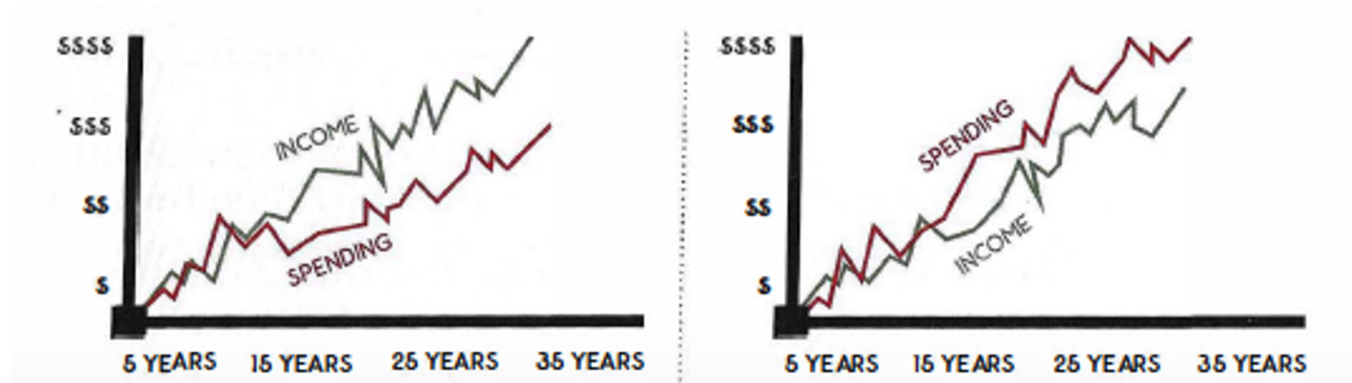


If Money Talked

Master or Master's

Lesson Points:

1. Most of us allow our *income* to drive our *spending*



2. When your spending exceeds your income, you become a slave.
3. We know we are *managers*—not *owners*—of our money because one day we will leave it all behind.

¹⁴“For the kingdom of heaven is like a man traveling to a far country, who called his own servants and delivered his goods to them. ¹⁵And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own ability; and immediately he went on a journey. ¹⁹After a long time the lord of those servants came and settled accounts with them. —Matthew 25:14-15, 19

4. When you manage someone else's money, you are responsible and accountable.
5. The reason you should keep track of where your money is going is that it's not your money.

Group Discussion:

1. Talk about a time you've seen someone experience consequences because of their spending (or saving).
2. What's your first reaction to the idea that you are managing money that God has entrusted to you? Does that match the way you've thought about money before now?

The challenge this week is to spy on your money.

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A) Mark the box that describes you as it relates to knowing where your money is going right now.

- I avoid thinking about it
- I'm mostly unaware of where it's going
- I know in general where it's going
- I know exactly where it's going

B) As you're spying on your money this week, it may be helpful to ask: Am I spending my money on the things that are most valuable to me... really? The exercise below will help you think through what those things may be.

Take a few minutes on your own to write down **four things** that are most valuable to you in your current season of life. Then briefly describe why.

I would spend money on...	Because...

Example: Housecleaning and/or lawn service

Because... time is my most precious commodity.

3. As a group, talk about a time when you prioritized (even grudgingly) what was valuable to someone else, even though it wasn't as important to you.

For example: Your spouse spends money on a gym membership, which isn't a priority for you. Or family vacation is important to your mom, so you paid to go along.

Off the top of your head, write down a few things you've spent money on recently. Then consider whether those expenses align with the four things you identified as valuable to you right now.

I spent money on...	Is this one of the four things I value?

Example: Eating out for lunch twice

As a group, discuss where you may be spending money on things you don't really value. Do you have a choice in the matter?

This week, you'll track your money to find out where you typically send it and spend it. Select the method you'll use to spy on your money.

If Money Talked

- **Go digital:** Use a digital money management tool to track all of your transactions. If you don't already use one, check your app store.
- **Keep a paper trail:** Save the receipt for every purchase you make. Store the receipts in an envelope or folder. Then, at the end of the week, record them on the Tracking Your Spending worksheet provided.
- **Write it down right away:** Carry a notebook (or keep a note on your phone) and record every expense right away.
- **Spend the same way:** Use only one credit card or debit card all week. Then use the card's transaction history as the record of your expenses.

Note: If you share joint accounts with someone else, spy on your money together. Combine your expenditures and track them in one place.

What's your relationship status with money?

LIVING THE DREAM

Your healthy relationship with money means you probably have a plan for your personal finances. You're investing, insuring, and maybe even getting help from other people to manage your money well. That is so wise. It's also so dangerous.

Here's why: Being in control of your finances makes it easy to develop the false impression that you control your finances. When you're the one earning your money, deciding what to do with it, and being thanked for giving some of it away, it's natural to believe the money is yours. The gravitational pull is toward ownership, not stewardship.

This is why you should really (yes, really) spy on your money this week. Tracking your spending—even when you have enough that you don't need to—is a habit that reminds you the money is not yours. It's a discipline not for your head, but for your heart.

GOING STEADY

If you loaned your friend a book and they misplaced it, you probably wouldn't be overly upset. But if you loaned them your car and they lost track of it? Well, that's another story. The larger the sum of money at stake, the more diligent we'd expect someone to be with what we entrusted to them.

You likely have enough margin in your finances that tracking every dollar you spend, invest, or save isn't a necessary habit from culture's perspective. But could that financial margin be the very thing that makes it necessary from God's perspective? You've been entrusted with more—more square footage, more cars, more clothes, more food, and more discretionary income than most of the world. Do you feel the weight of that responsibility?

If Money Talked

Tracking your spending may not be necessary, but it is in your best interest. It could relieve your hesitations about generosity because you might find out that things aren't as tight as they seem. Or it could appease your guilt by showing you how disciplined you actually are in your spending. Give it a try this week. You might be surprised at how helpful it really is.

IT'S COMPLICATED

The fastest way to learn a lesson is to experience immediate consequences: Touch the hot stove, get burned, learn to check before you touch it next time. Unfortunately, personal finances don't often work like that. You can spend several seasons of your life ignoring wisdom as it relates to your money, and you may not feel any immediate effect.

You could go months without logging in to your bank account, and the worst that may happen is you forget your password. Credit card companies will allow you to make minimum payments for the rest of your life. You'll go deeper in debt, but you won't get in trouble.

Money has a much longer feedback loop. The stress may not show up for years-until loan payments start, market conditions change, or your spouse can't handle money matters anymore.

Finances follow the law of the harvest: sow now, reap later. Tracking your spending is a way to sow now. Beginning—in an easy way, really to get a handle on where your money is going may be a decision you look back on years from now and are glad you made.

ON THE ROCKS

When the bills come in, other people are dictating how you spend your money. The credit card company forces you to pay a certain amount every month. Next, the car dealership. After that, the mortgage company. When you owe someone else money, they own a piece of you—your time, your focus, your flexibility.

How freeing would it be to be able to decide what to do with the money God sends your way?

Financial freedom isn't an enormous sum of money; it's the ability to choose for yourself what to do with whatever sum of money you have—which means it may be much closer than you think.

In fact, spying on your money this week could reveal just how close financial freedom may be. As you track where your money is going, you'll see who currently owns pieces of you. Hopefully you'll see that, in many cases, you can decide otherwise. You can stop spending those dollars. You can cancel. You can hold off on the upgrade. Figuring out where your money is going may be the first step to financial freedom—and it may not be far away.