

ONE

## DEVELOPING A STRATEGY OF LIVING WITHOUT DEBT

Wouldn't it be great to be totally debt free? Can you even envision that happening to you in your lifetime, including your mortgage? How do you think that would feel? When I ask people that question, I usually get answers like "Joy." "Relief." "Free." Or—"Yeah, right!"

If you want to be debt free, it's imperative that you have the vision first to see yourself as debt free. You must believe you can do this; it can't be just a nebulous aspiration. You must believe that God wants to do this work in your life. Philippians 4:13 says, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (NKJV). God's Word says *all* things—and that includes getting your debt paid off. Does it seem overwhelming or too good to be true?

You can do this, and the Lord wants to help you do it. However, the hard truth you must hear is that it's better to face this now, right at the start. Don't count on a magic wand to bail you out.

## Inventing a Cure for Debt

Thomas Edison, the great inventor, said, “Many people miss opportunity because it’s dressed in overalls and looks like work.” You actually have a great opportunity before you to grow in your faith, grow as a person, change your life for the better, and experience a new-found level of joy and peace in your life. That’s the good news. The bad news—or at least that’s how you may see it right now—is that, as Edison said, a great deal of work is going to be involved to reap the benefits of this opportunity. But the benefits, as you will see, are gargantuan.

Becoming debt free must become your arduous pursuit. I’m not going to sugarcoat it either. I could recite platitudes and Christian clichés about victory and overcoming, but after serving for numerous years as the navigator for many families traveling down the debt-reduction road, I will tell you honestly that this process usually takes a few years.

Unfortunately, there are no quick fixes when it comes to getting out of debt. But there *is* opportunity to make your financial future and your life unbelievably better through the hard work of implementing your personal debt-reduction plan.

The wide road of indebtedness leads to destruction, but the narrow road of financial peace in Christ leads to life and blessing. Being in serious debt-reduction mode is like winning a grind-it-out, 12-round heavyweight boxing match. It won't be easy. There will be work and toil and sweat and probably quite a few tears. You may be thinking: *Can we reconsider the magic wand thing?*

### **The Narrow Road Leads to Debt Reduction**

Stick with me. I'm not trying to scare you off, but I do want you to be realistic. You need to hear encouraging truth shared in love if you're to win the debt-reduction battle. You don't need more hollow, media-hyped, quick-fix schemes. That's wide-road stuff. But the narrow road leads to debt reduction. The painless, easy, overnight debt-reduction plans you hear about on radio and television are rubbish.

If you're struggling with paying off your debt, you're in a life-and-death battle for your financial future and certainly for your current or future marriage and family. Embarking on this road to debt reduction could literally change the entire future of your family line. The battle with debt you're locked in right now may be far bigger than you imagine. It may sound overly dramatic, but God's Word says you're involved in a flesh-and-

blood struggle against rulers and authorities and powers of this dark world—spiritual forces of evil beyond the realm we live in or experience life in.

### **Drawing the Battle Lines**

Ephesians 6:13 puts it this way: “Put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground.” The battle you’re waging against indebtedness is a battle against evil in the form of a financial and spiritual foe. But God’s Word tells you in advance that you will be able to win this battle.

In the following passage is a description of a set of tools you need for waging your successful debt-reduction battle:

Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all of this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one (*Ephesians 6:14-16*).

It’s important that you enter your debt-reduction battle fully prepared to fight. God wants you out of debt so He can use you in the fullness of His plan, and He wants to protect your heart with the breastplate of righteousness so that you

won't be crushed spiritually and emotionally by your debt. He wants you to be fit for readiness so you can experience financial peace in Him. And once you're ready and armed and full of faith to shield you from the tough times that will come while you're in debt-reduction mode, you'll have the ability to overcome the fiery darts of the evil one that will be thrown at you.

Don't be surprised if just as you start your plan to get out of debt, the car will break down, or you kids will get sick. You may very well have a fight with your spouse over money. But remember: your battle is not against flesh and blood. Stand firm. Then you have one more thing to do to be fully prepared for the battle:

Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying (*Ephesians 6:18*).

If you want to get really serious about getting out of debt, and I think you do or you would not have picked up this book, I encourage you to begin praying for your emancipation. If you're too feeble at this point to have the faith to pray, that's okay. Gather some trusted fellow Christians who will pray for you. This is where the battle will be won.

Even though implementing a debt-reduction plan will involve hard work and persevering through a tough battle, making your final payment will provide you with feelings of great accomplishment and spiritual victory. Last year two of my friends paid off their consumer debt within a week of each other. Talk about joy! I wish you could have heard their voices when they called me to tell me the good news. I want you to experience this joy and freedom too. The Lord, too, wants you to know this freedom. So put on the full armor of God, take up the sword of the Lord, pray in the Spirit, and make your stand.

### **Time for a Change**

Now that you're all fired up to conquer your financial foe, you must be realistic in realizing that you can't use the "same old, same old" approach. Becoming debt free will become your number-one goal. Set a realistic date for when you want to reach your goal. Write Philippians 4:13 on your heart and mind: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (NKJV). Make this your theme verse. Ask the Lord to take over your finances, and commit to really changing your financial ways. I know it can be scary to relinquish control of your finances to God, and you'll need motivation and endurance to win this

war. This book can help with that motivation, and the Lord will give you the endurance.

Think for a moment what you can do with the money that you'll free up when debt is behind you. Let's say it's an extra \$500 or \$1,000 a month. That will make a significant difference in your life. Will you save more each month? Give more? Travel? Those are all good answers, but they're all in the future. What about today?

After working for many years helping families organize their finances to get out of debt, I contend that you can live some of those future dreams now. If both the goal and reward are too far off, your drive to meet the goal and capture the reward will wane. Set the habits of giving or saving or traveling right now, while you're still in debt-reduction mode, or you probably won't do them in the future either.

Have you ever heard someone say, "If I won a big sweepstakes, I'd set up a special scholarship fund for inner city youth"—or perhaps make a huge donation to the church or go on regular missions trips. I tend to think that folks who don't do something toward realizing those goals, even on a very small scale, probably won't do them if they win a sweepstakes. Despite good intentions, I fear the Lord is not very impressed

with sweepstakes-induced largesse. I think He would prefer even a humble effort today.

Instead, I suggest that your life will be a lot more rewarding if you agree to tutor a kid from the inner city right now, give some money to your church now, and take a short-term mission trip now—as long as none of these cause you to go deeper into debt. Do something today, while you're in debt-reduction mode, and watch how the Lord uses it to turn your tough situation into a precious gift to the Kingdom. You'll be so fulfilled from your service that some of the anxiety of being in a debt-reduction battle will melt away. It will revolutionize your debt-reduction plan.

Let's take a closer look at your foe.