

The Daniel Model

Money Models for Believers:

Daniel 1:8-20

January 18, 2004

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The tragic story of a preacher and his family commanded national attention some years ago. He waited on God to supply him with food, and one of his children died of starvation and the rest of the family were treated for malnutrition. I was not closely acquainted with the family or the story; however, I had nearly witnessed the same thing when I served in a mission one summer. A woman had decided to trust Jesus for her finances. The way she did that was to go home and pray that God would provide. She expected God to act like Domino's pizza and deliver the necessary food and money to her door. She became weaker and weaker as she waited. Finally, God arrived at the door, but not as she expected. God came in the person that visited her from her church. She was given an emergency provision of food, but she also was confronted with teaching like this:

Blessed are all who fear the LORD, who walk in his ways. You will eat the fruit of your labor; blessings and prosperity will be yours. (Psalm 128:1-2, NIV)

Did you notice that there is no promise or blessing for staying at home or for purchasing a lottery ticket? It doesn't say "Blessed are all who fear the Lord, who walk in his ways. They will get a visit by Ed McMahon and Publisher's Clearinghouse."

Listen to God speaking through King Solomon.

He who tends a fig tree will eat its fruit, and he who looks after his master will be honored. (Proverbs 27:18, NIV)

Interestingly, Jesus did not close himself up in a house expecting his heavenly Father to deliver the food. He tended his father's fig trees. He looked after his master's business. He prayed for his daily food. He never taught people to be idle and expect God to bless and provide. In fact, his apostles taught something very different. The Apostle Paul wrote:

When we were with you, we gave you this rule: "If a man will not work, he shall not eat." We hear that some among you are idle. They are not busy; they are busybodies. Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the bread they eat. (2 Thessalonians 3:10-12, NIV)

Having said this, I don't mean to give the impression that your provision is up to you. Frankly, I don't like the adage attributed to Benjamin Franklin: *God helps those who help themselves*. That statement has led people to act as if God is uninvolved or irrelevant. They just focus on helping themselves and hope that God somehow helps them. That is so different from the radical dependence Jesus taught his followers. Listen to what he told his twelve disciples.

"Don't even take along a walking stick," he instructed them, "nor a traveler's bag, nor food, nor money. Not even an extra coat. (Luke 9:3-4, NLT)

When he sent 72 more out, he said:

Don't take along any money, or a traveler's bag, or even an extra pair of sandals. (Luke 10:4, NLT)

Jesus taught them total dependence. Yet Jesus wasn't giving them an eternal rule for mission work. As they left the last supper, he asked the disciples:

"When I sent you out to preach the Good News and you did not have money, a traveler's bag, or extra clothing, did you lack anything?" "No," they replied. "But now," he said, "take your money and a traveler's bag. And if you don't have a sword, sell your clothes and buy one!" (Luke 22:35-36, NLT)

Different circumstances require different tactics. The tactics weren't eternal. Dependence on God is. The father showed Jesus that now was a time to plan ahead and be careful of money. On the previous mission, they were to go and not concern themselves with money.

The first and greatest theme when it comes to dealing with money or anything else is radical dependence on God. That is what was modeled by Daniel. He showed a radical dependence upon God as a young teen.

Daniel was taken captive along with other young Jewish royalty to Iraq or Babylon. King Nebuchadnezzar knew the Hebrews would cause fewer headaches if they were governed by their own leaders, leaders that were well-trained and loyal to him. Daniel and three other Jewish teenagers excelled as they were groomed for leadership. Though privileged as royalty, they showed utter dependence on God. They risked their lives by deviating from Nebuchadnezzar's plan for them. Daniel did not object to the king's goals, but he did object to some tactics. They were to receive food and wine that was defiled. Why it was unlawful, the Bible doesn't tell us; but we have some clues. Wine would not be forbidden unless it was offered to idols. I suspect that all the king's food and wine had been offered in worship of him, and then was shared with his trainees. Daniel and his friends chose to honor God's word rather than the hands that fed them. They approached their supervisor with a plan that was sensitive to his goals, yet honored God's word. Daniel said:

“Test us for ten days on a diet of vegetables and water,” Daniel said. “At the end of the ten days, see how we look compared to the other young men who are eating the king's rich food. Then you can decide whether or not to let us continue eating our diet.” (Daniel 1:12-13, NLT)

Do you know what is stunning about this? A very young man planned his obedience. Have we done that with our finances? I suspect water and vegetables did not constitute their dream diet, but it helped them live in obedience and work toward the king's goals. This would not be the only time their faith would run counter to their king and their personal welfare. Daniel's three friends would be tossed in a fiery furnace, and Daniel himself would spend a night in a pit with hungry lions. Each time God rewarded them.

Daniel's plan gives us a model for managing money. Most importantly, it reminds us to live in dependence on God and by principle rather than compromise. They were willing to suffer loss rather than risk offending God. Their accountability to God was more important than their accountability to human beings and any immediate reward. They looked ahead and planned their obedience. They devised an appeal to their supervisor so they could obey God's word.

Their plan included three components of management. They asked their manager to inspect their appearance, compare it to others and make his choice.

A week ago, we looked at Joseph. When Pharaoh put Joseph in charge of managing Egypt's government, what do you think he did? Listen to what the Bible says.

So Joseph took charge of the entire land of Egypt. He was thirty years old when he entered the service of Pharaoh, the king of Egypt. And when Joseph left Pharaoh's presence, he made a tour of inspection throughout the land. (Genesis 41:45-46, NLT)

Joseph traveled the nation observing and learning. He could not manage the Pharaoh's business if he did not know his resources and what was happening with them. He inspected or inventoried what was happening. Daniel did the same with his manager. He first called for an inspection.

You and I can't possibly manage with any skill our resources unless we inspect or inventory them. We need to count our blessings and track their use. That means we need to know our income and know our spending. We need to track where our money is going? We can't just write checks until we have no more checks, or until our account is empty? If we do so, we are being managed rather than being managers. Advertising firms and others rule our lives and dictate our lifestyle because we live by temptation rather than by thoughtful plans. Indeed, if we are not tracking our money and planning its usage, we may be living on the edge of catastrophe and not know it.

How do you track money? Some families keep a cash ledger. Personally, I don't like a lot of cash because I find it hard to track. I prefer the written record of a duplicate check, but that is not necessary. What is important is to ledger or record how your money is spent, and then categorize it. How much is groceries, entertainment, housing, transportation? Where are you spending your money? If you don't track it, you are not managing it.

Second, compare your spending to your plan. Have you devised an income and spending plan? If you don't devise a plan, you are not in charge; and you've been given charge. Jesus calls you to use your money purposefully. How can you do that if you have no plan?

The temptation is to be lazy, but if we are a lazy about managing money, why should God trust us with more? Remember, we are managing God's blessings. Joseph excelled at this. We know less about Daniel's management. We know he excelled, but that means he had plans that he carried off well. In tracking personal finances he may have solicited help from someone who was good at it. He certainly got help as he governed Babylon, but **he** compared what was happening to his plan.

I'm a computer geek. I use financial software. My 89 year old uncle showed me his computer program. It is a pencil and ledger paper. Both work! They help you compare.

Once you track your money and compare it to your plan, you make choices. Sometimes, they are very hard; but it is you making them, rather than somebody making them for you. You begin to act with purpose. You begin to look long range and act. You begin to follow people like Joseph and Daniel in making decisions based on your values and hopes.

Jesus called us to be purposeful, skillful and accountable in our management of the money that God has blessed us with (Luke 16). That takes effort, but that effort is worth it. It makes us available to receive and pass on even greater blessings of God. Will you do that?