

giving) until you are actually free. Then, when liberated, give as generously as your love for Christ will lead you. Until then you may have to think of other ways to be generous, like giving time or sweat or possessions.

7. Finally, make a debt-free plan and work out the plan by faith. It might take years, but you are getting freer all along the way. It's an adventure. Be smart about it, get help, but *trust God above all*. God is in this; He will show you His power. Your weakness is your greatest asset, if you acknowledge it and turn to Him.

Remember that God has called us to a life of faith. “Without faith it is impossible to please Him”(Heb. 12:6). Most Christians are trusting their bank or their credit cards instead of God. You must not be like that. Repent if you have had a misplaced trust, and start a vigorous life of faith immediately. You will be surprised to see what God will do for those who trust Him fully.

Dying with Debt

Jim Elliff

It is a sad proverb, but so true: “The borrower becomes the lender’s slave” (Prov. 22:7).

Tossing and turning through the night, the heavy borrower is a depressed soul. He dresses with striped prison clothes every morning and lugs his shackles to work—that job that offers so little hope for setting him free. He dreads the coming of the mail, and has few waking hours without remorse. Serious debtors crave freedom, but often, sadly, borrow even more in their desperate attempt to shake open their prison door. The overwhelmed debtor is fawning toward his lender, but despises him for all his generosity.



I once knew a man, a very godly man, who owed about a million dollars. He was forever at the bank working out this and that deal. It was a huge burden from one week to the next, taking a mammoth amount of his time and “worry” capital, even though he attempted to do things as correctly as possible. His bondage promised to be never-ending. Is this what life is to be about?

Finally, through some discussions together and a lot of meditating, God opened my friend’s eyes to see the immense value of being completely out of debt in both his business and personal life. He had always thought that could not be possible. But it was. It was a light that guided him over the next few years until he arrived at the desired end. He thought of this “awakening” as one of the seminal events in his life. And God has blessed him for it so much that he is now able to be an extremely generous giver for many significant Christian causes. His shackles are forever removed.

Others are smaller players in the debt business. Yet with that school loan, the car burden, the credit card debt and the home mort-

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gage, it has become normal for people to go to bed like a prisoner who turns his head to the wall to weep. Many people are \$20,000, \$30,000 or even \$100,000 in debt on just consumer items. Even in their laughter there is sorrow. This has been the cause of not a few cases of depression and ruined families. It has kept potential missionaries from going overseas and aspiring entrepreneurs from taking bold steps. It has claimed its share of suicides. It is a load too big for us to carry. Yet friendly credit card companies are ever so happy to help you get there.

It is time to seek a different life. Wouldn't you agree? I know that sometimes unavoidable crises come. Regardless of how you got there, it is time to turn another direction and seek the freedom God can give true believers.

Here are my suggestions:

1. Work strategically toward a life with no debt at all. It may take many steps, but don't think it is impossible. If any couple had fewer prospects of being debt free on their home, it was us, considering my meager income. When my wife and I set our minds to it, however, God acted on our behalf. We immediately found that the wall of debt around us was shaking. Sooner than you would imagine, the last 20 years of home debt crumbled away completely. Putting even a little extra money on your present house debt may make years of payments vanish. You *can* have a life without any debt at all.

2. If you must have some debt, make it "reasonable." School debts, for instance, are not reasonable. Young people with no collateral, and no real job bringing in money, are often sadly lured into this strategy for completing their education. It has bound many who will pay for years to come on these unnecessary loans. Taking extra jobs, reducing expenses, and trusting God would be a much better way. Reasonable debt is permitted in the Old Testament, but is not the high road. Why not have God's best?

3. Avoid borrowing on depreciating items. As an illustration, you may think you must drive such and such a vehicle—but is it true? When you come to sell your car you will likely find yourself in a bind, having an item worth less than what you still owe for it. The car salesman will happily keep your debt going with a new car, but remember that you are getting deeper in. If you don't use credit, you may not drive the prettiest car, but you will be able to put gas in it. And remember that nothing depreciates like clothing, food, household items, etc. Live smarter and pay cash.

4. Destroy your credit cards. I know most think it is impossible to live without "the card," but that is not true. I've had over 30 years of married life, traveled all over the world, bought homes and cars, all without ever owning one. This has been true even though people have told me repeatedly, "But you must have a credit history!" I like the use of a debit card as a substitute for writing checks, of course. It does the same thing as a credit card overseas. Some find credit cards useful for records and for certain small benefits if you pay them off monthly. There certainly is no harm in that, *per se*. But for everyone who can use them well, there are scores who plan to, but don't. I've never seen anyone who accrued an unwieldy credit card indebtedness who didn't first sign up for the card. Think like this: *There is life without credit cards!*

5. Get financial counsel. Many people struggle for years when they could have been helped early on to control their income and outgo better. Some Christian leader in your church, or someone trained through a Christian financial counseling program, can do wonders if they are biblical in their approach. Use them.

6. Give to God, but don't give away what you do not have. There are many wonderful promises in the Bible for the giver. But God would rather you work on your debt first so that you can give what is actually yours later. It seems right to me to limit your giving to your church to an exact ten percent of your income (though I don't believe NT Christians are under this OT law of percentage