Be brutally practical. The Bible also says, "You do not have because you do not ask." Our Father in heaven has infinite resources and can stop time itself to achieve His purposes. Ridiculous? Interested? Read on.

The fact remains that God enjoys hearing the requests of His children. He is aware of all prayers, but He does not "enjoy" all prayers. Some prayers He ignores, while others God delights in (**Proverbs 15:8**). Praying is simple, but praying with power is not easy; it takes more than words. It also takes humility, persistence, and lifestyle. Let me explain. Would you give money to anyone who asks for it? Would you give \$20 to a five-year-old to buy candy at a convenience store? How about giving money to someone with a track record of financial irresponsibility and no sign that this time will be different? Would you help someone who has no plan on how to put your gift to work? Pray with humility according to His will (**Proverbs 30:7-9**). Pray specifically rather than for an amount of money. For example, if you need a new car ask for a new car, not for money to buy a car.



When we moved to our new home we made a list of all the specific items we wanted. God answered us with the first house we looked at. It was amazing. We looked at many more houses, but the first one was the best. Be specific with God, and God will be specific with you. Most importantly: Be humble; remember that God is not obligated to answer any prayer. He is God; we are not.

Check out: "**What if you win big... really big?**" to learn more about this.

Serve Others

In 2013, I was in Kathmandu, the capital of Nepal, with my son, and we were walking in the intersection of three, small streets when we noticed a large, broken brick on the road. I grabbed the brick and flung it into the nearby bushes. My son asked, “Dad, why did you do that?” Surprised, I explained that the stone was clearly a traffic hazard, and it was quick to clear away. He replied that—in a Hindu country—dirty, menial tasks are left for the lowest cast, or viewed as karma from the gods for some unsuspecting cyclist. But I had been trained by my parents to be a blessing to others. Sadly, many individuals and nations have significant financial trouble simply because they don’t apply this second secret. They don’t work to serve others.

Service to others brings blessing, but this blessing may or may not be quantifiable (such as money). Our work ethic is fading fast in Canada as we become a nation of handouts rather than hard work. The Bible says it many times: “In all labour there is profit. Lazy people want much but get little, but those who work hard will prosper. Lazy people don’t even cook the game they catch, but the diligent make use of everything they find.” I know of a highly-skilled engineer who was earning almost \$300,000 five years ago in a large oil and gas company, but is now installing doors, while some of his family are delivering flyers. You bet it’s humbling. That’s my point. Serving others is seldom, if ever, convenient. The first step out of poverty is to step out of bed. There are more biblical warnings against too much sleep than too little sleep.

Personally, I found that my work ethic was sadly lacking. I needed to look at the Scriptures rather than at social norms. My parents left Poland when it was a socialist, communist country to come to Canada, a land of opportunity and freedom. Now Poland is promoting free enterprise and Canada is being driven toward socialism. We are growing accustomed to having the government solve all our problems. Big G government promotes big B bureaucracy and feeds on big T taxation. This chokes the entrepreneurial work ethic. Who wants to get out of bed and work when you can’t even keep the fruit of your labour? It gets worse.

The Washington Post reviewed the work of author Nicholas Eberstadt, “Men Without Work: America’s Invisible Crisis.” He calls it America’s quiet catastrophe. I believe his work is very insightful, as he notes that the work rate for adult men has plunged 13 percentage points in the last half century. Furthermore, “the collapse of work for modern American’s



men happened despite considerable upgrade in educational attainment.” He speaks of the “social emasculation of millions of idle of men.” These “voluntary idle” tend to watch more television than those who are unemployed and seeking work.

Whew! I have vented, but not offered any hope. What can be done, regardless of our current state? We must remember that the great truths are too important to be new. Take a look at the following Characters to discover the classic solutions to ancient problems.

Plan Your Work: Work begins in the mind. That is what **Prudent Pauline** is all about. Her motto is: “Think before you act. Look before you leap.” The journey of a thousand miles doesn’t begin with the first step, but a good map.

Work Your Plan: Study **Diligent Daniel** to learn about decisiveness and thoroughness. He is an early riser, a quick starter, and a job finisher.

Finish the Job: Finally, by reading the various character qualities of **Steady Eddie**, we can learn the importance of patient plodding and perseverance. We learn to stick with a task until it is finished.

Get Organized

I thought my dad was dumb! There he sat with his hand-designed ledger, shopping receipts, and a bank statement. He was at it again—recording all our family expenses by category, and reconciling them to the bank statement. Why track your money? You can't bring it back. Who cares where it went? Well, that's what I thought as a teenager. Even after my know-it-all years, and into my thirties, I didn't take this seriously until I had six children and was starting a business. Money left as cash, cheque, credit card, debit card, or pre-authorized payments. As money becomes more nebulous, measuring money flows becomes more difficult. Financial coaches have their clients track personal spending for at least 30 days. Why? You can't manage what you don't measure. Get organized. Keep score. It's the third "spiritual secret" to financial freedom. Getting organized may not sound spiritual, but it is indeed spiritual. Spirituality is not chaotic; it's a discipline.

My dad left the coal industry as a controller in Poland and came to Canada to work in a bakery at night as an oven man—a hot, hard job. But his English was poor, and he had four kids to feed. He was good with numbers and understood something that I failed to grasp for decades. A clear understanding of the financial past helps us prepare for the future. By tracking expenses month after month, year after year, we subconsciously prepare for the unexpected.

Financial organization takes time, but it reduces stress. Don't misunderstand. I'm not saying that cash-flow tracking is all you need for financial freedom; there's more to it. What I'm saying is this: You will never manage what you don't measure.

Have you noticed that sports become more exciting once you start keeping score? When I was teaching my kids to play catch, it became more fun to count the number of catches before one of us dropped the ball. The same principle applies to finances. Keep score! When it comes to money, score-keeping is easier than ever, but also more complex. It's easy because we have so many computerized tools to help us: Smart phones, tablets, laptops, or personal computers. It's harder since money itself takes on multiple forms: It's virtual, plastic, paper, and coin.



Personally, I don't recommend automatic cash-tracking software packages such as Intuit Mint. They often come with annoying advertising; they compromise personal privacy; and, most importantly, they bypass the conscious mind. In other words they are too automatic. Instead use a semi-automatic tracking system, or else track it manually. To gain financial control you must know where your money is going. It's not easy, but it's very important. It takes conscious brain power.

Don't worry about the amount. Remember, Jesus said, "He who is faithful with very little, is also faithful with much." Cash Flow Tracking is a new skill you want to develop, and like any habit it takes much repetition. Start off right. Try the **"Your Money Kitchen"** and the **User Guide** cash tracking tools.

Underspend

Underspend! Deliberately underspend! Humble yourself by choosing to live BELOW your affordable lifestyle. It's simple, but not easy. Voluntary frugality is one of the biggest secrets to financial success. In the perennial best seller, *The Millionaire Next Door*, you can read about the inner-workings of wealthy households. It's a good read. Contrary to what advertisers would have us believe, riches and hyper-consumption don't go hand-in-hand. Quite the opposite! Most millionaires purchase used cars—not new—nor do they drive many luxury cars. My brother in Ontario was surprised that one of the Canadian billionaires, the late Mr. Weston, who could easily afford a Rolls Royce, drove a Ford minivan. Financial coach Dave Ramsey says that when you are getting out of debt, "if you live (super-thrifty) like no one else, later you can live (abundantly) like no one else."

How do you start? The first goal is to establish a monthly financial margin. The larger the margin between income and outflow, the faster you will be able to save. Use the dual approach to saving—off the top and from the bottom. It's all about delayed gratification. Together as a couple or family, choose the area(s) you will reduce spending in, and celebrate your successes with high-fives or a special, affordable treat. For example, cut out junk food, or buy used items instead of new.

Set a predetermined savings amount BEFORE you start to spend. It may be as little as 5% of your total income. Next: Stick to it. In the second Canadian bestseller, *The Wealthy Barber*, author David Chilton popularized the expression, "Pay yourself first." He borrowed the practice of setting aside the first 10% for super long-term savings from another classic financial textbook, *The Richest Man in Babylon*, by George S. Calson. I recommend a better approach taken from the number one best seller of all time, The Holy Bible, which tells us to "Honour God first." Then, pay yourself second. This is proactive saving from the top. Afterwards, find other ways to save—hopefully with minimal pain so that you can use the savings later for the greatest gain.

Many years ago my mother worked in the towers of downtown Toronto. She had started out in the Sears steno pool and then, over a period of almost two decades as she and my dad raised us four children, she climbed the administrative ladder to become a bilingual, executive, legal secretary. One year she and my grandmother



went for a fancy winter vacation in Florida. The other secretaries were shocked. They asked, "How can you afford to take a high-class vacation on a secretary's wage?" My mom asked them how much they spent on lunch that day. The replies averaged out to about three dollars. My mom replied, "I brought my lunch from home and saved three dollars today, sixty dollars this month and seven hundred dollars this year. My Florida vacation money came from my saved lunch money."

I share this story to make a point. Thrift is a learned skill. It starts small, but now I need to make an important distinction: Thrift is not the same as stinginess. Many people confuse the two. Thrift is defined as frugality, wise economic management, and the careful use of resources. Stinginess is a selfish reluctance to share resources. Both strategies avoid waste, but thrift is selfless whereas stinginess is self-centred. Thrift is a virtue. Stinginess is a vice.

In short: Make sure your outflow is less than your income, otherwise your upkeep will be your downfall. Self-control and deliberate under-consumption are the keys. It's up to you how much you under-consume. Learn more with the [Super Savings Study Guide](#).

Honour Your Parents

Honour your parents. Really? How's that related to financial success? In decades of financial planning and counselling I have noticed that those who spoke well of their parents tended to be better off, even financially, than those who criticized them. This is a general rule, and not always true. While not discussed in professional accounting circles or in university finance courses, it's a law of life that God has established for us all. It is the only one of the Ten Commandments with a specific reward. "Honor your father and your mother, as the LORD your God has commanded you, that your days may be prolonged and that it may go well with you on the land which the LORD your God gives you," Deuteronomy 5:16. Unfortunately, most Canadians have ignored the Bible during the past fifty years, so they have unwittingly missed out on this blessing. If this is the case, how do we honour parents?

- **Forgive them.** Bitterness and unforgiveness chain you to the past rather than helping you move forward.
- **Minimize or overlook their faults**—even if they have hurt you. If possible thank them for all they have done for you. As a child it is your job to respect them, not correct them.
- **Praise them publicly**, even if they are deceased, rather than maligning them. Identify and amplify at least one of their strengths.
- **Learn from them.** Ask their counsel. If you are underage, simply obey them. Jesus did. Jesus kept a very low profile, living under His parents until His heavenly Father directed Him to go public.

The direct benefit from adherence to the Fourth Commandment is not only highlighted within the Ten Commandments for emphasis, but also in Ephesians 6:2. The Apostle Paul is pointing out that God rewards those who obey Him. The blessings are not always financial, but they are always real rewards, which are sometimes financial. From a grace perspective, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God and He will exalt you at the proper time." Most of us have only one set of parents, and they usually want the best for their children. They try to guide them to that end, although good intentions do not always guarantee good results.



In looking back on my life, I see that when I followed my parent's counsel, I usually experienced worthwhile benefits. Although there was a time delay before the advantages become apparent. One clear exception comes to mind: Whenever the Bible and parental guidance conflict. For example, in frustration my dad once told me that if I kept reading the Bible I would have to move out of the house. He did not want me to become a kooky, religious fanatic. As calmly as I could, I reminded him of his earlier promise that so long as I was attending University and doing well in school, I could live at home. He kept his word, and I was allowed to keep reading the Bible at home. When I finished my degree and got a regular job, I paid a healthy monthly rent. Not long afterwards, I moved West to work in the oil patch. I met a great Western gal there, settled down, and we had many young'uns. It is important to note that after marriage, parental counsel takes second place to spousal counsel.

There are no perfect parents now, nor were there any in the past. You did not pick your parents; God did. So by honouring your parents, you in fact honour God. God says, "Those who honour Me, I will honour," 1 Samuel 2:30.

Give to the Poor

Give to the poor. This is another secret ignored by the financial planning community, except perhaps as an afterthought or as a tax reduction strategy. Too bad! The Bible heralds it loudly and consistently: “He who gives to the poor will never want, but he who shuts his eyes will have many curses,” **Proverbs 28:27**; “Happy is he who is gracious to the poor,” **Proverbs 14:21**; “One who is gracious to a poor man lends to the LORD and He will repay him for his good deed,” **Proverbs 19:17**; “The generous man will be prosperous and he who waters will himself be watered,” **Proverbs 11:25**. Jesus himself said, “Give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap,” Luke 6:38. I am not saying we should “give to get” in a motivational sense. I am saying that if we give properly, God will ensure that we are not net losers.

My wife and I experienced this dramatically many years ago as we secretly gave \$500 to a poor family in our church who desperately needed money for a mortgage payment. That was on a Saturday morning. In the afternoon, someone who had absolutely no contact with that family or knowledge of our gift gave us \$1,000. God rewards every act of charity, especially when it’s done in secret. Furthermore, proper giving is a type of financial insurance. But not all giving is equally blessed by God. Be careful not to give to the rich. “He who oppresses the poor to make much for himself or who gives to the rich, will only come to poverty,” **Proverbs 22:16**. Over my lifetime I have observed that the happiest folk, financially speaking, are also the most generous.

Why is this? I am not sure, but I believe it is related to us being made in the image of God. When our behaviour harmonizes with God’s character we are most satisfied and joyful. God is a giving person, not a taking person. He needs nothing. Giving is God’s nature. Giving is godly. That’s why Jesus said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” The problem is that we are all infected with sin. You don’t need to teach a toddler to take. As one wit quipped, “The centre of sin is the middle letter.” Theologically it is called total depravity, not maximum depravity, but total depravity. In other words, ubiquitous imperfection. We could all be worse, but none of us is perfect. Thus generous giving does not come naturally like self-centered taking.



To learn more about the importance of giving and the benefits of generosity check out two cartoon characters: **Generous Genevieve** and **Blessed Bob**.

Diversify Your Investments

Money is strange. It disappears faster than it appears. As the humorous American poet, Ogden Nash, once said, "O, money, money, money, I'm not necessarily one of those who think thee holy, but I often stop to wonder how thou canst go out so fast when thou comest in so slowly." It's just plain hard to preserve wealth. Stock market "corrections," inflation, and financial fees all destroy our wealth. What to do? Jesus tells us to "store our treasures in heaven." I plan to deal with this in a future article, but what do we do with our vulnerable earthly treasures? Let's take an indirect lesson from Abraham, whom God made "very rich in livestock, in silver and in gold," Genesis 13:2. Note Abraham's three categories of wealth: Livestock, silver, and gold. This is the first biblical mention of a diversified portfolio to safeguard earthly blessings. I see livestock representing dividend-paying stocks with growing dividends, plus the ability to reproduce via stock splits. Livestock falls within the asset sector of consumer staples, and might even be viewed as utilities/infrastructure. On the other end of this investment spectrum we have gold. It's dead. It does nothing. It just sits there and looks pretty. Yet gold is internationally recognized as a primary store of value. It's used as pavement in heaven, but on earth it will never lose all its value. Silver represents cash and highly-liquid, short-term bonds. Some of you may remember when silver was cash. Before 1967, Canadian dimes and quarters were mostly silver. It's good to keep some of your portfolio as cash so that you can act fast.

Why diversify your holdings? Ecclesiastes 11:2, as expressed in the God's Word Translation, says it best. "Divide what you have into seven parts, or even into eight, because you don't know what disaster may happen on earth."

The fact is, we don't even know what a day might bring. Presuming upon the future is dangerous, but the Lord tells us all to read the signs of the times; to be alert and think about current trends and their implications. After eight years, the rising stock market has grown without a "correction." It sounds like the financial markets need to get fixed, but a correction simply refers to a drop of at least 10%. A long-term correction may lead to a bear market or possibly a recession. By the way, the terms bear and bull markets refer to how these animals fight. The bears strike down with its large claws, while the bull thrusts up with its sharp horns. Despite being uncomfortable, corrections are actually healthy for the markets. They are buying



opportunities. Think, "A strong wind clears the forests of dead wood." I believe we will see a "correction" soon, but I could be wrong. Like any mere mortal, I don't know the future. I prefer to stay diversified. Investing only in Air Canada and West Jet is not diversification. Some in the investment community say, "Cash is king." Wrong. Christ is king. His word tells us to keep earthly treasures diversified.

True diversification across asset classes is becoming more difficult. Information is being shared across the globe faster and fuller, causing the financial markets to move in unison. It's harder to find assets that are totally independent of each other. It requires analysis and a good understanding of finance and economics. Knowledge and hard work are the opposite of randomness, like in a lottery win, for those who "play" the odds and markets. Sadly, a spirit of gambling and speculation has polluted our financial thinking, as evidenced by government-sponsored casinos and lotteries. In reality, good financial results don't just happen. Lasting prosperity is not a lucky win, but the result of much wise planning. Prudent investing is the same. That's the message in the Scriptures, especially from the book of Proverbs. Check out: [Prudent Pauline](#).

Expect Miracles

What's that? It must be a typo! You can't have (8) eight of (7) seven. Impossible! Everyone knows that. You can't make something out of nothing. You can't feed thousands with just a few burgers. Nobody can work financial miracles; it would be like turning ordinary water into expensive wine! Face it, there are certain laws of the universe that no one can override. Besides that, everyone's financial situation is different; it's unique. It's like a personal fingerprint. For God to help every person with a customized miracle, God would have to know not just their financial needs, but also their financial skills. Unbelievable! Such intimate personal knowledge would be like knowing how many hairs are on each and every head. Ridiculous!"

Many people deliberately exclude the supernatural. Ironically, such closed-system thinkers usually label Christians as narrow-minded. Really, it's the pagans who are narrow-minded by completely dismissing the possibility of supernatural intervention. I have personally experienced and witnessed God work financial miracles in the lives of those who seriously want to readjust their financial habits to God's ways. But it requires financial repentance from their own way toward God's ways. Unfortunately, most Canadians do not include God in their finances. That is a pity. They don't think about God, even though God is honored explicitly in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms: Whereas Canada is founded upon principles that recognize the supremacy of God and the rule of law. My point is this: God can fix any of our financial problems, and even perform a miracle, if we come to Him in financial repentance.

Don't misunderstand. When I say, expect miracles, I do NOT mean that we should expect God to supernaturally intervene while we carry on in our deliberate financial mess. No. That's not the way it works. It's when we stop our own bad financial habits and start doing things God's way that we can expect to experience His miraculous intervention.

For example, it is by honouring God with the first of our income rather than the leftovers that miracles begin to happen. Jesus says, "Seek first God's kingdom and His righteousness and all these things shall be added to you," Matthew 6:33. This is not logical; it's counter-intuitive. Jesus means that whenever we put the pursuit of God ahead of the pursuit of wealth, then God will take care of us. God will mysteriously and amazingly orchestrate events such that financial help will come to us. I can't explain it, nor predict it. It's almost weird, like the manna



that God sent to feed over a million people coming out of Egypt, ill-prepared for such a long journey. The word manna, literally means Man hu in Hebrew, which is like saying, "What is it?" Of course if you don't believe in the reality of manna, as described in the Bible, then you won't really believe in God, at least not in the God of the Bible. Good luck in dealing with your financial problems without divine assistance! God uses amazing, unpredictable methods to get his work done. Missionary Hudson Taylor put it this way, "God's work, done God's way, will not lack God's support."

Let's reconsider the feeding of the multitudes. The thousands of people who followed Jesus into the wilderness forgot to take enough food with them for the long teaching and training sessions with Jesus. God did not want them to go home hungry. God himself provided abundant food. What's my point? Simply, God takes care of those who seek Him first. Whenever we put the Almighty God ahead of the almighty dollar, we can be confident that God's provision for our material needs will come, even if it looks impossible. Nothing is impossible with God.

Summarizing the spiritual secrets:

1. Ask God for help
2. Serve others
3. Get organized
4. Underspend
5. Honour your parents
6. Give to the poor
7. Diversify your investments
8. Expect miracles.

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