

# Foundations

Late Winter

## Your Money or Your Life

**F**inance is defined as the management of money, either public or private. The word stewardship, on the other hand, is defined as the handling of another's assets. A good steward is someone who takes care of their boss's things. When the owner asks for an accounting the steward is expected to show not only that the original investment is safe but also that it has increased in value. (Is this beginning to sound like a [parable in the bible](#) that you've heard before?)

### Our Assets

Money is only one asset we are responsible for. Our health is an asset. It is given to us and we must manage it along with other assets like the environment, our personal relationships, our intellect and spirit.

Did you ever wonder why you were born here rather than in some part of the world where people went to bed hungry every night or had no shelter? There's a tendency to see what we don't have rather than being grateful for all we have been given.

### In Our Care

We live in a society that assumes that everything we possess is ours by right and that the ultimate purpose in life is to protect what we have and acquire more. What might it be like if we saw everything in this world including the material and spiritual as a gift entrusted to our care? This gift has many dimensions, such as time, money, health,



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relationships, etc., that we are expected to keep in balance. Imagine that the giver of this multidimensional gift will ask us some day how we have managed this gift and if we shared what we were given with

our brothers and sisters in need.

### Earning a Living?

There is a book called [Your Money or Your Life](#) by Joe Dominguez and Vicki Robin. It has been around a while, but was revised in 2018, and is as relevant today as it was when it was originally written. It talks about checking to see whether the energy you're using to make money is where you want to invest your life energy. Does your way of earning a living support your values? The authors talk about whether you are earning a living or earning a dying. There's a sense of real power in living in accord with what you believe, and it is within the reach of all of us.

# Common Ground

Dylan and Emily had a big wedding and paid for it themselves. Emily wore the dress of her dreams, they had the best DJ in town, and the most lovely reception hall. They managed it all on their savings. Emily's parents were really proud of them. No need to worry about *their* attitude toward finances.

So why are they arguing about money more and more frequently? They both know how to save for a desired goal — they've proven that already. The trouble is that saving for the wedding fits exactly into Emily's view of saving. It's meant to be *for something*, she thinks, for something immediate and concrete. She's willing to save for a vacation or a house or an entertainment center. But saving for retirement seems like a waste, and saving for a rainy day even worse!

## Seize the day!

Emily and Dylan both believed in saving and they weren't spending more than they were earning. Their problem had more to do with the reasons for spending and that has to do with the way they were raised to think about money. Emily's family was big on celebrations. When her folks got a tax refund it was cause for going out to dinner. Her Mom's bonus every year was the occasion for a family outing to a local amusement park. Any windfall had at least a portion of it put aside for fun. What's life about anyway? You might not live to use up those carefully saved pennies, and you wouldn't have any good memories to look back on either.

## Saving as a Sport

Dylan likes to save. It was a sign of his undying love for Emily that he was willing to spend money on their wedding. Saving is a game to him. If you can get a can of beans for \$.89 why would you spend \$.99 even if you like that brand better? "Memories won't pay the bills if one of us gets laid off," he tells Emily. But it isn't so much that as that he likes the process of saving. If you pay \$10 when you could have paid \$5 you're being a sucker in Dylan's family. Great discussions are based on how little his dad spent for a car and how his brother talked the furniture dealer into throwing in an extra chair when they ordered their dining room set. If you wanted to prove you were smart or mature you told stories to show how little money you could spend.

## Common Ground

This couple did not necessarily need a credit counselor, but they did need to work out their differences. They had to establish what was going to work for them, and then they would



probably need to decide how they were going to present their decision to their families. Dylan is smart and mature even if he indulges in celebrations from time to time without measuring every dollar. And Emily can enjoy life and build happy memories without necessarily spending an extra dollar, like the night they had a candlelight dinner and looked at their wedding pictures together. Or that spring Saturday when they went for a walk instead of doing the weekly housecleaning. Coming to a common ground will benefit them in the way they handle their finances, and in so many other areas of their lives together.

## JOURNEY WITH US TOWARD MARRIAGE



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# The Business of Marriage

New businesses often don't make it past the five year mark, and while your marriage is not a business, the divorce statistics are still a little sobering. Smart business startups usually consider the pitfalls of their type of business and try to create safeguards to keep them from failing. If the business is an expensive one to undertake, they look for venture capitalists to help underwrite the expenses. Then they project their anticipated expenses and their hoped-for revenue. Lets see what this looks like in terms of marriage:

## Venture capital

The venture capital you need to make it in this partnership are the gifts and talents you each bring into your marriage. In many cases you can thank the family you grew up in for those strengths. Your faith community, your education, and your friends have helped you build that capital. Many businesses flounder because they underestimate how much startup capital is needed. It helps to be aware of all the positives you are bringing to this marriage. It can build confidence –look what we have going for us!



## Anticipated expenses

### Time

Any new relationship takes time and any change will require extra time for adjustments. You get a dog, and suddenly you have to make time for walks and vet visits. You move and now it takes longer to get to work. So also in your marriage, adding children, a house, more relatives, all require more time. Handling your finances and combining them becomes another item that needs your time.

### Attention

With all these demands on your time,

it is important to remember that your relationship continues to need your attention. You need to be purposeful about having fun time together. A marital relationship does not stay strong without attention. The same way that you need to feed your body for it to be healthy, your relationship needs to be fed. And any attention you give to your marriage is like money in the bank – that investment will grow over time and reap rewards.

### Commitment

Being faithful to one another sexually is a baseline commitment in your marriage. Beyond that, though, you need to commit to trying to have the best marriage you can and not just an okay one. You should be aiming to show affection to one another, to work to understand one another, to forgive and to ask for forgiveness.

## Anticipated revenue

What is the payoff for the “expenses” you incur in building you marriage? A loving spouse, children who feel secure in the home you have created, a life that is much better both in financial and health terms. It is still true that couples in a happy marriage have better financial and physical health. Making the investment to be all in will help you have an outcome that is likely to be more successful than you could have imagined.



“The good news is that we won the lottery. The bad news is that after taxes and paying off our college, car, and house loans, we’ll have just enough to cover funeral expenses.”

# Rules of Engagement

Money is a subject that is often difficult to talk about. If you have had bad habits in the past, you may experience a sense of shame when the topic comes up. Or maybe you can see that your partner has a very different approach to money and you know that broaching the topic will lead to a stressful conversation. What will help the discussion is to have some ground rules.

**No finger pointing** – part of a more general rule of showing respect, not pointing out your partner's bad money habits will help keep the climate friendly. Remember that you are both trying to get your financial house in order.

**Try to tackle your finances one issue at a time.** If you haven't set up a budget, you may want to start there. If you have a budget, you may want to see if there is a category you can cut back on. Or maybe start a savings plan. But just pick one at a time so you don't feel overwhelmed.

**Check back in regularly.** Maybe you want to have an hour once a week to look at your progress, or maybe once a month if more realistic for the two of you. Whatever it is, make it regular and make it pleasant.

**Don't panic.** Even if a big downturn happens – a fire, or a lost job, or big medical bills, the least helpful thing will be to panic. We all do our worst job of decision making in panic mode. Lay



out what you think the two of you can do, and get help if you can't figure it out yourselves.

## **Trust yourself and each other**

At the bottom of all your actions is your love for each other and your trust in each other, so draw on that love and remind each other often that you are a team and that you have each other's back. All the money in the world and all the financial security is not as valuable as that!

## Money Habitudes

Trying to figure out the ways you use money, the way you think about money and the way you feel about money is challenge enough. But when you marry and have to make the way money works for you fit in with your spouse's ways, it can be REALLY challenging.

Money Habitudes is a tool that was developed by Syble Solomon. It has become a widely used instrument for helping people come to a knowledge of their habits and attitudes about money. It's not a research tool, not a test, and not an impersonal survey. Instead, it is a game that you can play by yourself or with your partner.

Because the cards are written in simple language and don't require any knowledge of finance, they're used effectively across the spectrum of age, income and education. The cards

are available in English and Spanish.

Learning how to do the basic Money Habitudes sorting activity is fun. The most common activity, Money Habitudes Solitaire, only takes a few minutes. Then have your partner do the same exercise. When you have both had a chance to play, interpret the results for you as an individual and for the two of you as a couple. Follow the simple directions and then interpret your results.

Now there is an online version too. You can see an introductory video [here](#). It will give you a better idea of how this tool might be able to help you learn more about your own feelings about money, and help you understand your spouse's ideas too. It's a great way to move to a common understanding before a particular issue raises its unsightly head.

# Exercises

## I know:

- How much our financial situation has changed over the last year
- What we plan to do over the next few months to save money
- How you feels about our current financial situation
- Our credit score
- How much money we have in savings at this time

Agree	Disagree	Unsure
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## I believe:

- We are basically in good shape financially
- It is important to discuss our financial situation regularly
- We have similar values when it comes to money
- It is OK to ask for financial assistance from family if necessary
- It is important to help others with financial support if we can

Agree	Disagree	Unsure
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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## I will:

- Share my money concerns with you
- Discuss any big purchases with you before I make them
- Create a budget with you if we don't already have one
- Listen respectfully to your concerns about finances
- Support charitable organizations if we are able

Agree	Disagree	Unsure
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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## What Are Our Goals?

As we all know, setting goals are one thing, achieving them are something else again. But a good step is to have your goals written down. Otherwise they flit in and out of your mind, as life shifts. Here is a suggested, shorthand form for goal setting. Across from each other you might want to put goals in the same dimension. For instance, your first short term goal might be to join a gym or buy a piece of exercise equipment. The long-term goal might be to hike the Appalachian trail. Working together will help you get where you want to be.

### Short Term Goals

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

### Long Term Goals

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

### Road Map for Reaching Goals

Goal	Cost	Date wanted # of months	Savings per month
1. _____	_____	_____	_____
2. _____	_____	_____	_____
3. _____	_____	_____	_____
4. _____	_____	_____	_____
5. _____	_____	_____	_____



# Spirituality

When you hear stories about disasters, both global and local, don't you want to help out? People are freezing, standing on long lines for food, sick or in need of an organ transplant – all that pain often stirs our hearts and makes us want to reach out.

## Agree to Share

In your marriage, those feelings should be translated into a part of the way you manage your finances. It's not possible to respond to the needs of others unless you have decided in advance that doing so is a priority the two of you agree on. Even then, each new situation requires you to decide on the level of your response.

## Small Change

If you start at the beginning of your marriage giving small amounts to those in need, then it will become a habit that you will sustain and hopefully even increase as you are able to give more. It's a habit of generosity and a habit of awareness that will stand you in good stead throughout your married life.

## Elijah the Prophet

Do you remember the story of the prophet Elijah who asked the widow woman for her last bit of oil and flour? She told him she was going to make bread for herself and her son, and after they ate it they would die because there wasn't any more. Elijah told her if she shared with him she would have flour and oil without end. She gave him the food, and it paid off.

## The Payoff

Your generosity will pay off too – not necessarily in flour and oil, but in your attitude toward life, toward your money and toward each other. You'll see each other as generous people, you see your money as an agent of good, and you'll see life as an adventure that you are fully engaged in as giver and taker.

Give away the riches in your pocket, take back riches in your spirit – not a bad bargain, after all.



*O God who loves a cheerful giver,  
grant us the joy of a generous heart,  
in Jesus' name.  
Amen*

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A NEWSLETTER FOR MARRIED COUPLES

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